

SOUNDING OUT...

DUBLIN

Jasper Winn trawls the bars and clubs of a newly confident, colourful and increasingly multicultural city



Fáilte Ireland

In 'Auld Dublin Town' a pint of plain cost a couple of bob, and Luke Kelly was a regular at the sessions in O'Donoghues. All long gone, of course. But even the 'New Dublin' of only a few years ago has changed. It's the capital of Europe's first smoke-free nation. A relatively open door policy towards the citizens of the newer EU countries and of the wider world has turned Ireland's first city into a cosmopolitan and upbeat playground. A pint costs as much as a small house did in the 60s. And a house goes for what you could have bought the whole country for in the 50s.

It's all had an effect on Dublin's music scene. There are ever more, and ever cooler, bars. Larger, smarter venues, too. Local musicians have been joined by newly-resident Croatian guitarists, Congolese

percussionists, Romanian fiddlers and Latino singers. Whilst the Irish enthusiasm for music in all its guises and the wads of euros in (some) pockets, mean that nowadays many top acts play Dublin ahead of the UK. New country acts like Gillian Welch and Steve Earle, have found a spiritual home and a knowledgeable audience, not to mention plenty of session musicians, in Ireland.

Naturally all this has changed the home-grown music scene in the capital. Old style ballads are being supplanted by the output of singer-songwriters like Gemma Hayes, Juliet Turner and Cork's John Spillane. And in even the most traditional sessions there will – horror – often be Cajun, Bluegrass or blues numbers slipped in amongst the jigs, reels and hornpipes. Rodrigo and Gabriela, a Mexican guitar duo, are popular capital

fixtures, as are numerous Latin American groups and African bands. But the flourishing live scene still stays in touch with its Irishness. Dervish, Sharon Shannon, Two Time Polka ('roots Americana', with the roots being Irish music), and Altan regularly play Dublin.

A traditional 'see who turns up' session, rather than cabaret Sham-rockery – 'tradaret' – for tourists, can be harder to track down. The line about how to find a good session in Dublin – "Do y'know where the train station is? Well, catch the 2.35 to Galway and you're sorted" – has a ring of truth to it. But there are plenty of fine traditional players in Dublin, and some *über*-fine ones, too. Andy Irvine (Planxty, Patrick Street and his own inimitable solo self) and Johnny Moynihan (Sweeney's Men, Planxty) still live and play in the city, and Sonny Condell (Tir Na Nog) and the lads from Kila are around a fair bit too.

The *ceol agus craic* – music and fun – of a good session isn't preordained. It's down to who turns up to play, how they all get on and 'the night that's in it'. But you can increase your chances of hitting the alchemy of tempo, melody and grace notes that make a good night by having a game plan. If you're short of time just go rambling. The centre of Dublin is walkable, so stick your head into every bar with a session until you find one that's really rattling. If you've got more time then find somewhere with all the right ingredients and go every night. You'll know you've arrived when the barman grunts "D'usual, is it?" as you come through the door, when the musicians shift over to give you bench room, and when, the next day, you can tell your friends, "Ah, Jaysus, lads, you should have been there last night..."

LISTINGS

Dublin Tourism for info on festivals, venues, gigs and pubs. (www.visitdublin.com).

Hot Press Ireland's music magazine, with gig listings and events, though poor traditional coverage. (€3.50, fortnightly, www.hotpress.com).

In Dublin Dublin's listings magazine, (free, weekly, from pubs, arts centres, shops etc).

The Event Guide Comprehensive listings of gigs, events and other music information, (free, fortnightly, www.eventguide.ie).

MEDIA

Raidió na Gaeltachta (93 FM) Irish language radio station with plenty of traditional music programming.

RTE Radio 1 (88-89 FM) Well worth tuning into John Kelly's weeknights at 8.30pm Mystery Train for an Andy

Kershawian mix of trad, folk, world and the weird.

TG4 Irish language television channel with twice weekly (Sundays and Tuesdays) *Geantrai* featuring traditional music from around the country.

VENUES

Crawdaddy Dublin's premier venue for world music and blues. Tinariwen, Papa Noel's Bana Congo and Julian Marley have all played here. (Old Harcourt Street Station, +353 1 478 0166).

