

Belfast-born hip hop artist, who grew up in Manchester, talks about his debut album *The Troubles*.

How were you introduced to hip hop?

It was my big brother who first introduced me to hip hop when I was about nine or ten, but I truly fell in love with it when I started high school in the Moss Side area of Manchester in 1998. At that time Moss Side was known as the Bronx² of the UK, yet I always felt a lot safer hanging around with the black kids because they said they had a connection with Irish people, whereas the white kids would always try to bully me because I was Irish. I felt accepted in the black community and so I naturally embraced their music.

What was the reaction to your music from Northern Irish audiences?

Initially I think a lot of Northern Irish listeners were not sure how to take me. Some moaned³ and said I wasn't really from Belfast because I had moved away, but since appearing on BBC Radio 1's Fire in the Booth with Charlie Sloth, the amount of support I have received from all over Ireland has been overwhelming.

You write a lot about the Troubles, which are now ostensibly at an end. What other subjects are there for hip hop artists in Northern Ireland to write about?

I talk about the Troubles because of my roots. Like so many others from Northern Ireland, I grew up in a family very much affected by the conflict, and I explain that thoroughly⁴ in my album without taking sides or showing bias. My album is very much about people rather than politics, and experiences rather than beliefs. The youth in Northern Ireland need to unite together. They need to

grasp the seriousness of where we, as a nation, have come from, and more importantly where we are heading. I don't believe true peace will be found by sweeping our differences under the carpet and pretending they don't exist.

culturenorthernireland.org, September 2, 2014

1. artist's name in homage to an ancient Chinese author
2. dangerous district of New York
3. complained
4. completely

File 9 p. 102 • Our biggest export is our people

“It was April 14, 1950, I’ll always remember it, I was 18.” Bridie recalls. [...] “We were sad to be leaving our home in Ballinakill, but also excited at the prospect of what lay ahead, there was very little in Connemara back then, very little in Ireland. [...] It was so exciting to get to Euston Station in London for the first time. It was all so new and unexpected. Then you went home to Ireland and when you came back the second time to Euston it just looked so grey and dirty and you knew you were back to work, and that work would be hard—and it would be a long way from home.

“But families had always experienced this. My mother, Delia Cloherty, left for America in 1921 and used to tell us of passing through Dublin on her way to catch the liner¹ in Liverpool—the smoke from the fighting was rising above bombed-out buildings on Dublin’s streets in the War of Independence as she passed by on the train. We knew as children we’d probably have to leave as well when we were older, it’s just so sad that nothing has changed all this time on—after all that struggle and sacrifice. [...]

“We went back to Connemara every summer and loved doing the work on the farm that we had previously thought of as such hard work. We knew that the work in London was tougher, but we wanted to send money back to help out back home—like the Polish do in Ireland now² I suppose—and like the Irish are once again doing from England and all over the world. There was no work in Ireland then and no benefits. It felt like the whole village was in London after a while—you were with your people. [...] The Irish would tend to share houses with each other and keep a very close community together.”

I’ve lived in England for 60 years now, but Ballinakill will always be my home.

“Our biggest export is our people”, *The Irish Examiner*, 2010

1. ship

2. in 2010

Top Non-Irish Nationalities living in Ireland:	
1) Polish: 122,515	6) Brazilian: 13,640
2) UK: 103,113	7) Spanish: 12,112
3) Lithuanian: 36,552	8) Italian: 11,732
4) Romanian: 29,186	9) French: 11,661
5) Latvian: 19,933	10) German: 11,531

Dwellings:

Brazilians and Italians: 72% lived in cities and their suburbs	Latvians: 35% lived in large towns	UK Nationals: 50% lived in rural areas
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Marital Status:

Spanish: 68% were single	Romanian: 55% were married	Latvian: 15% were separated (including divorced)	UK Nationals: 5% were widowed
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Average age profile:

Brazilians: 55% were under 30	Polish: 54% were 30-44	UK Nationals: 57% were 45 and over
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File 9 p. 103 • Keeping in touch with Irish culture

How do you keep connected with Irish culture when living overseas? That was the question we asked of readers through our new *Irish Times Abroad* site.

