



# REVIEWS

## Temple Bar Tradfest

### Temple Bar, Dublin SIOBHÁN LONG

Redemption comes in many guises, and Temple Bar has done a mean job of redeeming its once ragged reputation with its TradFest, now in its fifth year. Luring punters who may rarely venture into the area during the rest of the year, this traditional music festival has done much to rehabilitate Temple Bar.

This year's festival revealed how well it has bedded down in its city-centre locale, a place where traditional tunes had faded into the ether, after the heady days of the 1970s when folk clubs thrived and proprietors of the calibre of John Kelly welcomed customers into his shop with a fiddle tune.

The weekend's events began with an inventive collaboration: Matt Molloy, John Carty and Arty McGlynn. Eclectic support was provided by Mary McPartlan, Rick Epping and Aidan Brennan. McPartlan's belly-deep voice is growing richer with the years, and her reading of Shane MacGowan's *Rainy Night In Soho* was a pinprick evocation of love and regret. Epping's concertina and harmonica-driven swing from Bob Dylan to The Rolling Stones by way of Willie Clancy was a master class in musical magpie-ism, undertaken with verve and delight.

Matt Molloy's flute playing was suffused with finesse, his fluid, tiptoeing lines intercut by Carty's initially cautious, almost speculative fiddle, and supported by the implacable Arty McGlynn. Slowly, the trio loosed the binds, blithely turning tunes on a threepenny bit, and rising to a gallop on the pair of jigs, *The Humours Of Kiltyclogher* and *The Yellow Wattle*. Matt aired a march he had composed, whose name escaped this writer, but its unforced and confident rhythm suggested a musician who's found his second wind in earnest. The trio's

authoritative pacing of the concert, from the fire-side intimacy of their opening set slowly rising to a crescendo, as well as their wry banter, was a reminder of just how engaging traditional music can be, when communicated with intent. Echoes of Martin Hayes's masterful management of the concert setting rang out into the air, as the lights came up.

We Banjo 3 (actually a foursome of banjo pickers) proved a halting opener for Noel Hill, Tony Linnane and Alec Finn's gig on Friday night. Supreme banjo player Enda Scahill struggled to communicate the background to the tunes and the history of the instrument (perhaps a tad misplaced in a support slot where time is limited), but there were whispers of an Americana mix that may well breathe easier with a touch more rehearsal. Niamh de Búrca, Mark Kelly and Mick O'Brien offered a finely wrought warm up to the much anticipated reunion of Hill and Linnane, who revisited their 1979 self-titled and seminal CD with gusto. Hill's absence from the city has been far too long, and his return was greeted with a packed house and rapt attention.

The pub trail offered a mixed bag of ragged balladry and beautiful tunes, including some of the latter from Cavan's indomitable Martin Donohoe on accordion, accompanied by Antóin MacGabhann on fiddle.

Festival visitors loped easily between venues which jostled with one another on every street corner for the passing trade. Sunday afternoon saw The Kilfenora Céilí Band whup it up as only they can, while the Ulster-Scots Hounds Of Ulster brought a more visceral and occasionally abrasive presence to the streets. Leaving Temple Bar on Sunday evening was akin to stepping out of Chinatown in New York City: the distilled essence of our music fading blissfully into the noise of the passing traffic.



**At large:** Children meet a member of the Búí Bolg Theatre company at the Temple Bar Trad fest. Photograph: Cyril Byrne