

## Fleadh People

# Josephine Marsh: 'We're bringing the Fleadh back home'

Composer, musician and teacher Josephine Marsh lives for traditional Irish music, a trait which she is now passing on to the next generation. Elaine Tubridy spoke with her about the Fleadh homecoming this summer.

"IT'S kind of the next generation now. They're giving our generation the excuse to go to the Fleadhs. We mightn't have bothered the last few years but now we're back on the road with them, because of their involvement in it we're all getting involved again."

East Clare accordion player Josephine Marsh has been attending the regional and All Ireland Fleadhs all her life, but it's thanks to her children that she has a renewed interest in the biggest traditional music event of the year.

"I've heard of a few people that I know coming from America and different places where their children would have qualified for the Fleadh and it's giving them a chance to come over and take part in it, where they might not have been back to Ireland for a good few years before that," she says.

Her 13 year-old son Jack, who plays the Uilleann pipes, and her nine year-old Andrew, who plays the banjo, will take to the Fleadh stage in Ennis this August, but Josephine believes winning a medal is not as important as enjoying the music.

Jack won an All-Ireland medal at last year's Fleadh in Sligo and while Josephine is very proud of him, she is just glad to see her son's making friends and having a good time.

"The nice thing about it is I can see them

making new friends and they're going for the fun of it, they're not that bothered I'd say if they win or lose or draw but they were lucky last year. They put in a lot of practise and they did a good job. It's more for the friendships really," she says.

She is looking forward to the Fleadh coming home to Clare and hopes the whole county will feel the benefits.

"It's going to be great for Clare, the whole of Co Clare, not just Ennis and the atmosphere will be fantastic," she says.

Born in London to Irish parents, her mother and father met at the Galtymore dance hall in Cricklewood.

Josephine's uncle played in the band and both of her parents had a great interest in music.

Josephine and her three siblings were all born in London before they returned to her mother's home town of Broadford in 1971.

Josephine grew up competing at Fleadhs around the country with musicians such as Eithne Donnelly, Siobhan Moloney, Norma Moloney, John Moloney and Francis Custy.

She recalls how she and her fellow musicians would go to the All-Ireland Fleadhs to soak up the atmosphere and meet their friends, regardless of whether or not they made it to the finals.

She competed with the guidance of her music teacher Deirdre O'Brien Vaughan from Newmarket on Fergus until she reached the age of 18.

"The Fleadh for me would have meant the freedom to play music and express myself through music and to meet up with friends for the fun of it really, that was the big thing for us down through the years, just having fun and not to focus too much on the competitions and winning or losing too much," she says.

Even though Josephine has taken a step back from performing full time since the birth of her children, she still plays the odd gig and she teaches music in West Clare.

"In my 20s and 30s I would have played a lot, I would have had my own band and would have done a lot of travelling around the world. With children you don't get an opportunity to do that as much, but I do teach," she says.

Josephine has been invited to play at the Ceol Cascadia Festival in Seattle, Washington with Cormac Begley, Patsy Hanley, Angelina Carberry and other Irish household names this July.

Organised by Randall Bays, the festival centres around concerts and workshops at the Evergreen State College.

Randall will travel to this year's Fleadh in Ennis with his son, who has qualified for the All-Ireland finals.

"Sometimes we forget that there would be a lot of musicians abroad that would be involved in the Comhaltas and that the Fleadhs take place abroad as well. They qualify for the All-Ireland from abroad.

"Last year when I was in Sligo, I met up with some musicians that I haven't met in years and they were travelling with a bunch of musicians from Boston who had qualified in the Fleadh so it was absolutely brilliant to see them.

"People that might have emigrated could be involved in different Comhaltas branches around the world as well, so it's a great opportunity to get home for an event like this," Josephine says.

Having released a solo album in the 1990s and a CD with her band in 2001, Josephine is now working on some tunes that she hopes to release next year. She is also an accomplished composer and she dreams of publishing a book of her tunes someday.

"I've been thinking about it for a while, so it's long overdue now at this stage. Some of my tunes have been recorded by some artists over the years so it's nice to see they're interested in my own tunes," she says.

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