

## Fleadh People

# John Lynch: The leader of the band

The Kilfenora Céilí Band is certainly one of the biggest names in trad music today. This summer, the band takes to the stage for the Fleadh and this Christmas will mark the 25th anniversary since the band re-formed. Stuart Holly speaks to Band Leader, John Lynch about his experiences with the Kilfenora Céilí band.

A HUGE dome in the Fair Green in Ennis will set the stage for the legendary Kilfenora Céilí Band to thrill thousands of Fleadh-goers this August.

It promises to be a major highlight of the festivities with 2,000 lucky revellers expected to pack out the dome to celebrate the band whose name is now synonymous with traditional Irish music.

Despite playing concerts and festivals across the world, The Kilfenora Céilí Band's leader John Lynch says that coming home for the Fleadh in Ennis is a particularly exciting prospect for them. It was, in fact, their success in the All-Ireland Fleadhs gone by which carved open the opportunities which led to the band's worldwide acclaim.

Retired school teacher John Lynch — whose father, uncle and aunt were all members of the Kilfenora Céilí Band of the '50s which won three All-Ireland's in a row — has been running the group since 1993, a year that sparked the re-emergence of the Kilfenora Céilí Band as one of the great forces in trad folklore.

It all began in the summer of 1991 when John was a teacher in Kildare, and he noted that there were no Clare bands competing in the Fleadh in Sligo.

John, whose grandfather was a founding member of the Kilfenora Céilí Band, explains, "I just said to myself 'I'm going to put a band

together for the '92 competition' and I came home for the mid-term break and I put a band together. We practiced first at Christmas of '91 up at Peter Griffin's kitchen in Lisdoonvarna.

"In '91, I travelled from Kildare to the rehearsals here. We had the rehearsals in St Flannan's and we still have our rehearsals in St Flannan's. 26 years later we're still there. "Then we competed in the Fleadhs in '92, '93, '94 and '95. We got second in '92, and then we won '93-95. I thought that we would only just enter competitions to see if the present generation could emulate what my father had done in the '50s and we did, and I thought that would be it."

When people started asking the band to play gigs — including appearing on RTÉ's *Up For The Match* before the 1995 All-Ireland hurling final — the band started to take on a life of its own so John uprooted with his wife and four children from Kildare to take up a job at Edmund Rice College Limerick City so that he could run the band full-time.

"Of course '95 as we all remember was the year Clare won the All-Ireland final and that year we were also asked to play on *Up For The Match*. There's a clip up on Facebook, it was really very entertaining to see that clip when we were all young and had hair. It was a fantastic year," he says.

The achievement of winning the Céilí com-

petition can't be understated. It attracts some of the biggest crowds who come to witness the crème de la crème battle it out — there can be up to 14 successful groups which have already won their regional competitions.

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Speaking about clinching the group's third title in a row in '95, John, whose brother Pat is a fellow musician and teaches in St Flannan's, says, "When we went to defend our title for the third time in Listowel that was electric. "I remember being on stage and the thought that hit my mind was 'if we don't win tonight we're going to be known as the Kilfenora Band who didn't win three in-a-row' because the band before us had done so, so I felt the pressure a little bit alright.

"But that night was a great night — we went up to play on the rig in the square in Listowel, there was a big crowd there.

"It was a fantastic feeling to have emulated what the band before had done and you felt like you were carrying on the tradition again and that you had represented Kilfenora and Clare in the All-Ireland Fleadh, it was a fantastic feeling."

Since then the Kilfenora Céilí Band has gone on to grow a public following of their own but

the Fleadh continues to be a highlight of their calendar — even just as spectators.

However this year they're the main attraction and John believes it's a huge opportunity for County Clare to display its rich culture and many attractions.

"This year we're really looking forward to the All-Ireland Fleadh coming to Clare because it's so long in coming, it's a great chance for the people of Clare to show how friendly we are and what a great tradition we have and what great culture we have in this county as well as the great scenery — we have the Burren, the Cliffs of Moher, Kilkee, we've the Wild Atlantic Way, we've so much at our natural disposal. Then the music on top of that — we are really looking forward to it.

"We are doing a Céilí on the Thursday night of the Fleadh with the Tulla Céilí Band in the West County, we'll have great craic with Mark Donnellan and all the lads in the Tulla.

"Then on Friday night we're doing a concert, collaborating with Sean Keane and of course we'll have our wonderful singer Edel Vaughan from Crusheen, and we'll have Michael Donnellan, Michael Gardiner, Laura Minogue, and Deirdre Kiely is dancing with us.

"We're really looking forward to the challenge of that because we'll have 2,000 people inside a dome over at the Fair Green. It's going to be a great night."

 COMHALTAS



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Members of the Kilfenora Céilí band in action on stage.  
Eamon Ward