

Fleadh People

Tulla Road Céilí Band: Taking the competition home

The Tulla Rd Céilí Band head into the All-Ireland Fleadh on the back of being crowned Munster champions. Here Stuart Holly speaks to band leader Niamh O'Dea about what it means to represent her town and county in the legendary competition.

THE TULLA Road in Ennis is well-known for its traffic jams. With a growing number of young housing developments, traffic spilling greedily in from the M18 and a never-ending series of road works, it's often bumper to bumper with cars struggling to join the flow of traffic from tributary roads.

However a group of musical residents decided to create a new type of jam in the area by forming the Tulla Road Céilí Band.

A pure coincidence that the birthplace of this band should be on the road to the homeplace to the traditional juggernaut which is the Tulla Céilí Band — and the way they are going, the Tulla Road Céilí Band are already on the metaphorical road to following the success paved out by the Tulla Band and their Kilfernora counterparts.

Formed in 2010, the Tulla Road Céilí Band found instant success after being crowned champions of Ard Ghaisce Na mBuíonta, the céilí competition at the Ennis Trad Festival.

Niamh O'Dea, leader of the Tulla Road Céilí Band, explains that while there are members of the band living as far away as Down, there is a core group based on the Tulla Road.

She says, "As a band, there's a few of us who happen to be residents on the Tulla Road in Ennis, which is where we got the name. In 2010 we got together for the Ard Ghaisce Na mBuíonta at the Ennis Trad Festival in 2010 and we actually won it the first year."

The group was victorious in the competition again in 2012 and despite this success, the Tulla Road Céilí Band has never entered the County Fleadh until this year.

Flutist Niamh says, "Since 2012 we've all continued to perform together in various formations, in sessions for example, and then when we heard that the All-Ireland Fleadh was going to be on in our hometown of Ennis in 2016 we said we'd enter the Kilrush County Fleadh where we were successful in getting through to the provincial stages."

The 10-piece band then went to Listowel in Kerry this month where they emerged as Munster champions of the senior Céilí band competition.

"It was our first time as a group competing in the All-Ireland," explains Niamh.

"At Listowel there was very stiff competition but we played well and we really enjoyed

competing. It was a new experience for lots of people in the band. Some of us have competed before with other Céilí bands, some of us haven't, it was very enjoyable."

While Niamh has experienced almost unparalleled success in previous Fleadhs — she was a member of the Ennis Céilí Band which famously won a three-in-a-row from 2001-2003 — the flutist says there's great excitement heading into Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2016.

The Ballynacally native, who is often involved in trad sessions in pubs around Ennis, says that the members' families will be coming along to support them as they fight it out with their competitors for the coveted title.

"We are delighted to be representing our town, our county and our province in the All-Ireland Fleadh," says Niamh. "The fact that it's on in Ennis makes it more special. It's 39 years since the last one was on in Ennis so it's great to be partaking in it and it's an honour to play on stage, especially in the senior band competition. It's one of the most popular competitions purely based on the big crowds it draws. I was part of the Ennis Céilí Band which won three All-Ireland's in a row so I've

always had a passion for Céilí Bands."

As the big weekend quickly approaches and the practice sessions in halls and houses around Ennis ramp up, excitement levels rise and rivalries get heated. However Niamh insists that the comradery far outweighs the rivalry when it comes to the competition, which will also feature another Clare band, Tigh Na Coille who came third in Munster.

"It's more comradery there with them," says Niamh, adding, "may the best band win!"

The Tulla Road Céilí Band includes Patricia Clarke on piano from Co Down, Anne-Marie Rynne on fiddle, Ennistymon, Carmel O'Dea, fiddle, Ennis, Finnoula Ryan, fiddle, Ennis, Tracy Ryan, flute, Newport, Tipperary, Niamh O'Dea, flute, Ennis, Teresa O'Dea, Ballynacally, Marty Ryan, accordion, Ennis (originally Newport, Tipperary), Marcus Moloney, banjo, Ennis (originally from Limerick), Paul Cropera, drums, Ennis.

 COMHALTAS



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Tulla Road Céilí Band