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A journeyman's job ends

By NORMA PRENDIVILLE

ONE of Limerick's most famous sons, legendary broadcaster Ciarán MacMathúna, is about to bring down the curtain on a radio career that has spanned half-a-century.

On Sunday, November 27, Mr MacMathúna will present the very last programme of *Mo Cheol Thú*, the early Sunday morning programme which has been his trademark for the past 35 years.

For his many loyal listeners, Mr MacMathúna's departure will bring a certain sadness, marking as it does the end of something precious and unique that has attained the status of an institution over several decades and generations. For many too, it will be like losing a friend when his distinctive, gravelly voice says for the last time: "Go dté sibh slán".

Born in Mulgrave Street, Limerick, in 1925, Ciarán was the youngest in a family of six, whose schooldays were spent in the city and whose summers were spent in Newport and in Kilkee.

As a young man he won a university scholarship and graduated with a Masters degree, having carried out a special study on the theme of Irish Folk Songs. Having joined RTE, then Radio Eireann, in 1954, Mr MacMathúna quickly made his mark as he travelled the country, interviewing and recording people's stories, songs, ballads and, above all, music.

At that time, Irish traditional music was in a slough in terms of its wider public appeal and without Mr MacMathúna's pioneering work, many tunes and the playing of many musicians would have been lost to posterity. His work also helped also to preserve distinctive local styles, including that of Sliabh Luachra where he first visited in 1956.

His programmes such as *Ceolta Tíre*, *A Job of Journeywork* and *The Humours of Donnybrook* now constitute an invaluable archive, an archive on which he often drew in the *Mo Cheol Thú* series.

"It was a great pleasure to be part of RTE for the last 50 years. My duties were mostly 'a job of journeywork,' very enjoyable work indeed travelling around Ireland and many parts of America, England and Scotland recording traditional music and song. Meeting all the musicians was very exciting for me and I only hope that my programmes helped to make their music as popular as it is today," Mr MacMathúna said on Sunday when he announced the date of his last programme.



Go dté sé slán: Limerick man Ciarán MacMathúna who is retiring from RTE after 50 years in broadcasting

ferred with the Freedom of Limerick in June, the then Mayor, Cllr Michael Hourigan said of him: "He is a constant voice and presence in a sea of change and his contribution to traditional music and the broadcasting of it to a wider audience is incalculable."

Accepting the honour, Mr MacMathúna replied: "I remember somebody saying one time that this Ciaran MacMathúna is presenting a music programme on the radio but he can't sing, he can't play an instrument and he can't dance. Then another fellow replied: 'he is over-qualified'."

"When I was collecting music in the countryside and recording local

wife," said Mr MacMathúna. His wife, Dolly, was a renowned singer and the couple, who have three children, celebrate the golden jubilee of their marriage this year. Mr MacMathúna also celebrates his 80th birthday this year.

Adrian Moynes, managing director of RTE Radio said on Sunday: "Ciarán MacMathúna is inseparable from RTE Radio. He is one of a small group of broadcasters whose work and personality have created the signature of radio broadcasting in Ireland. I am sure that all his listeners feel they know him personally and all of us, colleagues, friends and listeners, wish him fulfilment after a long career in which he gave

ment."

Paddy Glackin, music editor at Radio One, added: "Ciarán MacMathúna has made an enormous contribution to the preservation and development of Irish traditional music. For 50 years he has been the voice of the music through his many programmes and has been a friend to traditional musicians all over the world."

"He leaves a wonderful archive of traditional music and song which will be an invaluable source of inspiration to musicians for generations to come."

Mr MacMathúna was conferred with an honorary doctorate from the NUJ in 1999 and also from the