

SYNERGIES OF STYLE

Eileen McCabe finds out that Brittany has been a big influence on Carlow flute player Ciarán Somers.



Ciarán Somers has long been an advocate of the flute since the early days in his native Carlow when he took lessons from Micky Byrne in whistle and uilleann pipes and direction on flute from Jon Browne thereafter.

Melt into the fold the distinctive North Connaught style and more recently a strong Breton influence and this brings Ciarán, currently a member of Pipers Union with David Power and Donal Clancy, to the present with his imminent release: *Ciarán Somers Now*.

A fulsome flavour of sound with the exquisite accompaniment of Arcady and Breton guitarist Nicolas Queménér, the instrumental album combines style ingredients that have played an important part in Ciarán's musical journey. "I was taught from a young age in Carlow and also got to play and listen to the likes of Seamus Tansey and other Sligo players on teenage visits there. I took lessons with Seamus and Peter Horan. Matt Molloy has been another great influence. I just really liked playing in the style so I gravitated towards it.

"I had previously recorded an album in Brittany with my good friend Dave Sheridan called *Faoi Bhláth* in 2009. That came about as I had

They have their own similarities with the Irish tradition but there's a lot to learn from Breton music" Ciarán muses. "Their music has such a buzz. It's still at the stage where it's having a rebirth and there are a lot of bands touring. Visit any small village in the middle of summer and there will be a huge festival on. It's the excitement of those events that draws me to it and the music is very creative in drawing new sounds and there is a great attitude towards it. A beautiful fusion that, with each performance, can have a different sound as there's so much diversity in it."

The album takes this fusion and runs with it. The focus is predominantly on the flute with a range of keys: C, D, E flat and F. "I play a D Flute made by my good friend, the Breton maker Pol Jezequel and a Grinter flute (on loan) and a fully keyed C flute by Chris Wilkes. I play the whistle on a slow air from Connemara titled *Johnny Seoighe* on which I'm accompanied by David Power on hurdy gurdy, which is really interesting, almost primeval" As well as a variety of Irish tunes, Ciarán has included his own compositions; a set of jigs called *Kilcarrig Bridge* and *The Hunter's Rest*. Another inclusion is a beautiful slow air

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bought a flute from Pol Jezequel in the same village that Nicolas Queménér lived. Nicolas played with Arcady and is one of the top guitar players in Breton music and when I met him we got on really well. I was impressed with the flute sound that Nicolas captured whilst playing in his recording studio in Brittany. When I heard that and knew that his playing and expertise were there, I thought the album was a natural path to take."

Visits to Brittany brought Ciarán into another dimension of music. "When I met Jean-Michel Veillon and other flute players there, they became an influence at that point and it changed my outlook on wooden flute tone. There's a slightly different approach to the playing and it's a little more inclusive of world traditions and classical traditions. They approach tone in a different way with different vibratos and articulation and I like to think I have picked up something from that.

The Banks of the Barrow "That tune is important to me." He explains "It's associated with a fiddle player, Tom Nolan who lived locally; He had a close association with the River Barrow and surrounding area. The tune was collected by Frances O'Neill in 1903 and Tom passed it on to a generation of players in the area." The Breton influence is heard on *Suite de Gavottes de Montagnes* played in E flat and a suite of tunes that include an exquisite duet, *Le Lezard Pergourdin* that Nicolas composed along with a multi-track arrangement of a Breton *March Kas a Barh*.

As well as the album's imminent release, Ciarán has some exciting gigs ahead with Pipers Union that include The Big Blowout Concert in Glengarriff in June and the Soma Festival in July. With plans to increase the focus on musical projects in the near future, we should be hearing lots more synergies from the powerful tone of this Carlow man's flute.

The CD will shortly be available online at www.Ciaransomers.com