

Inside job

R2 goes behind the scenes to hear from the men and women who help shape today's music industry

London-based Irishman **Joe Giltrap** arrived in England in the early 70s. He was a founder member of pioneering folk duo Irish Mist before going on to open London venue, the Weavers Arms, which until its closure in 1999 was arguably London's premier home of roots, Irish and

Americana music. Today, Joe records and performs solo and with a re-formed Irish Mist, and contributes a regular column for London-based weekly *The Irish Post*.

What are your earliest musical memories?

I remember tinkering with a piano in my grandfather's house on the Celbridge Road in Lucan, Co. Dublin. The sheet music for 'The Wild Colonial Boy' was always open. I can't honestly recall if anybody could actually play it or if it was there just for show but the words always stuck with me and I did actually record the song some years ago. My dad used to mess about on the piano but only on Sunday mornings for some reason. The first records I bought were Marty Robbins, Burl Ives and Johnny Cash. I also loved rock'n'roll – people like Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis – before I discovered and got hooked on folk music during the Folk Revival in the 60s.

What was your first job in the business?

I started playing in a local pub in my hometown – Leixlip, Co. Kildare – with a couple of friends, Michael Lube and Albert Daniels. We were called The Rye Folk after the River Rye that runs through the town and joins the Liffey beside Leixlip Castle, which is owned by the Guinness family. Arthur Guinness brewed his first beer in Leixlip and sold it to passing travellers on the bridge there before moving the operation to St. James's Gate. I was just learning to play guitar at the time and drove the lads mad pestering them to show me chords. The fact that somebody actually paid us a few quid was a minor miracle.

How has your career moved along?

Slowly – the usual ups and downs; not quite sure which has been more dominant though. I think they take



turns. The jury is still out on that one. I suppose I have made a bit of progress since those early days and hopefully will make some more. I actually enjoy the recording process a lot and getting to record some of my own songs and songs that I have co-written has been very satisfying. Running the Weavers was a big influence also because it brought me into contact with some great musicians and songwriters and inspired me to write more.

What do you now know that you wish you had known when starting out?

Just about everything. Age is a hell of a high price to pay for maturity, (if you can use the word 'maturity' in relation to musicians). There is an upside though. Rattlesnake Annie said, "The great thing about longevity, Joe, is that you eventually *git* to know everybody." (You have to imagine that in a Tennessee accent.)

What have been the best and worst moments in your career?

Probably the best moment was recording with one of my heroes – Tom Paxton. Never thought anything like that that would ever happen. The worst moment was probably when Warner Bros. dropped Irish Mist (myself and Malcolm Rogers) after the Birmingham bombs atrocity. They were about to release a single and an album. It was, of course, a knee-jerk reaction. They didn't feel there was much of a future for Irish music. They certainly got that wrong. However, our career was insignificant and totally irrelevant compared to the death and suffering in Birmingham. It put things into perspective.

How do you relax?

I usually relax late at night because I'm not a great sleeper. I watch TV or read. I also love sport and I enjoy family get-togethers.