

Fleadh People

Liam Clancy: Songs of Innocence and Experience

11-year-old Tubber native **Liam Clancy** has become a mini-celebrity this week with thousands watching his lilting skills online. Ahead of this year's Fleadh, All-Ireland champion Liam tells *The Clare People* why he's carrying on the age-old tradition.

MANY visitors to Clare this summer for the Fleadh will travel in hope with their bodhráns, fiddles, flutes and banjos in tow in preparation for the country's All-Ireland tournaments. And while 11-year-old Tubber native Liam Clancy will also have his banjo and flute packed in the boot of the car, it's his wonderful voice which has brought him success and widespread attention.

The multi-talented Tubber National School pupil is currently preparing to enter the regional Fleadh competition in banjo, flute, lilting, whistling, and singing — while he's also participating in the grúpa cheoil, trio and céilí band competitions. If he has a successful time in the regional competitions, he admits he'll be flat out for the week of Fleadh Cheoil Na hÉireann when 400,000 people pack the streets of Ennis from August 14-22.

Liam is already an All-Ireland Champion in lilting and silver medalist whistler and this summer has ambitions to place in at least three competitions. And when asked if he has a competitive streak, the unassuming youngster turns to his mother Clora and asks, "I don't know, am I competitive?"

"Yeah I like to win like but I enjoy doing it,"

he adds.

While Liam has plans to get to at least three All-Ireland finals, it's his lilting which has made him a mini-celebrity. Along with capturing his All-Ireland title, Liam has appeared on television twice with Fleadh TV, he has performed on Clare FM, Galway Bay FM, and has even performed at a senior citizen's party in Tubber where a lady gave him a €10 note 'because it reminded her of her early life and memories of Cois Na hAibheann'.

A lot of attention for one child to handle — but mum Clora explains, "He doesn't get nervous, he just takes it in his stride."

For those who don't know, lilting is a form of traditional singing — sometimes referred to as jiggling by older generations, Liam explains — and it is believed it came about in part from the unavailability of instruments.

And although it may provoke images of a wise old man sitting in the corner of a pub, Liam is quick to put that to bed by insisting that lilting is 'cool'. Such is its appeal that this week, a video put online by *The Clare People* of Liam's entrancing tones was quick to garner 6,000 views.

Explaining how he first fell in love with

lilting, Liam explains to *The Clare People* that he was in fact self-taught at the beginning. He would watch videos online and mimic the work of Seamus Fey from Cavan.

"I had this song called Ms Gilhooley's Party and there was lilting in the song and the teacher said I was good at lilting," says Liam. "Then I looked it up on YouTube and got used to it."

Liam's three siblings, seven-year-old Eimear, Róisín (15) and Ronan (9) are all musical and his mum Clora says 'music is in his blood', revealing that Liam's dad Noel has an interest in trad while his grandfather Joe Clancy was a well-known fiddle player who competed in the 1982 Fleadh with the Iniscronin Céilí band.

Now, with Fleadh Cheoil Na hÉireann in his sights, Liam says he's been practicing every evening and even staying off the chocolate. He explains he has a pact with his singing teacher Edel Vaughan, a Crusheen native who is a solo artist as well as performing with the Kilfenora Céilí Band.

"Coming up to the Fleadh I can't eat chocolate because it tickles my throat," says Liam. "Edel says she'll give me a blue Yorkee Bar if I stay off chocolate before the competition."

He credits Edel with much of his success, saying her classes and 'very good and he's quick to praise his other music teachers in Crusheen, Eimear Howley (banjo) and Michael King (flute).

He also has a cheeky word about his school teacher Ms Kilkelly, "She's very nice but she gets cross sometimes."

While many envisage the streets of Ennis to be packed with revellers enjoying the pubs and electric street atmosphere, the week of the Fleadh is also a huge family event, something which Liam and his family have experienced over the last two years.

Last year in Sligo, where the whole family stayed for a week, Liam took to the streets to busk while he also visited local tourist spots. Looking to offer a word of advice to visitors to Ennis, Liam adds, "In Clare I'd go down to Tubber ... and go to the Burren."

Asked if he's more excited that the Fleadh is in Ennis, Liam gives the most deadpan response yet. "I'd like it far away so I can get a holiday."

However, he adds with a smile, that it will mean more to win at home. "If I win in Ennis it means I've won where I'm from."

 COMHALTAS



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You Tube sensation Liam Clancy (11) from Tubber, will stay off chocolate until the All-Ireland Fleadh in August.