Maev Mc Daid (London): “Irish music is a way for me to celebrate Irish culture, as well as share it with others. Playing the harp keeps me connected to the songs and stories of home, and it also gives me the chance to experience new opportunities in a different country.”

Brian O’Sullivan (New Zealand): “Every time I’ve travelled back from Ireland over the past 20 years, it has been a battle of the books in terms of baggage weight allowances on flights. Even today, books remain the most effective mechanism for transmitting rare and in-depth cultural information, despite the availability of digital media. After a particularly serious bout¹ of homesickness, my partner and I resorted to setting up an Irish book-publishing business in the basement of our home in Wellington.”

Michael Russell (New York) “I live in New York and work for America’s newest stock exchange. There are three Irish in the firm of 70-plus people. We each have a tricolour at our desk and unfurl it during great sporting events.”

The Irish Times, Nov 26, 2016

¹. period

She had consented to go away, to leave her home. Was that wise? She tried to weigh each side of the question. In her home anyway she had shelter and food; she had those whom she had known all her life about her. Of course she had to work hard, both in the house and at business. What would they say of her in the Stores when they found out that she had run away with a fellow? [...] She was about to explore another life with Frank. Frank was very kind, manly, open-hearted. She was to go away with him by the night-boat to be his wife and to live with him in Buenos Ayres where he had a home waiting for her. [...] A bell clanged¹ upon her heart. She felt him seize her hand:

“Come!”

All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her. She gripped with both hands at the iron railing².

“Come!”

No! No! No! It was impossible. Her hands clutched³ the iron in frenzy. Amid the seas she sent a cry of anguish.

“Eveline! Evvy!”

He rushed beyond the barrier and called to her to follow. He was shouted at to go on but he still called to her. She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition.

James Joyce, *Dubliners*, 1914

1. résonner 2. barrier 3. hold strongly

File 9 p. 104 • Bloomsday Festival

The Bloomsday Festival is an annual celebration of James Joyce's modernist epic¹ *Ulysses*, the events of which take place in Dublin on 16 June 1904.

The name is inspired by the main character Leopold Bloom. The first Bloomsday in Dublin took place in 1954 and was organised by a group of literary and cultural figures.

The Bloomsday Festival has developed into a colourful and diverse celebration of Joyce and *Ulysses*. This world-famous literary street carnival typically takes place from 11-16 June in Dublin, the heart of the Hibernian² metropolis, the city that inspired Joyce and his major works. People celebrate Bloomsday by dressing in the fashion of the period, eating food mentioned in the book, visiting the locations where the novel takes place and performing readings from the text. Festival events range from lectures, readings, workshops and walking tours to Bloomsday Breakfasts, theatre, music and pub crawls.

www.bloomsdayfestival.ie

1. *épopée*

2. from *Hibernia*, the Latin name for Ireland meaning "land of winter".

When you grow up speaking Irish all the time you take it for granted¹. You take for granted the lens through which you see the world. For example growing up in Connemara you would be greeted by the Atlantic Ocean each morning. If it was a choppy sea we might say

Tá bláth bán ar gharraí an iascaire

‘The fisherman’s garden is under white flower.’

You see, this language connects us with the landscape and environment that is beyond the visible and the obvious. For example the Irish word for wolf is Mac Tíre “Son of the land.” And the Irish word for a ladybird² is Bóin Dé: “God’s little cow.”

Moving to America in my mid-twenties to further my acting career, I found myself in the heart of New York City. Leaving the Atlantic waves and broad western vowels behind me. I was immediately consumed by the rush and buzz of it all. This lasted some time.

Then last Christmas I was at home in Connemara. Dad and I were having a chat in the sitting room about the endangered state of the Irish language, a conversation that is often had in our house. We spoke for some time about the position of the language in Ireland, finally coming to the conclusion that its future as a spoken language was very uncertain.

I then asked him what the real tragedy of the loss of this language would be.

His answer was very simple Bás Áilleachta: ‘The death of beauty.’

This statement had a profound impact on me. I returned to New York City but something within me had changed. I no longer had the same interest in telling other people’s stories. I realised that within me, was my own personal cultural narrative that I wanted to share.

Dónall Ó Héalaí, www.celticconsciousness.com, 2018

1. *considérer comme acquis*

2. *Coccinelle*