

# Entertainment

by Eric FitzGerald  
eric@limerickpost.ie

INTERVIEW

## The return of Horslips

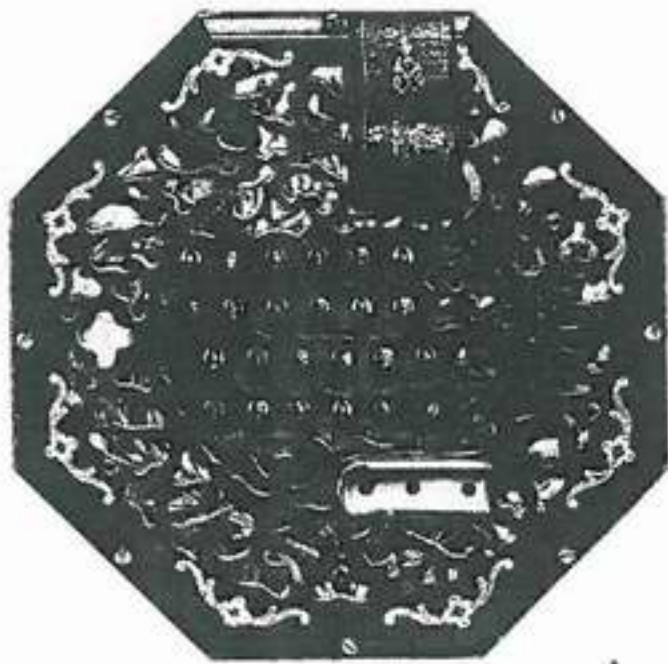
**Psychedelic folk rockers Horslips hit Limerick for the first time in 35 years playing Live at the Big Top, Limerick Milk Market this Friday August 8. Limerick Post talked to members Jim Lockhart and Johnny Fean about the early days of Horslips, playing over 200 gigs a year and releasing nine albums in eight years and the band's sudden demise in 1980**

by Eric FitzGerald  
eric@limerickpost.ie

TODAY Jim Lockhart is the senior producer in the Music Department at RTÉ Radio and he is one of the unsung heroes, along with Ian Wilson, who recorded most of Ireland's up and coming bands for 'The Fanning Sessions' on 2fm since the nineties. In 1970 Jim was doing an MA (Master of Arts) in Economics and Politics at UCD, and teaching economics to 1st Years in the college, when a chance meeting ended the career of Jim Lockhart, Economist, forever.

"I was mooching up through Stephen's Green, late again for another lecture when Barry asked 'You can play the organ can't you?' No, but I play a bit of piano!" Jim knew musician Barry Devlin in UCD and he needed an organ player for a television advert for Harp Lager. The group that came together to pretend to be a band were all accomplished musicians and out of that happy experience working with Ark advertising company, Eamon Carr, Barry Devlin, Charles O'Connor and Jim Lockhart became The Horslips.

Jim remembers, "We had great fun recording the yoke, started playing together after that and one thing led to another."



**1972: The debut album 'Happy to Meet, Sorry to Part'. Its concertina shaped sleeve was recorded using Rolling Stones mobile recording studio in Longfield House, Tipperary**

And that became Horslips, one of Ireland's biggest and most exciting bands. Alongside Thin Lizzy, Horslips experimented with mixing traditional Irish music with blues and progressive



**Horslips: Barry Devlin, Eamonn Carr, Charles O'Connor, Jim Lockhart, Johnny Fean**

rock that defined the term Celtic Rock. For ten years as an independent band, Horslips shone brightly producing ten albums and playing over 2000 shows.

Jim recalls, "We were serious workaholics, or as someone once said to me, 'Ye were work alcoholics!' We were running our own operation. Rather than just get a record deal, we did a thing that was well before its time, we set up our own record company and our own operation. We ran a cottage industry. Everybody had their own functions. Barry Devlin and Eamonn Carr were press and publicity. Charles O'Connor with his graphic design background was the art department. And I was admin. It was great fun. It didn't occur to us to stop or slow down. We were actually enjoying ourselves too much. We would take two or three weeks holidays a year and most of the time we go off on our holidays together on the same island in Greece."

