



Leader 2

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2009

Wheels of fortune: Patricia Feehily comes clean. Yes, she once took a lift in a limo >>P3



So the story goes: Lough Gur is celebrating 15 years of its storytelling festival >>P4



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And the band played on

Most weddings these days are planned with military precision, as befits the biggest day in a couple's lives. But what's the point having lovely flowers if the band aren't up to scratch and the night fizzles out? **Frank Murphy** meets some Limerick bands whose job it is to keep the dancefloor full and the party kicking

WHEN it comes to weddings people tend to take the band for granted. But it takes a certain skill and instinct to know how to keep a wedding crowd happy.

Limerick has its share of wedding bands who know the score. They've been gigging and honing their craft for years, and when a good wedding band is on its game before you even know it you should be on the dance floor with your Great Aunt Lizzie boogeying like there's no tomorrow.

When it comes to forming a wedding band it's not just about getting a few friends together and banging out any old pub tune. It

takes practise and commitment, and an urge to get on in a scene which is as competitive as any niche in the music world.

Planning a band's look, knowing the right balance of songs in a set list, and knowing the right name to brand your group with can be just as important as the ability to pluck a few chords.

The world of the wedding band also has its own unique demands, and a level of professionalism that would surprise many people. In recent times that has become even more apparent in an ever decreasing market.

It's no longer enough to simply turn up and play. Bands who are the real deal and who are willing to go that extra mile are finding that more apparent,

and the importance of a great wedding band has become even more pronounced.

James Nestor is a member of The Mad Hatters wedding band, and he puts the whole matter in perspective: "In the last year things have gone quiet with the recession. But the backbone of an Irish wedding is a bit of music and a good meal, and if either of those elements is wrong then the whole thing can be ruined."

Despite the recession most wedding bands are still optimistic. While people might be watching the pennies it's hard to envision a time when there will be no weddings at all.

With all this in mind we decided to talk to a few wedding bands about what it's like to do what they do.

What kind of changes have they seen on the circuit and in society? What's the secret of being a success in an always competitive market? And how much work goes into ensuring they stand out from the crowd?

Village Tapestry

John Daly is a drummer and vocalist for Village Tapestry. He's seen it all in his twenty-four years in the game...

"The band must be thirty years old at this stage. It was originally called Village and they changed the name to

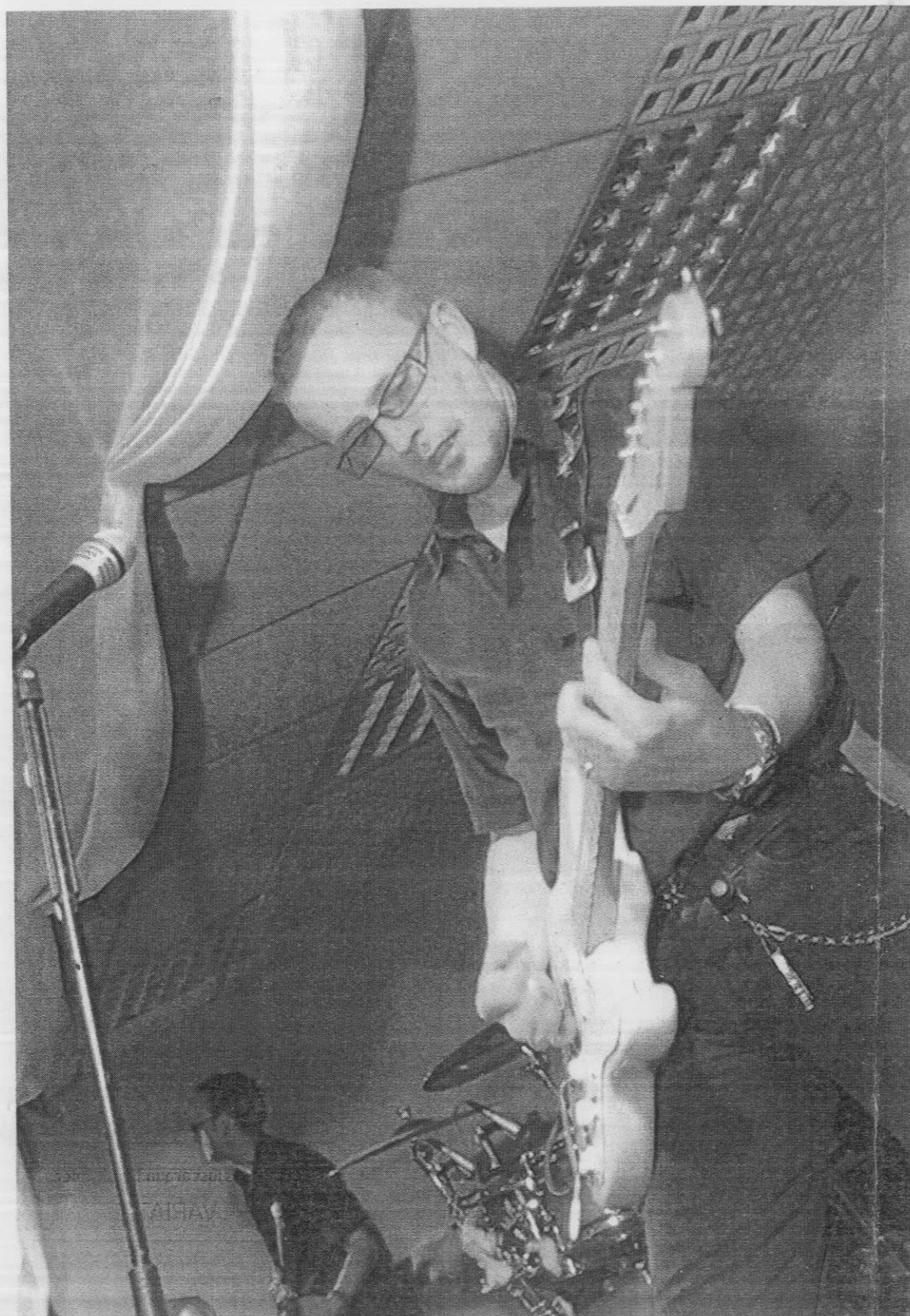
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The Mad Hatters Wedding Band in full flow at a recent nuptials celebration

