

'MUSIC, MUSIC, MUSIC!'

The Blunnie Sisters from Carrick-on-Shannon

Ailie Blunnie writes about the role that music has played in her and her sister Róisín's lives

RÓISÍN AND I grew up in Drummagh, Carrick-on-Shannon, together with our brother Colm and all the O'Donnells, the Careys, the McCarthys, the Burkes and the Warnocks. It wasn't unusual for there to be seven or eight of us in the one car coming home from school or the pool, athletics or gymnastics. There was usually a snappier-than-advertised dog wagging its tail somewhere nearby too. Music was always a part of the picture. I'll try and give you a sense of the memories we have, starting from our house and walking you down through the town.

The first thing you'd probably notice coming into the house was the piano where our father, John, played waltzes and ragtime, a bit of Beethoven, Turlough O'Carolan and songs from the musicals, often while reading the newspaper or the parish newsletter on the music stand in front of him. The radio was ever-present in the kitchen, playing lots of trad. music, which our mother, Ann, has a lifelong affinity with, though she loves all sorts of music. Her old record collection in the sitting-room press is full of diverse treasures: Horslips, The Chieftains, Leonard Cohen, Bert Kaempfert, Nina Simone, Leitrim flute music, Miriam Makeba.

Outside, memories of bonfire night and John playing the accordion: "You put your left foot in"-style, with neighbours old and young dancing. It probably looked like something from *The Waltons* from a distance, but if you scratched the surface, you'd likely have found a pile of squabbling children, after yet



■ **Ailie Blunnie — new album in November 2017**

another game of rounders had turned into a war-zone. We were no shrinking violets.

Next is Comerton's garage down in Lower Summerhill, where we rehearsed every Sunday as part of teenage pop-band 'Revamp'. Michelle Comerton was on bass, Michael Corrigan on guitar, and Jason O'Carroll (RIP) was a musical dynamo on the drums, with energy to burn, dreams as big as the universe, and a neon orange, Adidas t-shirt that he loved wearing at gigs. One of our more memorable gigs was at the Jamestown Show, where we had to stop the music because we were upsetting the cattle. A lifelong lesson in humility.

Beside the Boys' School and into St Mary's Hall where we did Irish dancing and rehearsed for the Community Games Variety Competition, the odd Scór ballad group, and many a school or town musical with Anne Maxwell, or Joe Moore, and Angus Dunne at the helm.

Vivid memories of Sr Romana's wonderful Christmas concerts to the left in the Girls' School, and to the right out the Leitrim Road was where we went for piano lessons — in Cootehall, with Antoinette Watson. Honourable mention for Charlie McGettigan too, out in Drumshanbo — a great friend and support to both of us. Down Main Street and a glance out Park Lane, where Róisín might have had a promising football career if it weren't for a broken finger in a hard-fought u-12s Gaelic Football match, right before a piano exam.

The new statue of Susan Langstaff-Mitchell is next on our music-map, a poet whose words I had the pleasure of putting to music for the Millennium Choir for the Carrick 400 celebrations in 2013. And St Mary's Church, where John shared organ-playing duties with the wonderful Elizabeth O'Halloran, and myself and Róisín sang a fair few Holy Holys and Alleluias in our time with



■ **Roisin Blunnie conducts The Laetare Vocal Ensemble, Dublin City University**

Fr PJ and the Folk Group. Martina Rynn's Music School is another stand-out memory—above Flynn's pub—both for singing lessons and for classical guitar lessons with John Drummond.

Over to the right is the town clock—the scene of many a freezing cold Christmas Carol-Singing experience, and

then, further down George's Terrace to The Dock, which fostered my own development as a singer-songwriter and gave both of us a great platform for performing and attending gigs and events.

The last few stop-offs are on Bridge Street: The Oarsman, where we did a regular gig for a summer or two during

college, and then of course Cryan's, which was always full of ceol agus craic. Then we come to the bridge and along the bypass to Maynooth and Dublin where we went to college—Roisin to Trinity, and myself to Maynooth. Arts with music for both of us.

An interest in conducting and choirs took Roisin to Hungary for a few years, and then back to Dublin where she began lecturing in Mater Dei and later DCU. She set up her own choir, Laetare Vocal Ensemble there. I began studying Psychology, and now divide my life between working as a singer-songwriter and training in counselling and mental health. My debut album 'West to the Evening Sun', released in November 2017, features Laetare Vocal Ensemble as guest choir.

And that brings us to the end of our trip down music-memory lane, at least for now!

SNIPPET

ART EXHIBITION IN MOHILL

BARRY MURPHY IS AN artist living in Cloone. An exhibition of his paintings was officially opened by Leitrim County Councillor Séadhna Logan, pictured here with the artist and his portrait of Patrick Kavanagh. The exhibition which took place in the Canon Donohue Memorial Hall during the Mohill Horse Fair at the end of October 2017 was well attended. Included in the exhibition were portraits of several Irish artists. A portrait of the late Patrick Gallagher MRCVS, Mohill, or "Pat the Vit" as he was better known, was also among the collection.



Here you see Pat's wife, Anna Sheridan Gallagher, standing beside the portrait of her late husband. Anna celebrates her 90th birthday in December 2017. A long standing member of the *Leitrim Guardian* committee, we want to send her every good wish for her birthday.