

## Martin Hayes Enthralls at St. Canice's

Acclaimed traditional musician Martin Hayes returned to perform at Kilkenny Arts Week for the fifth successive year at St Canice's, a gig we booked our tickets several weeks beforehand – and we were not disappointed. The Clareman, who is now based at Madrid with his wife Lina, performed a brilliant gig at St Patrick's Gateway (at the Imagine Festival) with Dennis Cahill, Liz Knowles and Doug Wiseleman, and they repeated the trick in Kilkenny. Hayes is an engaging personality and he interacted easily and delightfully with the audience during a set in which the quartet performed most of the tracks from their wonderful album, titled 'The Blue Room'. He began with 'Easter Snow' which was followed by 'My Mind Will Never Be Easy', 'The Boy In The Gap', 'The Orphan', the 'Bear Island Reel' and 'The Clare House Dance'. Sat near the front as we were, the rhythms built up beautifully and the intensity of the playing was palpable.

Growing up in a farm in East Clare, Hayes told his enthralled audience that his was a house full of music, where regular sessions were played. He developed an obsession with playing music and developing his craft, winning Fleadh Cheoil titles on the fiddle – he subsequently played at this year's Fleadh in Drogheda.



Martin Hayes performed a brilliant set at St Canice's Cathedral during Kilkenny Arts Week.

He said he loved playing in Kilkenny and was always struck by the consistent warmth of locals, from the receptive audience to the "Howya, Martin" he had become so accustomed to when walking through the city. "I've always felt at home here," he said, smiling. The group's influences include American jazz and blues (part of Dennis Cahill's musical background) and that they always strove to "intentionally let the music flow". Among the other tracks performed on the night were 'The Humours of Scariff', 'Down The Back Lane', 'Bould Doherty', 'Brennan's Reel' and a Peadar Ó Riada number titled 'