

Fleadh People

Tola Custy: Lights, camera, action

IT'S been well documented at this stage that Ennis can expect the happy invasion of up to 400,000 people for Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann. And while the county town's streets will be buzzing to the hum of a few thousand fiddles this August, from the Temple Gate Hotel Car Park cameras, lights and two stages will be set up so that a global audience of more than a million people can catch the action on Fleadh TV. **Stuart Holly** found out more.

AT the launch of Fleadh TV last week *The Clare People* caught up with its new presenter Tola Custy, himself a member of the famous Clare traditional music family. Tola explains that he was drawn to a role on Fleadh TV as soon as Ennis was announced and that 'bold as brass I just said to Paul McKay [the show's producer], 'listen, I can do something here''.

Tola's vibrant enthusiasm for traditional music in Clare is evident within a minute of speaking to him. While he reveals that this is by far Fleadh TV's biggest set-up for the annual event, at the top of Tola's list will be showcasing Co Clare to viewers from across Ireland and those further afield who will watch online.

In front of the Temple Gate Hotel, people can expect a mini festival. Fleadh TV will be hosting its own site with a 1,500 person capacity where there will be a main stage and an acoustic stage, huge speakers and a big 12m-squared big screen. Visitors to the Fleadh TV closure will see a mixture of legends and established acts performing, along with competition winners and local acts.

Tola will be joined on the presenting crew by Roscommon woman Cathy Jordan, a

member of Dervish, BBC Belfast presenter Lynette Fay and TG4 regular Mairead Ni Chuaig.

While Mairead and Cathy will host festivities from the main stage and Lynette captures the madness on the streets of Ennis from O'Connell Monument, Tola will be visiting traditional strongholds around the county — Tulla, Miltown Malbay, Ennistymon and Bunratty Folk Village — showcasing the best in trad that Clare has to offer.

Tola explains that while many viewers tuning into Fleadh TV will be hardline trad-lovers, his aim is to bring the event to the unacquainted.

"Fleadh TV is trying to attract exactly those who haven't been to a Fleadh — the ethos of Fleadh TV up to now has been to give a very warm, colourful, unmusician-biased view of a largely musician event," says the Toonagh man.

Tola, who still works part-time as a primary school teacher, continues, "It's a very special event and has a huge viewership — not that that's the most important thing — but when 1.1million people who can't make the Fleadh tune into something like that, I think you're in the realm of All-Ireland finals in

September days and that's a lovely thing to be involved with."

"I travel the world all the time in my musical life — that's the way I try to present music to people who may never have heard trad music before and I'm attracted to things like that and I think Fleadh TV does that in a very special way."

Speaking about his own role with Fleadh TV, the fiddle-player continues, "I get to go to four different areas around the county. I go to Ennistymon, Miltown Malbay, Bunratty and Tulla and I'll do live hook-ups in the middle of that four hour live presentation every night.

"What's really cool is I'm from the area, so what I'll be trying to show the world is that this happens in Co Clare all the time. Yes, the Fleadh is here but we have an amazing grassroots movement right here, a living healthy socio situation where you have a lot of people playing at a high standard, learning at an amazing level and I'd like to be able to show that and go to the world, 'look at this, this isn't actually any special event, this is what we do all the time here'.

"I won't actually have to do an awful lot of searching to show an abundance of material.

So that's very, very exciting to me."

Tola describes the grassroots trad movement in Clare as 'mind-blowing', estimating that as many as 2,500 children are participating in playing trad music in Ennis and its surrounding areas alone. "There are no statistics like that associated with any other grassroots movement the world over, not even bluegrass, not old time, it's really mind-blowing. So my job is easy," he beams.

Speaking about what Ennis can expect this August, Tola adds, "It's absolutely amazing. You'll see 60-year-olds play with six-year-olds, you will see people out all over the streets, playing music. I kid you not, they will be everywhere, they'll be sitting at the height, they'll be propping up the window outside Knox's Bar, they'll be outside Teirney's shop, they'll be going down the lane way beside Teirney's bicycle shop, I'm not kidding you, and it's what blows me away.

"I'm just dying to dive into it now and actually deliver it."

Fleadh TV goes out live in TG4, Thurs 18th-21st Aug from 8.30pm to 11.30pm live. If you're watching internationally you can see it on fleadhcheoil.ie or tg4.tv.

 COMHALTAS



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Cathy Jordan, Tola Custy, Mairead Ni Chuaig and Lynette Fay and at the announcement of the Fleadh TV Presenters for Fleadh Cheoil Na hÉireann Inis 2016.

Eamon Ward