



Untraditional way to start a trad band

TRADITIONAL music and reality TV might seem a strange idea, but that's what TG4 screened this year in Lorg Lunny, an eight-part series featuring musician, producer and arranger, Dónal Lunny's search for young musicians, to create a new trad band.

The veteran of groups such as Planxty, The Bothy Band and Moving Hearts, Lunny chose seven instrumentalists and one vocalist, and that ensemble, named Ciorras, has released its debut album, *Silver Lining*. Their concertina/flute player, Tommy Fitzharris, says of the band's unconventional origins: "We came about as a result of the TV programme. It involved Dónal going around the country scouting for young talent that played traditional Irish music. The intention was to create a band, and he also had an idea to create a new percussion instrument."

That instrument, the greadán, designed and developed by Lunny over the course of the series, proved to be problematic in its assembly, and seemed to be a distraction. Nevertheless, the series continued, with the show's main man scouring the country for suitable players, while he sought valuable advice from fellow musicians, such as Mike McGoldrick, Paul Brady, Gary Shannan and Noel Eccles.

"It was obvious, from the start, that there was going to be a large accompaniment section in the band," says Fitzharris. "It ended up with Dermot Sheedy, from Co Clare, on bodhrán, Tadhg Ó Meachair, from Dublin, on piano and Stephen Rooney, from Co Down, on guitar. After that, Dónal

Eight-member Ciorras were handpicked by musician Donal Lunny for a reality TV show, says Gerry Quinn

was looking for melody players. He chose James Mahon, from Dublin, on pipes — a fiddler, Tara Breen, from Clare, flautist Robert Harvey, and myself on concertina. Robert and I are both from Co Laois. Those were the main instruments he picked, but he kind of got a bonus, in the sense that he had four flute players. I play flute as well as concertina. James also plays flute, as does Tara, though she doesn't play it on the album. In fact, most of us are multi-instrumentalists, but I don't know if Dónal realised that when



Seventh heaven: Ciorras features seven musicians and a vocalist.

he was picking the band."

When it came to the singer, Tommy says that the selection was decided by only a handful of band members. "I think Dermot, Tadhg and Tara were there to decide who the singer would be. They picked Ciara Cunningham, from Co Cavan."

As part of the TV series, Ciorras were placed in a large house to work out arrangements and put together a set-list for a concert in Belfast, to be featured in the last programme. "We gathered at a house outside Belfast, in a place

called Magharalin. For us, it was the first time that we had all come together as a band," says Fitzharris. "Some of us had met before, at different locations, but I only met the rest of the band a week beforehand, in Dublin. We were told that we had only ten days to come up with six or seven arrangements of tunes, for what eventually would be a gig in Belfast. That was no mean task to try and execute. To my luck, I knew Robert, because I grew up with him in Co Laois. We would have played music together, and

against each other, at the Fleadhs. "I also knew James, because I had recently completed a masters degree in traditional music at the University of Limerick. James did the same programme there. Aside from that, I hadn't really any experience of the others."

Once the TV series was shot and broadcast, the new young band went into the studio, with Lunny as producer, to record their debut album.

Silver Lining proved to be the first CD to be recorded at the Thomas Moore Studio, a new facility owned by singer-songwriter, Jimmy McCarthy, and situated at his home, Jenkinstown House, in Co Kilkenny.

"Jimmy McCarthy, another legend, really," says Fitzharris. "It was great to meet him, he's a lovely man. He's got a fantastic studio in his home."

"It's a brand new, state-of-the-art studio and we were delighted with the quality of the CD that came out of there. I'd like to thank Jimmy, sincerely, for having us there."

As for the future of Ciorras, Fitzharris is upbeat about its prospects. "Everyone is dedicated to the band and we'd like to record another album within the next ten months or so. We'd also like to get on the world-touring circuit. It would be great to get over to the States and play there. We'd like to go as far as we can get," he says.

Ciorras' *Silver Lining* is now available. They play the **Temple Bar TradFest**, Dublin, on Thursday, January 27, at The Button Factory, and Celtic Connections Festival, Glasgow, on Friday, January 28, at Oran Mór.