



- MEET A TOWNIE -



EVELYN AND THE ENVOYS – AND NOT FORGETTING HUGHIE – ROLL BACK THE YEARS

They opened with 'Each Season Changes You' but it was evident that the years since they first performed together hadn't altered the sound and the enthusiasm of the Envoys Showband.

Here they were in the Station House Hotel on Saturday night bringing their music to the masses once more. And, like the devotees who had packed venues such as the Fiesta and Termon Ballrooms and many another arena beyond these shores, reliving every moment.

"It was fantastic, a great atmosphere and packed to the rafters, and in a great venue too," singer Evelyn Gallagher reflects on a night of nights.

The Envoys together again and the dance floor in the Station House Hotel still, a few days later, throbbing to the feet that pounded on it. And Hugh McLean embracing the occasion as guest artist.

"People came from all over to hear us – it just couldn't have gone any better."

From long distances – almost as distant as the years and, specifically, 1967 when it all started for Evelyn and the band.

Born and reared in Dromore, Letterkenny, and daughter of Nellie and the late Bobby O'Donnell, she attended Lurgybrack National School and the old tech at Ard O'Donnell.

Her initial musical influences? "The Ponsonbys. Ina Ponsonby – her married name was Walsh – was a great talent and indeed so were the rest of them. She would compose songs – she was just so talented. "A talent that so obviously seeped down through the family.

"When they were going to perform at dances, I'd be watching them getting ready.

"And Ina would take me to dances in Ramelton and that started the interest."

Other influences included her neighbours, Fred and Maggie Wilkie, and singing nights in the Dry Arch bar in the late sixties.

Also performing in local pantomimes in Walsh's shed and at the rear of Houston's shop in the town – each event helping to draw out Evelyn's own voice and talent.

It was Envoys bassist Joey McDaid who decided that here was someone who could perform on bigger stages and consequently she found herself with the band in the Culdaff Arms back in 1967. "I wasn't nervous – I suppose I was too young to be nervous," she recalls.

Along with Joey, the Envoys then were made up of Brendan Duffy, T.P. McNamee (for whom Ted Ponsonby, fittingly, filled in last Saturday night), Eamon Brogan and Malcolm Patton. Fergus Cleary would join the band in subsequent years.

"I could not have had a better crowd of people



See photos of Evelyn & the Envoys at the Stationhouse on pages 44 and 45

Evelyn Gallagher

to perform with. They were a sensible bunch of boys, didn't drink or smoke, they were just committed to the music."

That commitment was essential in an industry that required so much of it and as the Envoys reputation grew so did their fan base and their travels.

"We played all over Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. A lot of travelling but great experiences."

On one occasion they had been performing in Scotland when word came through that an act had pulled out of a gig in Swansea in Wales on St. Patrick's night and could the Envoys fill in as a late replacement?

"We agreed to do it and drove down through England to get there. I remember it one of these big plush venues with a revolving stage. Some of the boys weren't sure how to get off it!" she laughs.

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Evelyn Gallagher reflects

A twelve piece orchestra performed before the Envoys adding to the sense of occasion. "And we were the main act. The place was packed out and we went down a treat. It was a memorable night," says Evelyn.

Only for someone to forget – neglect? – to pay them. "We went to look for our money afterwards but never got paid for it."

A revolving stage and left on a merry-go-round where payment was concerned! But, nevertheless, an experience not to be forgotten.

Managed by Seamus Hannigan – "He was so good at organising things and getting us ready for performances" – the band enjoyed, of course, many appearances in their native county, Evelyn recalling venues such as the Derrybeg Hall, Termon Ballroom and the famous Fiesta in her own home town.

"We met so many of the big names in the showband world along the way." And they in

turn got to meet one of the country's finest.

The band's debut album was "Envoys of Ireland" featuring Hugh McLean and Evelyn.

At the tender age of fifteen, she recorded 'Silver Haired Daddy' – to this day one of her all time favourite tracks. "Mum and dad were very proud of it."

There were recordings in the Eamonn Andrews studios in Dublin. "That was a big thing for us at the time." No appearances on 'This is Your Life' but they can always say they performed in his studio.

Evelyn's husband, Kieran, sadly passed away sixteen years ago and they have a family of three, Karen, based in Brussels, Brian (Auckland), and Kevin back home in Letterkenny.

And their mother's music an ever present when they were growing up.

And set to be again. "We're talking of getting together again for another one. Nothing definite as yet but it's looking very likely," says Evelyn, who resides with her mother, Nellie – she'll be 94 on her next birthday – in the family home in Dromore.

Each season changing but the music lives on.

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