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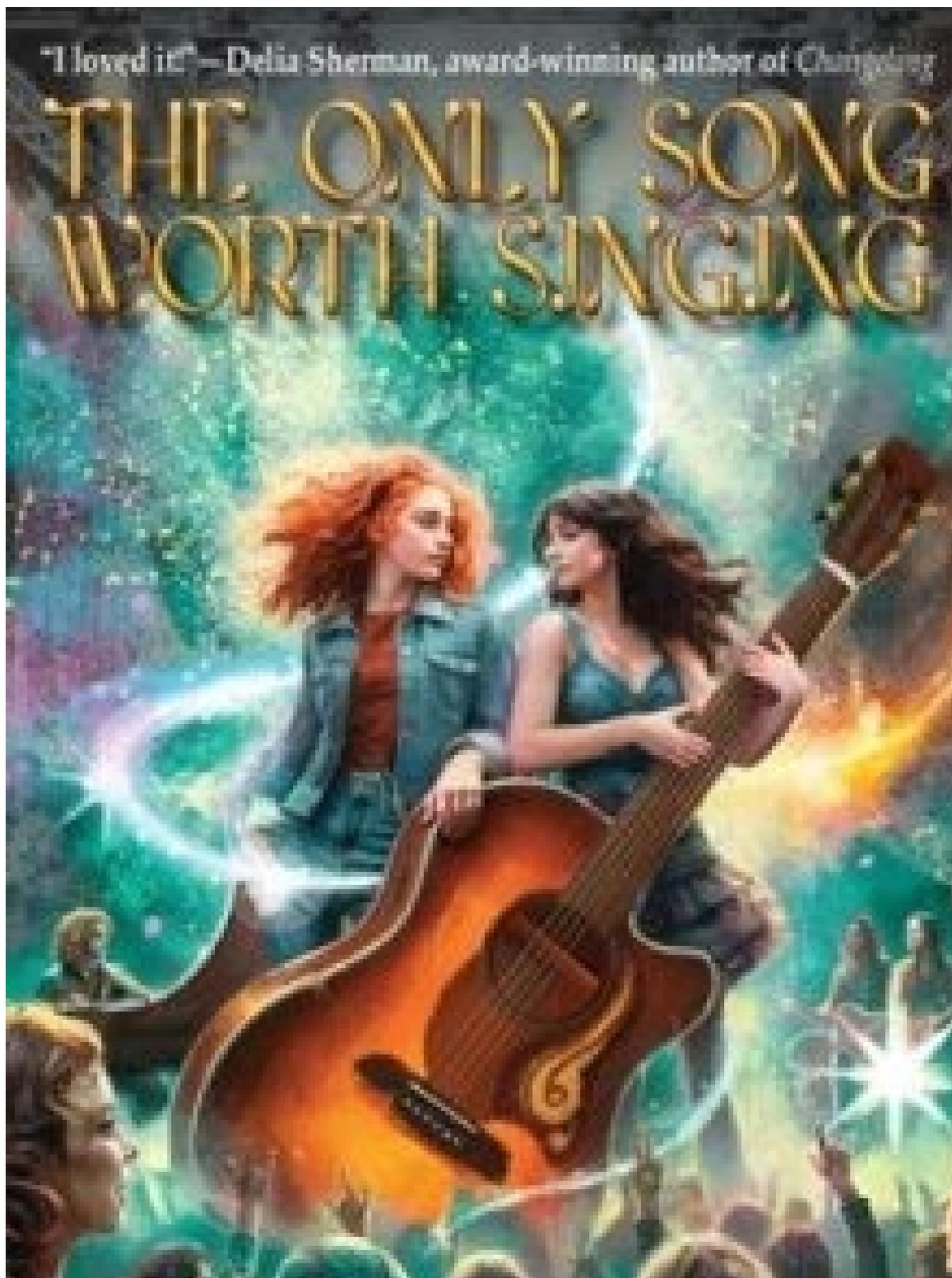
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## On the Road with Radiohead by Randee Dawn

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**By Randee Dawn**

29 May 2025

**Randee Dawn, author of *The Only Song Worth Singing*, on how her experiences of meeting and interviewing Radiohead and others has informed her fiction . . .**

There I was: On the road with Radiohead, smack in the middle of the 1990s. I was covering their early U.S. dates on *The Bends* tour – alternating between interviewing them and observing them from afar for an article that would ultimately appear in *Alternative Press* magazine.

