

News

Tributes flow for Limerick broadcasting legend and folklorist Ciarán Mac Mathúna

Eugene Phelan

HE may not have attracted the same fame as his fellow Limerick broadcaster, Terry Wogan, but Ciarán Mac Mathúna, who died last weekend, was just as consummate a professional as his fellow city radio presenter.

Ciarán undoubtedly contributed a huge amount to Irish music, culture, and folklore and it was fitting last weekend that tributes were led by the Taoiseach Brian Cowen, who described the 84-year-old as a "brilliant broadcaster and authority on Irish music and folklore".

While in many ways Mr Wogan and Mr Mac Mathúna were completely different professionals they had a number of things in common, including radio shows that lasted over 30 years.

Mr Mac Mathúna, who like Mr Wogan received the freedom of his native

city, was for over 30 years to be heard every Sunday morning on Mo Cheol Thú, which aired on RTE from the Seventies until its demise in November 2005. It was one of the longest running programmes on radio.

Born in 1925 in Limerick city, he lived on St John's Avenue off Mulgrave Street and was educated at CBS Sexton Street, before graduating with a BA from University College Dublin.

He had a distinguished career as a teacher before turning his attention to radio broadcasting and producing.

He picked up many awards and achievements throughout his career, including two Jacobs' Awards and honorary doctorates from University College Galway and the University Of Limerick.

He joked in an interview with Jimmy Woulfe in the Limerick Leader in September 2000 that he was brought up near all the

social services in Limerick. "Across the road we had the jail, the hospital and the cemetery. You couldn't ask for more than that."

His father, Seamus, was principal at St Patrick School, and, sadly, his mother died when he was just one year old.

He was one of six children.

He studied engineering at UCD, but gave it up to follow the route of Irish and Celtic Studies.

In 1947 he was given a job with RTE with its first mobile recording unit. Ciarán broadcast a programme title Ceolta Tíre at lunchtime on Sundays.

As there was little or no commercial Irish music material at the station, Ciarán, when on safari around the country to record material that was to form the nucleus of the library of Irish music and song at RTE.

While he travelled all over the country and was

a household name, in 1962 RTE asked him to go to the Untied States to record programmes there.

"I went on my own without any technician. I went to New York, Philadelphia, Boston and then Chicago and recorded Irish traditional music there which was very much alive, but they were just playing for one another and got no opportunity to let people in Ireland know how strong Irish music was in America," he recalled.

In leading the tributes, Mr Cowen described Ciarán as a "brilliant broadcaster and authority on Irish music and folklore".

"I enjoyed listening to his programme, Mo Cheol Thú, which has a special place in Irish radio programming history over the last number of decades, as it became one of the longest running programmes on radio. Each programme comprised a mixture of song, poetry and folklore and was much



The late Ciarán Mac Mathúna: a 'brilliant broadcaster and authority on Irish music and folklore'

loved by all radio listeners," he said.

"He was a much loved figure and he will be missed by all lovers of Irish music, both in Ireland and around the world," Mr Cowen said.

He sent his condolences to Ciarán's wife, Dolly, and their children.

Limerick was represented at Mr Mac Mathúna's funeral by Cllr Michael Hourigan, who granted him the Freedom of the City in 2005, and director of services Pat Drommey.

"I was honoured to give him the Freedom of Limerick. I felt he really deserved it as he was a very proud Limerick man, very proud of his roots here and he was a credit, not only to Limerick, but to the whole country," said Cllr Hourigan.

He admitted to being a big fan and listener to his Sunday morning programme.

"He had a very distinc-

tive accent, cultured and he travelled the country recording Irish music," he added.

He said his legacy would be his love of music, which he recorded, collected and shared with the people of Ireland.

"This music would have been lost to the Irish people if it was not for the work of Ciarán Mac Mathúna," Cllr Hourigan said. "I personally never missed his programme on a Sunday morning."

Mr Mac Mathúna was a renowned authority on Irish music and made an enormous contribution to the preservation and development of traditional music.

At the funeral, his friend, Mons Tom Stack, described the late Mr Mac Mathúna as a "gentle person, he was a merciful person, non-judgmental and a fair-minded man. In other words, he reflected in so many ways the Christian gifts enumerated in the

Sermon of the Mount."

Fine Gael leader Enda Kenny said Mr Mac Mathúna's death marked "the passing of an institution in Irish traditional music".

"Ciarán was one of the 20th century's greatest promoters and preservers of Irish traditional music. Along with his wife, Dolly, he made a phenomenal contribution to Irish culture. No person I ever knew appreciated in better fashion a decent half-one while involved in good conversation in a friendly pub," Deputy Kenny added.

His portrait hangs proudly in the Limerick Civic Trust History makers Hall of Fame and the archive of his Mo Cheol Thú programmes is available from RTE Here.

Mr Mac Mathúna is survived by his wife, Dolly, a well known folk singer, and sons, Padraic, a consultant doctor; Ciarán, an architect, and daughter, Deirdre.

Wogan leaves radio slot after 30 years on air

David Hurley

LIMERICK native and Freeman of the City Terry Wogan will draw the curtain on his illustrious radio career this Friday when he presents his hugely popular breakfast show for the final time.





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