Whelans Dublin's original 'new venue' with acoustic sessions in the front bar and everything from Irish singer-songwriters like Gavin Moore to the Levellers playing the main stage. (25 Wexford Street, Dublin 2, +353 1 478 0766, www.whelanslive.com).

Vicar St Big deluxe venue that gets the big, just sub-festival sized names, with recent gigs by Dr John, Toots and the Maytals and Gillian Welch. (Thomas St, +353 1 454 6656, www.vicarstreet.com).



Lúnasa at Temple Bar Music Centre, 2004 (James Goulden/AAAphotos.org)

Temple Bar Music Centre Lots of indie music finds a home here, but also some world music acts, and a few flakier, more alternative Irish musicians. (Curved Street, Temple Bar, +353 1 677 0647, www.tbmc.ie).

Olympia Theatre Historic and charming theatre venue. Eclectic programming but often features major Irish traditional musicians. (72 Dame Street, Dublin 2, +353 1 679 3323).

TRADITIONAL & IRISH MUSIC

The Temple Bar Traditional sessions in a central location but can get crowded. (47-48 Temple Bar, Dublin, +353 1 672 5287).

Clé Club Traditional music on Monday evenings starting at 9pm. (Connolly Room, Liberty Hall, Eden Quay, Dublin 1, +353 1 874 9731).

Mother Redcaps Tavern Traditional Irish music on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings and Sunday afternoons, free of charge. Jazz or blues on Fridays and Saturdays. (Back Lane, High Street, Christchurch, Dublin 8, +353 1 453 8306).

The Cobblestones Highly recommended trad sessions or gigs nightly, a real musicians' hang out. (Smithfield, Dublin 7, +353 1 871 1799).

The Palace Bar Wednesday night sessions – and well worth dropping in to see how the *craic's* going. (Temple Bar, Dublin 2, +353 1 677 9290).

Oliver St John Gogarty's Evening trad, though the afternoon sessions can be more relaxed and rewarding. (Temple Bar, Dublin 2, +353 1 671 1822).

The Green Room The Holiday Inn! Weird, I know, but features some top Irish traditional musicians on occasions. (Holiday Inn, 99-107 Pearse Street, Dublin 2, +353 1 670 3666).

Purty Kitchen The house band Cuisle with guests play traditional Irish music on Tuesday for free. Upstairs in the Purty Loft there's a concert area played by the likes of Kila and Tir Na Nog. (Old Dun Laoghaire Road, Monkstown, Dublin, +353 1 2843576, www.purtykitchen.com).

Johnny Fox's Pub Edging towards 'cabaret trad', but outside the city and saved by plenty of *craic*. (Dublin Mountains, Glencullen, Co Dublin, +353 1 295 5647, www.jfp.ie).

IRISH DANCING

O'Sheas Nightly set dancing in an informal atmosphere. Watch or join in the 'Siege of Ennis' or try a bit of 'close dancing'. (Lower Bridge Street, Dublin 8, +353 1 679 3797).

Comhlitas Ceoltoiri Eireann *Ceilidh* dancing on Friday nights. (32 Belgrave Sq, Monkstown, Co. Dublin, +353 1 280 0295).

Hughes Relaxed and friendly set dancing – phone for times. (Chancery St, Dublin 1, +353 1 872 6540).

FESTIVAL

Dun Laoghaire Festival of World Cultures Every August. Details for 2004 from www.festivalofworldcultures.com



Happy City Samba (top) and Dhol Foundation performing at Dun Laoghaire Festival 2003

SHOPS

McNeills Music New and second-hand traditional instruments from *bodhráns* to concertinas, via mandolins, fiddles and pipes. (140 Capel Street, +353 1 872 2159, www.mcneillsirishmusic.com).

Claddagh Records The place to browse between sessions - wide range of traditional recordings, as well as world music. (2 Cecilia Street, Temple Bar, +353 1 677 0262).

Mad For Trad Online shop for a wide range of tutors for all Irish traditional instruments, presented on CD/DVD by Irish masters and recording artists. (www.madfortrad.com). |