

# MEITHEAL FINALE CONCERT

Limerick Institute of Technology, July 24th, 2010

Good omen, the concert hall car park was full by 7:30pm, half an hour before the concert was to start so I drove off to a far flung parking lot, where I met Luke Daniels, Dessie Kelliher and Jack Talty. We exchanged greetings and Jack reminded me of our last meeting, five summers ago in Courmeyer at the foot of Monte Bianco in the Italian Alps, you get to travel a bit in trad.

The three lads were here to join forces with the other Meitheal tutors and some 81 teenage students who had been hard at work for five days. This is a summer school like no other, it comes with a warning "Meitheal is tough going. Don't come unless you have a trad music obsession!"

I was there to present an award to the best young trad group of the summer school on behalf of Irish Music Magazine and to judge students' poster work. Resident photographer a Japanese gentleman by the name of Key took over 4000 pictures over the course and the groups used one of those pictures on a poster to herald their arrival on the music scene.

The concert was presided over by Eimear Ní Mhaolmhuaidh, with introductions in both Irish and English, whilst backstage Ernestine Healy made sure that students were on cue and ready for their time under the lime-lights. Garry Shannon, course director was calmness personified.

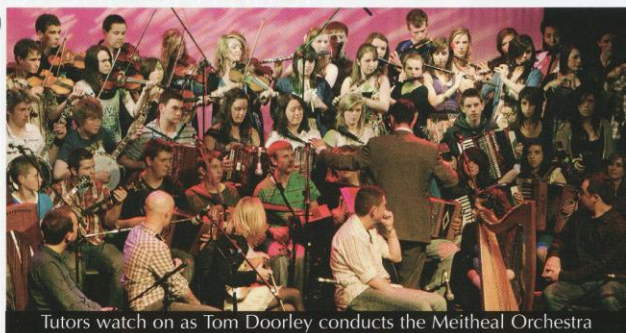
In the first half of the concert ten groups and their tutors performed specially arrange pieces, with two groups on stage at any one time. With so many musicians it wouldn't be fair to single any one out, but what I can tell you is their music would challenge the average session player. The music was experimental, complex changes of rhythm were employed and all this coming from lead instruments. Percussion came from Dermot Sheedy on bodhrán the Greadán, the new instrument designed for Donal Lunny's, TV programme, Lorg Lunny.

The personalities of the tutors came through also, Brian Finnegan's group "Pluck It" went for a Flook-like swing and Tara Breen's "Cleopatra's Rambles" had the saxophone of Jana McCarthy Kent playing in the final section of their slot. All the students played flawlessly, never missed a note or went out of rhythm, a testament to their talent and the way they had been taught.

The second half of the event was time for the tutors to give little master classes playing far more traditional music than their students.

The interplay between tutor was at times mesmerising, Michelle Mulcahy adding bass accompaniment to Cora Smyth's fiddle and Kieran Munnely and Brian Finnegan duelling on flute and whistle. Luke Daniels gave us *The Darling Girl from Clare* on a stuttering box. Karen Tweed told a hilarious story about her late mother Nora and had a soulful slow air to following in her honour flashed through with shafts of bright sunshine like the flash recall of happy memories of childhood summers in Ballybunion. Karen passed on the final notes of her piece to Dessie Kelliher who ran away with a set of dance tunes before being joined by Tara Breen. That closed the first section of the second part.

Meitheal has awards also, these aren't empty accolades, they are about doing something to further the students progress in the music, there were prizes of partial scholarships to next year's Meitheal, a place on the Comhaltas Tour of Ireland, slots at the Nyah festival in Cavan and a place on the prestigious adult course Blas at the University of Limerick in 2011. Brian Finnegan donated the sale of a full box of his new CD "The Ravishing Genius of Bones" to help fund a place for a student at next year's Meitheal. I presented the award for the "band of the summer school" an honour decided by the student themselves to Turas Fada. My choice for the best poster went to Kieran Munnely's mentored Schulas, named because their tutor taught them tunes with his shoes off.



Tutors watch on as Tom Doorley conducts the Meitheal Orchestra

Their poster which is printed here captures the spirit of the summer school, quirky, fun, it establishes a musical identity with a sense of adventure and mystery too.

The concert closed with a large an astronomical orchestral work befitting what must be stars of the future. The 15-minute piece was composed and conducted by Tom Doorley. The opening theme Mars was taken from Holst's The Planet Suite and the three other movements were Wedding March, Venus Jig and Gravity Reel. At the end the students gathered full of teenage fizz and vowed to come back next year; they tearfully thanked tutors for a brilliant week. For me it was an uplifting experience, it gave gifted teenagers direction and allowed them to use their talents to excel.

And if you'd like to hear just how good they are they'll all be back together again for a re-union at the National Concert Hall, Dublin on August 25th for a lunchtime concert, and they will be working with Liam Ó Maonlaí.

Garry Shannon and his team have the future sorted, 2011 is going to be very good!

**Seán Laffey**

