

Tommy Peoples - a master of his craft

In 2010, *Clare People* journalists Ronan Judge and Andrew Hamilton took a look inside one of Clare's truly special musical families. Ahead of their performance at that year's Kilfenora Music Festival, we spoke to Tommy Peoples about his daughter Siobhan, and to Siobhan about her father Tommy. This is a selection of what they had to say about each other and their kindred love of traditional Irish music.

"WE TEND to resort to old tunes that we're familiar with," said Tommy of his upcoming concert with Siobhan. "We've each gone our different kind of ways, tune wise or selection wise. She's obviously associating with a younger lot than I would."

The pair, he admits, may be informed by slightly different musical styles, but Tommy believes that the difference owes more to the individual rather than to the place where they learned to play.

"People talk about styles but in reality every individual has their own style. It's almost like conversation. You'd know the voice or the style of speaking of an individual. It's the same as playing," he said.

"It might tend to be called a West Clare style or a Donegal style or whatever you might, but in reality, it's very individual when you listen closely enough. That also applies to father and daughter as much as neighbours."

There is too an unmistakable sense of pride in Tommy Peoples' voice when he talks about his daughter's musical abilities.

"I very much appreciate Siobhan's playing and her abilities as a player. It also makes it very easy to go play with someone you can depend on - if you have a lapse yourself then the other person can pick up the slack," he said.

"From a very young age, she was always kind of rocking to music and I'd say she really started it playing on the piano, playing with her grandmother, Kitty. And then going to school in Toonagh with Frank Custy he would have started her on the fiddle. I had no contribution there as regards her fiddle playing. All the teachers at school were doing that."

As for Siobhan, she also recognised that there was a relationship between parent and child that does not change with age. No matter how old the child gets, the time-worn hierarchy born over the decades has a power that endures.

"Music is funny. It's the same sort of way that you'd have a relationship with a parent - there are things you'd do in front of them and there are things you wouldn't. There are things that I would play completely differently when I'm not with Dad [Tommy], but when I play with him you can't help but slip back into family mode. It's almost like role-play. But I'm sure it's the same for him. I'm sure he wouldn't be able to express himself in the same way on his own as he would with me," she said.

"It's just different. It's like when you're with your friends, you're raucous and you have the craic, and you say whatever comes into your head. With other people, you tend to be that bit more reserved and respectful. It's all about expression for me. I just find that when I sit with Dad, I concentrate a little differently, the same as you would if you were chatting to your parents. I tend to fall in behind him a little more than I would and let



Above: Tommy and Siobhan Peoples pictured in Cruises Bar in Ennis during the filming of the *Geantraí na Nollag* programme in 2005.

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I FIND MUSIC QUITE EMOTIONAL. SO, IF IT'S GOING WELL (PLAYING WITH HER FATHER, TOMMY), YEAH, THAT IS PRETTY SPECIAL. YOU WOULD HAVE FRIENDS THAT YOU CAN FALL IN WITH AND YOU PLAY VERY NATURALLY [TOGETHER] BECAUSE YOU ARE SO FAMILIAR WITH THEM. IT'S LIKE THAT IN A WAY. AND IT'S ALL FAMILY, IT'S ALL GENETIC. THERE IS SOMETHING THAT KICKS IN WHEN YOU'RE PLAYING WITH FAMILY. IT'S LIKE A NATURAL UNDERSTANDING THAT YOU HAVE"

him take charge. It's not better, it's not worse, it's just different.

"I find music quite emotional. So if it's going well [playing with her father], yeah, that is pretty special. You would have friends that you can fall in with and you play very naturally [together] because you are so familiar with them. It's like that in a way. And it's all family, it's all genetic, there is something that kicks in when you're playing with family. It's like a natural understanding that you have.

"The genetics of the music certainly passed on, that's for sure. In my family, we have three chefs now and my mother and grandmother would have been big into cooking. I reckon it comes from them. And the music is the same. I think there's an element of being drawn to it because that's what makes you want to practice. But then there are people who can practice and practice but their natural instinct would be to repeat things. Their instinct to decipher the song for themselves maybe wouldn't be as strong - and that's where the genetics come in, maybe."

These stories were first published in two separate extended feature interviews with Tommy and Siobhan Peoples in April of 2010. The interview with Tommy was written by Ronan Judge and the interview with Siobhan was written by Andrew Hamilton.