PICTURE: DERMOT CULHANE

And the band played on



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it's called Village Tapestry. There was a lot of wrangling over the name a few years ago, so we had to work our way around it, all to do with personnel changes really, so we had to change the name.

"People get used to the name and say, 'Oh, they're gone now. I haven't heard from them in a long time.' And hence you've gone out of their minds and they don't phone any more. But word has kind of got out again despite all the name changes. It just takes a bit of work.

"Ollie Byrne, our guitar player and singer, has been there from the very start. When I joined in 1985 it was a four piece and our lead vocalist at the time decided to go to America for two weeks and didn't come back for six years. So we've been a three piece since.

"At the time in the eighties we were one of the well known wedding bands in Limerick. Now we find there's a lot more wedding bands on the scene in Limerick, so things have changed a bit.

"The line-up at the moment is me on vocals and drums, Ollie, and Bobby O' Driscoll on bass. It's been a long haul with a lot of changes in between, but this happens in bands. But you'll also have one guy who'll be the mainstay in the band.

"I've noticed huge changes since the smoking ban, and of course the pubs aren't doing the business, so bookings are down, and

the pubs were our shop window. It's all change now.

You get young bands on the scene who haven't a clue. They play their own music, they don't play to the crowd. On the wedding scene you play to please the crowd.

On the original scene you're doing your stuff and that's your showcase, and sometimes young bands

four of us do the singing. Stewart would be the lead singer and the rest of us would do harmonies. It gives us a bit of an edge as a band because we can cover a wide range of stuff.

Three of us are from Raheen, and one of us is from Caherdavin. We play most of our gigs in or around Limerick. Nearly every gig we play now, we know someone at it. It

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find it difficult to differentiate between the two. I suppose that's why we've been very popular because we've always played stuff that people can get up and dance to.

"If you have a good band you'll have a good night, but you might have a good meal and a bad band, and that only turns into a lousy night."

The Mad Hatters

James Nestor is a drummer and vocalist with The Mad Hatters. He's seen many changes on the wedding circuit.

"There's myself, Peter, Stewart, and Roger, guitars and drums basically, and

makes it great craic because you do get to know a lot of people and it adds a bit extra to the gigs.

"When we started out we used to play a lot of pubs and we'd do costume changes. We did it for a bit of fun, we had no intentions of doing weddings, but it just kind of took off. The next thing we got inquiries asking us if we'd do weddings, and we did it and it worked.

"No, there's no rivalry on the circuit around Limerick. I know a lot of guys in different bands, and what you try to do for somebody if you are booked is pass on the numbers of other bands, and it works that way for a lot of bands. I don't find any rivalry. I get recommendations and pass them on and

some people pass on my number.

"All weddings can be a challenge in one respect. You could have a young crowd or a mixed crowd and you have to do the music to suit them, but at this stage we can read a crowd. You've got to mix it up because there could be anyone there from ten to eighty years of age.

"I've noticed a trend in the last few years where once the parents were involved in organising the hotel, the meal and other things, now in recent years the bride and groom have taken over these jobs, and they put a lot of thought into what they want in a wedding band and what they want for a first song.

"I think a wedding band could make or break a wedding as well. You have to do what they want you to do, because they're paying your way and you need to give it 100%. And whether we're playing Duran Duran, Bon Jovi or the Kaiser Chiefs we enjoy ourselves anyway."

Touché

Ken Casey is a guitarist with Touché, a four piece who have been on the wedding band scene for a few years. He balances his day job with being a band member.

"Bryan Ronan, John Hannon, and Leon Casey Ryan and myself are the band members. Myself and Leon are on guitar, Bryan is on drums, and John is on bass. Touché has been going six years now, and

the current line-up has been in place for the last three years.

Myself and my brother Leon have always been in the band from the start. We got to know the rest of the lads through friends of friends, and you hear about people in the music circles. The music circle in Limerick is small, so if you're looking for a particular type of musician you'll find them.

"We got into music in the first place in school through shows. We went to the Crescent Comp, so it was great to get the confidence from doing shows in school, and it kind of pushed me on to do more music.

"Because of my music background I can also help out in the school I teach in with music shows as well, so that's a bonus and it works out nicely.

"I went to college in UL and got a day job, but I work in the band on regular basis. As a band we'll do a wedding any night of the week, and even though we're a Limerick band we're happy to travel anywhere in the country.

"I work in Carlow as a woodwork teacher but I travel back home to Limerick at the weekends to do the gigs. The teaching job is a great advantage because I can use time off to catch up with my music.

"Our first wedding was good. We were a bit nervous, but we got through it okay and people were on the dance floor most of the night, so that's always a good sign. After a while all this stuff becomes second nature."



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Touché: brothers Leon Casey Ryan and Ken Casey were original members of the band and were joined by Bryan Ronan and John Hannon



Time for a killer solo: guitarist Peter of the Mad Hatters wedding band grabs the limelight at a recent party