

Fleadh People

Sinéad Quinn: Songbird

The Fleadh this August hopes to fill the streets of Ennis with music and life. Among those hoping to add to the atmosphere and music is 17 year old Sinéad Quinn, the reigning Munster singing champion from Newmarket on Fergus. **Stuart Holly** reports.

WHEN Fleadh Cheoil Na hÉireann 2016 is in full swing this August the streets of Ennis will be packed from the stone cows in the Market to Ennis Abbey by the Fergus.

If you happen to be ambling along in the evening trying to navigate the heaving crowds, music, fiddles and bodhráns, keep an eye out for Sinéad Quinn and her friends — they plan on making a few bob by taking to the streets in the evenings with their instruments.

Sinéad Quinn, a 17-year-old Newmarket native, might be a familiar face to those who frequent trad sessions around the county where she often joins well-known flute player Bríd O’Gorman, who’s also her neighbour.

The St Patrick’s Comprehensive School student has a talent for traditional Irish singing that was first spotted by her fiddle teacher Mary Liddy as a 10-year-old and she’s been competing in Fleadhs around the country ever since. Sinéad, a reigning Munster champion in Irish singing, is hoping this will be her first year to take home a medal from the highly competitive All-Ireland Fleadh.

However Sinéad, speaking to *The Clare People* this week, says she can’t wait for the week of the Fleadh regardless of the outcome, adding that the fact she’s on home ground makes

it all the more exciting. Playing traditional music is not just a hobby, but also a huge social outlet for the teenager — and a chance to generate some additional spending money in the form of shows, and come August, busking.

Sinéad said, “I do summer work in the Old Ground with Deirdre O’Brien Vaughan for Tuack Tours, which are American tours that come in. We do a show for them every Thursday and Saturday evening and I sing as part of that. It’s traditional, the really old Irish songs. That’s mostly what I sing. This is my fourth year doing it. I really love it, the Americans are great.

“I’m definitely more excited that the Fleadh is in Clare this year, I’ll be busking with friends on the streets in the evening. We’ll have to go looking to pick out a spot soon,” she smiles. “There’s a good few in our group, about six or seven I’d say. We’ll have the whole week as well, which will be great, and we’ll be getting lifts in and out.”

Sinéad, who will be entering the Irish and English singing competitions as she does every year, successfully came through the Clare stage of the Fleadh last week and will compete in the Munsters again this month. As well as participating in the Fleadh Sinéad

stresses that she gets huge enjoyment from participating in singing sessions all over Clare. Many villages now have music festivals at different times of the year which she partake in, including Feakle, Tulla, and Sixmilebridge to name a few.

What’s become a passion for Sinéad — who goes into her Leaving Cert year next year — started out as a happy accident. Sinéad explains, “With my fiddle teacher Mary Liddy, we were doing a competition and we needed singers and players and dancers. I hadn’t really done any traditional singing, I was just singing in the school in choirs, and she asked me would I sing a traditional Irish song for the competition so I did and I loved it so she gave me a few songs for that competition.

“I was about 10 at that stage and the Fleadh was on that year as well and she encouraged me to enter into that and then from then on I just did the Fleadh every year, going around to different sessions and workshops and things like that. I developed more of an interest in it as the years went on.”

Since stumbling on her passion for Irish song, Sinéad credits two teachers for nurturing her unique talent, saying that Edel Vaughan — herself a well-known singer — introduced

her to ‘fabulous songs’ and her current teacher Deirdre Scanlon from Ballina/Killaloe has been a ‘great inspiration’. She also reserved high praise for popular sean nós singer Sean McMahon from Kilmurry, who Sinéad says ‘is always extremely encouraging’.

Sinéad, the eldest of three, usually travels to Fleadhs with her family — in one case staying an hour away from Cavan as the squeeze for accommodation.

Her sister Fiona (16) is a concertina player while her little brother Shane (13) started off on the mandolin (but he’s since fallen out with the instrument).

Sinéad believes that this year will be special. The trad scene in Clare, she says, is vibrant and she expects that to be fully evident come August 14.

“There’ll be a lot of music in Ennis. Everywhere you turn there’ll be someone playing music and the crowds will be immense, you’ll be squashed in literally. It will be a great time for anyone who’s at the Fleadh, even if you don’t play, everywhere there’s music you can enjoy so there’s entertainment for everyone,” said Sinéad, adding, “There’ll be cute little four-year-olds dancing on the street up to people in their elder years.”

 COMHALTAS



Fleadh
Cheoil na hÉireann
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14 – 22
AUGUST

In association with
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Sinéad Quinn in Ennis last week.

Natasha Barton