

SCENE
AND HEARDBY
BRIAN CAMPBELL

Mark Kozelek made his name with Red House Painters, but now the supremely talented California-based singer trades under either his own name or the Sun Kil Moon moniker. He talks to **Scene** ahead of his gig in Belfast this weekend...

Making his MARK

AS a musician who has skirted mainstream success, it's fitting that Mark Kozelek popped up in a film called *Almost Famous*.

The multi-talented American singer-songwriter came to prominence in the nineties with his Red House Painters band and while record label wrangles left a sour taste towards the end of that decade, he admits that he has fond memories of his time filming *Almost Famous*, directed by Cameron Crowe. "Yeah, that was a great time. Cameron is a pretty important figure in music history and I think if it'd been any other sort of music movie made by anybody else, it may not have been so great. "I wonder sometimes, because really all I did in that movie was kind of stand around and nod but people keep asking me about it!

"I think the reason is because of Cameron. I think he made a really good movie that was really true to life and although I didn't have a real big part in it, I was glad to be in that world at that time.

"I remember it was '99 going into 2000 and I remember thinking, 'My God, this is really something to be going into the millennium with' and it was a really cool end to that decade for me."

Kozelek played the bassist in *Stillwater*, although off-screen he's better known as a supremely gifted singer and guitarist.

His phenomenal back catalogue includes Red House Painters material, solo albums and most recently music recorded under the Sun Kil Moon moniker.

The California-based singer has just completed his latest SKM album and he says he'll be airing some of the new tunes when he plays Ireland this weekend, taking in Dublin tonight, Galway tomorrow and Belfast on Sunday.

"I'll probably do a couple, yeah. I won't do them all because I don't want live versions of my songs to be out on YouTube, but I've written new songs, so I might as well play a couple."

For a musician who is renowned for his delicate vocals and intricate guitar playing, Kozelek surprised fans when he covered songs by Modest Mouse and AC/DC but he pulled the feat off in quite some style and his Sun Kil Moon album *Tiny Cities* (of reworked Modest Mouse songs) was stunning.

He says he isn't one for setlists, though, and takes each gig as it comes.

"I do a little of everything. I try to do a few new songs and some old Red House Painters songs and now and then I'll do an AC/DC one or one of these Modest Mouse songs or maybe even a cover I haven't played before. So I try to mix up a little bit of everything from all my years of doing this."

Modest Mouse are becoming more and more high profile of late, helped by the fact that Smiths legend Johnny Marr has joined their ranks.

"That made a lot of sense to me. I think Isaac Brock and Morrissey are both heavyweights and both great lyricists in their own right," says Kozelek.

"It's interesting, because they're both huge talents and they both have that real fanatical fanbase and they both

make records that really matter, so it made sense to me that Modest Mouse would be a band that Johnny Marr would want to hang out with for a while. I think it was a pretty good move."

Had he heard any feedback from Brock and the band after releasing his album of covers?

"I haven't heard a word. I read one article where the journalist had contacted them and wrote that they politely declined to talk about it, so I don't know. Who knows? Maybe they didn't like it. It's one of those things, but I've moved on."

