

# From Lisbrin to Los Angeles

by Shane Finnerty

He's played his music in Ireland, England, Germany, Italy, Australia and the USA. His name is Jerry McLean from Lisbrin, Ballycastle in County Mayo, Ireland, and this is his story.

Jerry McLean is one of those rare individuals that seem to elude the streets of Los Angeles. You won't find him amongst the masses as they stumble through the daily grind. You will however, find Jerry in a little cozy spot in L.A.'s Farmer's Market, sinking a few 'scoops' of beer and basically minding his own business. When you first meet him you instantly like him. He is humble, modest and very proud of his Irish Heritage. No airs and graces here, just the man, his story and his love of music. When he was five years old, Jerry used to make his own 'make believe' guitars from wood he found around the farm because actual guitars were nowhere to be found and the only local who possessed such a thing was Paddy Langan, a friend of Jerry's brother Sean. The McLean brothers would all pile onto a tractor driven by older brother Patrick and head off to the parish Town Hall to see Paddy Langan's band play. Jerry decided he wanted to be a rock n' roller after seeing Langan's red electric guitar and after hearing "She Loves You" by the Beatles one afternoon on a portable record player down on the Mayo coast. He would pretend he was a rock n' roll guitarist and this was the beginning of his journey into the world of music.

When Jerry was ten, his mother sold the farm in Mayo for next to nothing and took her kids to Bristol, England. His father, who had already gone ahead of them, passed away six months after their arrival, leaving mother McLean to fend for herself and the seven lads. At the age of thirteen his mother and one of his brothers surprised him with a present of a 'real' electric guitar. "It was one that didn't make your fingers bleed," said Jerry, "It was a Rock 'n' Roll red guitar ...it was lovely." Jerry formed a band at school in Bristol and they put on musical shows. At that time he was the lead guitarist. He worked as an apprentice mechanic and he hated it. "I hated the boss," says Jerry, "I worked there for a year but needed some real money as it was decided around that time that the family were going to move to Australia and I needed money for this big trip. I worked on the freeways doing some driving, working machinery, working with a pick and shovel. I didn't care. We were going on a cruise liner and it was going to take seven weeks to get to Australia. Beer money was had to be had," says Jerry laughingly.

Jerry was only seventeen when he boarded the cruise liner. During the voyage, he and a guitar-playing friend managed to get a couple of gigs aboard and entertained the passengers. "It was the best holiday vacation I ever had," says Jerry. "Getting waited on and everything you wanted. At that time the Australian Government was crying out for qualified immigrants. We paid ten pounds towards our fare and the Australian Government paid the rest." Their long voyage ended in Melbourne and shortly after arriving Jerry started his new life as a bartender and eventually put a band together and got back into the rock n' roll groove. As time moved on, the bands came and went as did the gigs in bars and clubs. Jerry admits that he had a total disregard for Irish music back in the old days. His father was a musician and a bit of a 'celebrity' locally and traditional music was the name of the game. Jerry was a rock n' roller and really had no interest in the traditional stuff. This all changed when, gigging in Australia, he gained a new respect for the Irish traditional tunes when hearing a band called 'The Bushwhackers'. It may have been the fact of being so far away from home and not hearing it for a



The McLean Brothers back in the 60's.  
L to R: Al, Jerry, Willie and Sean



Jerry's band Blackthorne Aire featuring Jerry with Janet Duncan and Brian Therio

The McLean house on the left, where Jerry was born and raised in Lisbrin, County Mayo, Ireland.