It was a unique position to be in. At the time, Radiohead had just begun proving that they were more than the “Creep” one-hit wonders – but their true critical breakthrough *OK Computer* was still some time away. I had a small window of access before they’d achieve mass, stadium-level fame. So there we were in Washington, D.C.’s Black Cat venue, a small venue whose main attribute seemed to be that Dave Grohl was an investor.

Soundcheck was on. Singer and guitarist Thom Yorke wasn’t on stage, not plugged in, but wearing a banana-yellow guitar. I’d barely spoken to him thus far; he was shy, sometimes a bit cranky, and nursing an ear infection. I was sitting in a back corner of the venue, doing my fly-on-the-wall impersonation when Thom abruptly leapt from the stage and chased a roadie across the empty floor, pointing the gun like a weapon. A startlingly lovely smile split his face – and I wrote at the time it was the most spontaneous gesture I’d ever seen of his. In that moment, he was “free, unthinking, beautiful.”

Backstage stories about bands are not usually small, beautiful things. But in my experience hanging out with musicians, they’re mostly *not* the stereotypes we see portrayed on TV or in movies. Here’s a shocking fact: They’re people. And the ones who I spoke to were often in America for the first time, men (mostly) in their early twenties, in an era without internet or cell phones to keep them connected back home. They were surrounded every day by people paid to be with them. Many years

later I understood on a gut level that the whole enterprise was a brave, reckless thing to do. But you do it because you have to.

Radiohead weren't the direct inspiration for the band in my new dark rock fantasy, *The Only Song Worth Singing*, but they do flavor the margins – as do all the bands I've interviewed over the years. The inspiration for *Only Song* – about a band of best friends from Dublin who tour the U.S. for the first time in the 1990s, and have their lives turned upside down by a trio of scary fairies – came from numerous sources. But I mined my memories and experiences to make it feel real and lived in.

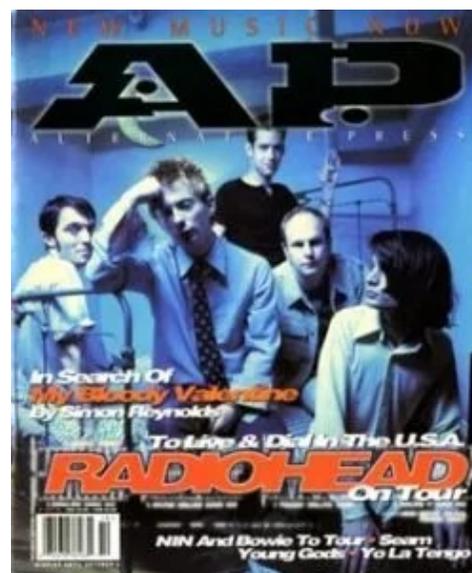
Still, before writing *Only Song* I hadn't really thought much about turning the music world I knew into fiction. That didn't come together until I discovered the other key source of inspiration for the book – an accidental discovery on the library shelves of *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales*, written by an unexpectedly familiar name: W.B. Yeats. Apparently Yeats had spent time wandering around Ireland in the late 1800s, getting rural folk to share their folklore. Along with those stories, he catalogs the fae as “Trooping Fairies” or “Solitary Fairies” and gives brief explanations as to what they're known for.

The one that stuck with me was the *Leanhaun Shee* (that's how he spells her Irish name) or the “fairy mistress.” He gives her just a few sentences, but explains that she's the Gaelic muse who slowly steals the life away from those she inspires. “The Gaelic poets die young,” he wrote, “for she is restless, and will not let them remain long on earth – this malignant phantom.”