Guitarist Johnny Fean joined Horslips in 1972. It was Johnny's guitar playing that finally defined what the band was about. Johnny Fean grew up in Henry Street, Limerick in the 1960s before moving to Shannon where his father was working. Johnny was in a number of groups in the '60s and it was while playing at a festival in Ballyvaughan in 1971 that Fean was spotted by Horslips who were headliners.

When the band saw Johnny play they made up their minds to get him in on guitar. The guitarist brought tunes from Clare and around Munster that the rest of The Horslips didn't know.

Johnny says, "The sound of Horslips at the time was electrified folk music and I had a background in Irish tenor banjo as well and would play parts of the tunes on electric guitar."

Johnny Fean had only just joined the band when Horslips recorded the first

album 'Happy to Meet, Sorry to Part' using Rolling Stones Mobile Recording Studio. The same studio that Led Zeppelin used, where Deep Purple recorded 'Smoke on the Water', to give this some context.

He remembers, "That was totally unheard of in Ireland, parking it outside a stately house in Longfield House, Tipperary, especially from me. I had no experience of recording at that time, it was another amazing world that I walked into. Awesome stuff. We were lucky to be able to afford the studio and get a great producer, Alan O'Duffy."

The band set of a course of constant gigging, songwriting and rehearsing when time allowed and then set up in a studio to knock out an album in two

**“He will pull out a solo out of the blue that will pin your ears to the back of your head”**

JIM LOCKHART ON GUITARIST JOHNNY FEAN

weeks. Jim has fond memories, "We would have bits of songs knocked up from over the year and we would take a couple of weeks and hold up in a rented Irish cottage in Donegal or Ballyvaughan. Everyone in the band had different musical tastes and that was one of the wonderful wellsprings of inspiration for the band. Being on the road was huge fun, it was like being on a permanent holiday. We'd play concerts and also dance halls where you would be doing a lot of covers in the set."

The band played all over Ireland, and



**New York: Jim Lockhart, Charles O'Connor, Eamonn Carr, Johnny Fean, Barry Devlin**

also England, Scotland, Germany and the US. Jim remembers, "We would do long tours in America, three months, and promo tours doing radio stations and interviews. We made the best of our time on the road."

In the 1970s Horslips played in Limerick 12 times. The last show was in the The Savoy in 1979 and within six months of that show, the band were no more.

Jim ascertains, "We ran out of steam creatively, every album we did was different which wasn't particularly clever commercially. If you are clever you set up a music style but we kept exploring different angles. We had done what we could with that blend of electric and traditional. The fashion of music had been changing in 1978. All that progressive rock that we were part of got blown out of the water by the whole punk explosion. We were listening to The Clash and Elvis Costello. What we were listening to and what we were playing was beginning to diverge so in order to keep at it we would have had to totally reinvent ourselves to have any logic in a new musical landscape. So we made a bit of an effort to do that but our hearts weren't in it. So at some stage we said might as well just give it up, we've had a good bite of the cherry and there is no point in letting it degenerate. Go while it is good."

Today the reformed Horslips do not have to or need to play 200 gigs a year. The band plays a limited number of festival shows simply because they love to play, the members have remained good friends since the '70s. Horslips rehearsed the new show over three months and the band has gelled well and play a set of Horslips classics coupled with rare gems from all their records, there's something for all the fans.

"We are really looking forward to it",

says Johnny. "We are amazed that fans have remained so loyal. We are humbled and delighted."

While Jim Lockhart and Barry Devlin have returned to playing music after a long interval, Charles O'Connor and Johnny Fean have never stopped gigging over the years. Jim says, "Johnny is playing out of his skin these days. I went to a gig of Johnny's in Dublin three years ago and by the end of the night he was playing guitar that I had never heard from him before. He will pull out a solo out of the blue that will pin your ears to the back of your head. He is an extraordinary player. He is finally playing as much as he should be playing. He is enjoying himself."



**1980: 'The Belfast Gigs' was a recording of Horslips' final show, played with a pulsating punk energy**

With Ray Fean replacing Eamonn Carr on drums, Horslips will play Live at the Big Top, Limerick Milk Market this Friday August 8. Some tickets are still available. Support comes from The Cha Haran band and they will also play the after-party happening in Dolan's from 11pm.