

Fleadh People

Paula Carroll: The voice of the county

Clare FM presenter Paula Carroll will be broadcasting live from the streets of Ennis as her daughters compete during the Fleadh. Here the singer talks to **Stuart Holly** about looking forward to juggling work and family commitments.

SCARIFF native Paula Carroll is a singer, disc spinner, former fiddler and full-time Flammie — that is, a Fleadh mammy.

A term that many might not be familiar with but a role most parents know all too well. It's the traditional Irish music version of an American soccer mom. Every year as the Fleadh Cheoil Na hÉireann gets into its full swing of Scoil Eagsa and competitions, Paula arrives with two talented daughters in tow to support them in their respective competitions, to soak up the unique atmosphere and re-acquaint themselves with familiar faces.

But that's enough about Flammies — it sells Paula way too short as she has many more strings to her bow. The East Clare woman is deeply immersed in the music scene in Clare and has become a household name through her work on Clare FM programme The West Wind, recently recording a series of live kitchen sessions from around the county.

Not only does she DJ on a Wednesday night, Paula — who is just back from the famed Willie Clancy Summer School — is involved with trad festivals in Tulla and Feakle. It wouldn't be an unusual sight either to see her gracing the air of Pepper's Pub with her melodies of a Wednesday night.

Although a long-time radio presenter and traditional music singer, Paula didn't become acquainted with the life of a Flammie (sorry) until eight years ago when her daughters began to enter.

"I'm a singer from Scariff and I've been involved in music since I was a kid, in traditional singing, but not really involved in Fleadh Cheoil until I was an adult. I never did the competitions myself as a child but I've got two girls now who play music so from that point of view I've been observing the Fleadh as an adult over the last seven or eight years.

Paula's daughter Rosa is a fiddler aged 16, while 13-year-old Eva plays the concertina. Paula reveals that Anna (18) doesn't get involved after falling out with the fiddle some time ago.

The spectacle of the Fleadh has left its mark on the Clare FM presenter, who now lives in Feakle.

"I do remember the first All-Ireland Fleadh I went to, just being overwhelmed, walking down the Main Street and the surge of people, just thinking 'oh my God'. It's a spectacle, phenomenal, to see it in action. And the fact that it's run mainly on volunteer effort — that blows my mind really.

This year will mark new territory for the presenter as she's expecting to take to the streets for live broadcasts of The West Wind, similar to what she did for the Willie Clancy this year. Paula explains that Clare FM has an ingrained place in the identity of Irish music in Clare with people tuning in across America to hear the popular show she shares with five other presenters.

She continues, "People will gather around when Clare FM do our outside broadcasts, have a bit of craic, see how the radio program is made live, enjoy watching the dancers and all that.

"You'll have Fleadh TV with TG4, that's a spectacle as well. People will follow the music around that way and really enjoy it as well as musicians playing on the street, in the pubs, and then the die-hards will stay going 'til five or six in the morning when the really good music is played."

Aside from her work commitments, Paula will play host to a packed house for the week with musician friends coming all the way from Seattle and Boston to stay with her family for the week of the Fleadh.

"Yes, I've got friends coming over from Seattle — Randle Bays (who featured on Martin

Hayes's first album) and his wife Susan, who are American Fiddlers. I've another kid who's a friend of my daughter coming from Boston. She's coming for the whole summer. It becomes a family event as well as a professional event for me and we will be in town as much as possible to soak up the atmosphere."

Looking ahead to the big week, Paula says Ennis is the perfect location to host the world renowned festival and all that comes with it.

She says, "Ennis is really well set up for different reasons other than practical reasons. First of all it's a beautiful town — we don't notice it as much — but it's a gorgeous medieval town with lovely buildings, the rivers, all of that. It's also got a brilliant tradition behind it of music. Not just in the town but the whole county. Clare is one of the strongest music counties in the country, nobody disputes that. So it's got that cache and tradition behind it."

Paula adds with a smile, "What town in Ireland could be prepared to have its population increased by 300,000 in a week? It faces the same challenges that any other town faces. I just think it's going to be fantastic festival."

Below: Paula Carroll

 COMHALTAS



Fleadh
Cheoil na hÉireann
INIS2016

LÚNASA
14 - 22
AUGUST

In association with
shannon AIRPORT 