I started putting ideas together – and came up with a “what if?” moment that started my creative engines. To me, modern poets were musicians. So what if the fae from Yeats' book – including this fairy mistress – decided to pay attention to one band in particular? How would you get the magical creatures to leave you alone before they killed you?

That's where *Only Song* truly became a story: combining my expertise behind the scenes with musicians, and blending it with a book I found by chance in the library. Before this, I was no expert in Irish folklore (despite being a fan of Celtic rock and the country in general) – and while I can't say I'm *expert* now, I am much better educated.

Worth noting is that Yeats' book does have controversy attached to it – something I didn't initially



know when writing *Only Song*. Among other things, Yeats' methodology was lacking, and there are those who suggest he invented the fairy mistress entirely. All right, then: Let's put it into the story. So much of fairy lore refers to belief: If you believe in the fae, they exist; when belief fades, they disappear as well. How hard is it then to imagine that a great, Nobel Prize-winning poet like Yeats could not conjure a fairy into existence just by writing about her?

That was how my fairy mistress Sheerie, in *Only Song*, found her back story.

It's not so hard to pair music and magic, in the end. A barn-burner of a rock show, with hundreds or thousands of people all singing the same song, moving to the same beats, led by musical wizards on stage is an emotional whirlwind that is as close to real magic as we get in this mundane world. It's magic that shows up in unexpected ways.

One of the other great memories I have of being on Radiohead's tour was this: After a day of largely not hanging out together, watching how the band members assembled on stage, donned their instruments (or sat behind them) and transformed. Their individual wires crossed, and at that connection something new came alive.

Thom even smiled.

Absolutely magical.

(c) Randee Dawn

### **About *The Only Song Worth Singing* by Randee Dawn:**

Childhood friends Patrick, Ciaran, and Malachi would've been happy to play music for coins on the streets of Dublin, but when their sound – a blend of traditional tunes and rock styling – lands them a record deal, they also get their first tour of America. As they gather fans, however, they also get the attention of three *sídhe*, fairies straight out of Irish tradition who play by their own rules.

Mal finds himself beleaguered by a prankster whose malicious tricks make him think he's losing his mind, while Ciaran falls hard for a hanger-on whose primal sexuality saps the life from him. Patrick can save them – if he's willing to trust the superstitions he learned during a painful childhood he



thought he'd left behind long ago.

But the only thing that matters more than music to Patrick? His friends.

The Only Song Worth Singing is an upmarket mythic novel about blood, craic, and rock and roll. Set in the 90s at the height of the Celtic rock boom, it should appeal to fans of Alex Bledsoe and Alice Hoffman alike.

**Order your copy online here (<https://amzn.to/4j44iSm>).**



**And see here (<https://www.writing.ie/category/interviews/>) for recent Meet the Author articles on Writing.ie.**

## About the author

Born in Virginia, and raised in Maryland, Randee Dawn is now a Brooklyn-based author and journalist who writes speculative fiction at night and entertainment and lifestyle stories during the day for publications like the New York Times, NBCNews.com, Variety, The Los Angeles Times, and Emmy Magazine.

Her humorous pop culture fantasy novel Tune in Tomorrow was published in 2022 by Solaris/Rebellion, and Publishers Weekly praised her for her ability to: “balance over-the-top drama and comedy with genuine intrigue to create a fun story with plenty of heart.” Lightspeed praised Tune in Tomorrow as “an excellent read if you’re looking for something to make you smile... well worth your time.”

In 2025 Randee has three new books out, including: The Only Song Worth Singing (Arc Manor/Caezik, April); Leave No Trace (Arc Manor/Caezik, August) and We Interrupt This Program (the next entry in the Tune-iverse) (Solaris Nova, Fall). She is also the co-editor of The Law & Order: SVU Unofficial Companion; co-edited the anthology Across the Universe: Tales of Alternative Beatles, and has dozens of short stories published in anthologies and magazines.

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