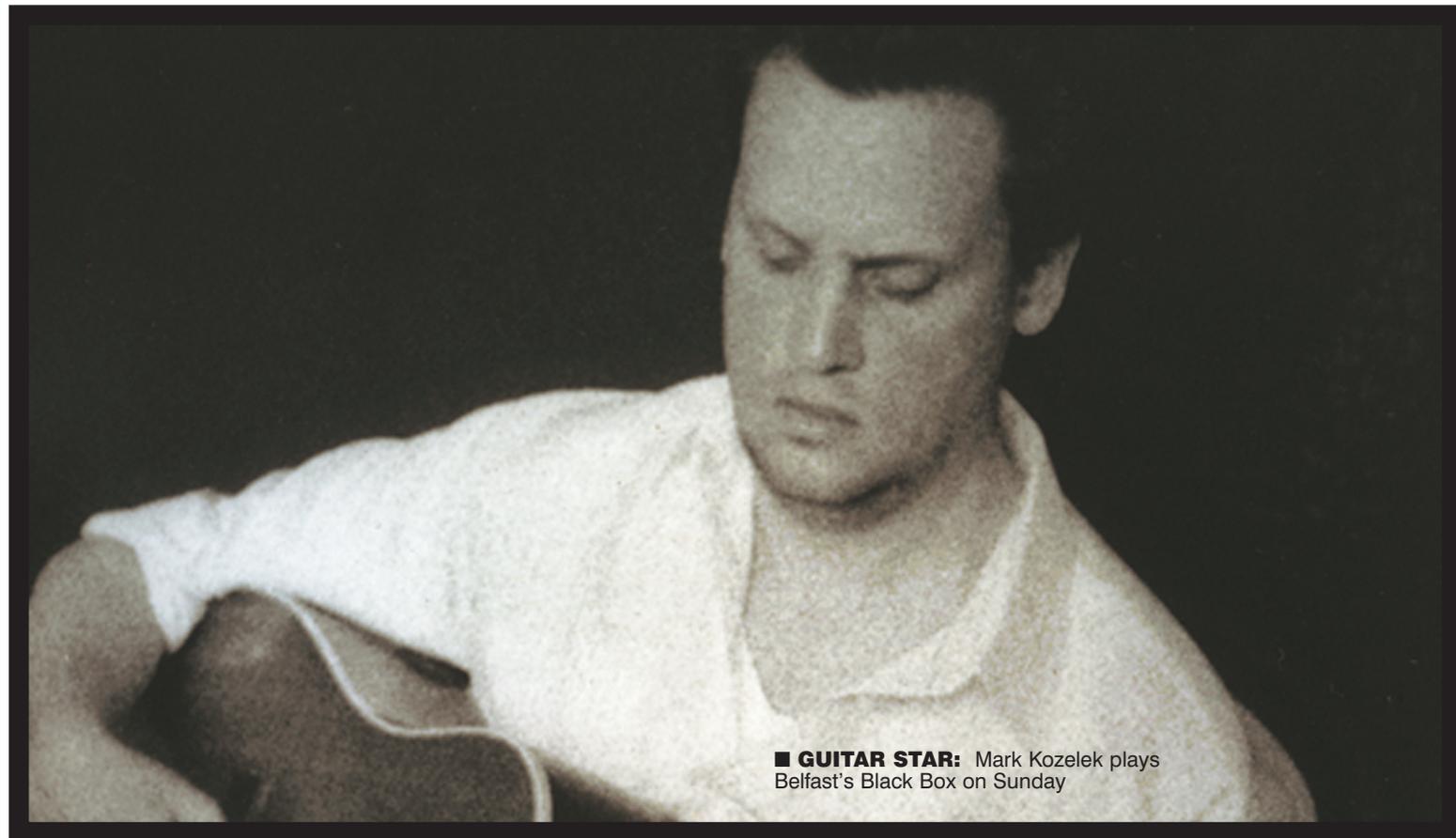
The new Sun Kil Moon album won't be released until next year, but the singer is currently promoting a limited four-piece vinyl set made up of his *White Christmas* and *Little Drummer Boy Live* records.

The box-set will no doubt be lapped up by anyone who picked up the Sufjan Stevens Christmas collection last year and Kozelek says he won't rule out playing festive fare such as *White Christmas* on his current tour.

"Well, it's early November. It's one of those things, but if somebody calls it out, I'll play it."

Kozelek says he has only ever played Dublin on his previous visits to Ireland and so will be playing Belfast and Galway for the first time on this tour. He kicked off his European jaunt in Sweden – where he recorded *White Christmas Live* – and he says there are ups and downs when it comes to organizing his tours.

"There's a lot of logistics with going on tour. It's like you're setting up a wedding or something! You have to get the hotels and transportation and all that stuff."



■ **GUITAR STAR:** Mark Kozelek plays Belfast's Black Box on Sunday

He says it's a breath of fresh air to now be in the position of putting records out on his own label.

"It's made a really huge difference to how I feel in my life. It feels better to be in control and the money is better and it really really frees me up.

"I guess it's like anybody else with any other kind job or career; you take what you learn over the years and what I've learnt over the years on being on all these labels is I've found a way to make it work for myself.

"For me, I feel a lot of pressure has been taken off now. When you're on a label, you're committed to them for a certain amount of time and you've got to get permission to do stuff.

"Say I was on a label and I wanted to go and do a five-song EP or a song

with someone or a Christmas record, they wouldn't let you. So it feels so good to be able to do whatever I want." He's joined on this tour by Red House Painters bandmate Phil Carney, although Kozelek doubts whether he'll ever put out another RHP album in the future.

"I think for me it feels a little too much like something in the past. I still play with those guys and I still enjoy recording with them and we're all still friends, but I think when you've taken so much time off and then you come back and do a record, it can be a little cheesy or a little desperate or something.

"So I probably will continue to play with those guys, but it just seems right now with Sun Kil Moon that there's a momentum going on."

And as for his film work, does he plan to do any more of that?

"I've never made any plans to do any film stuff – it's all just sort of happened and I hope it continues, but I wouldn't know how to plan it.

"Hopefully if some director comes around again one day... but I don't know; it might never happen."

Would he be available for work if Cameron Crowe was to give him a call? "Cameron's definitely up there in the hierarchy of some of the most talented people I know, so I'm real honoured to be a friend of his and yeah, if he ever needs me again he knows where to get a hold of me!"

■ **Mark Kozelek plays the Black Box in Belfast on Sunday, with support from Cat Malojian. Doors 7.30pm. Tickets £10, available from the Belfast Welcome Centre on Donegall Place and via www.gotobelfast.com.**

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