

## Fleadh People

# Teaching tricks of the trade: Kieran Hanrahan

County Clare has a long-standing tradition of Irish music. Where other counties have spent the last 60 years catching up — with the help of Comhaltas's Fleadh Cheoil Na hÉireann and its Scoil Éigse — Clare has long prospered in the field of trad.

STOCKTON'S WING legend Kieran Hanrahan is one of a crop of prodigious musical talents to emerge from Ennis and despite having left Ennis as a younger man, the now RTÉ Radio presenter credits much of his success to his Clare upbringing.

The banjo-playing icon explains, "I grew up learning my music in Ennis — in my age group we were lucky there was a cohort of people playing traditional music — the Cottors, Paul Roache, the MacMahons, Dermot Lernihán, people like that. We had a very strong group of talented musicians around the town, from that point of view it was a pleasure growing up in the town, there was a great sense of community."

Kieran has paid it back to the community in spades as a teacher, a trade for which he has a deep love. Alongside his gig as the presenter of Céilí House on Saturday evenings, Kieran teaches music at DIT and regularly teaches banjo at the Willie Clancy summer school and Scoil Éigse.

"And the now Dublin-based musician is

preparing to return to Clare as director of Scoil Éigse, a role which he took up last year in Sligo.

It's a matter of things coming full circle as the St Michael's Villas man actually won the All-Ireland banjo competition the last time Fleadh Cheoil Na hÉireann was in Ennis, in 1977. He's spent 21 years broadcasting from the Fleadh — this year coming from Temple Gate courtyard — while he's been teaching at Scoil Éigse for the last 10 years.

"I would have always thought banjo so I was asked to take over as director last year," explains Kieran, who says they're expecting more than 700 students this year at the summer school coming from the four provinces, Scotland, England, the USA and far flung places including Japan.

Scoil Éigse will be based between Rice College and Coláiste Mhuire and Kieran says it's an incredible opportunity for fledgling musicians to interact with some of the world's best talents, adding that it's 'fantastic to see the fun the young people get out of it'.

"We would hope to get the word out in Clare — it's not just for visiting musicians, this is for local musicians as well. It's a great opportunity to interact with the top musicians, people that locals might not have had access to before."

Coming home to Ennis, Kieran says, brings an added element of fun to this year's Fleadh for him. He says that while it's always the 'highlight' of his annual music calendar, excitement levels this year are at an unprecedented level.

He also remembers the last Fleadh in Ennis in '77 fondly, recalling music on the streets til 5am long after the pubs had all shut their doors.

Kieran says, "The fact that it's my hometown makes it that bit more exciting — and I know the lay of the land. There's a great sense of reunion no matter where the Fleadh is. There'll be people I won't have seen for 12 months but I know I'll see them at the Fleadh."

"I just remember in 1977 it being packed, it was such a different town. There were two

way streets in the town. I don't know if they were ready for it — it was a fantastic opportunity at the time. People came from all over the country.

"I remember sitting in the Cathedral grounds at 3am and the Liverpool Céilí Band played til 4 or 5am. I guess there were different circumstances with the Fleadh being on, but those memories will always stay with me, it was fantastic."

Speaking about the 400,000 people due to arrive in Clare, Kieran says it's a 'frightening' number but that the county will be ready for it thanks to plans to disperse the crowds across Clare 'to Kilfenora, Doolin, Corofin, Tulla, Miltown Malbay, all the well-known places for traditional music'.

"It will be fantastic. There'll be a lovely atmosphere early in the week, all the young people from Scoil Éigse will be looking for places to play, I'm really looking forward to it."

"If people want or check out the Comhaltas website, we would love to have the Clare students attend."

 COMHALTAS



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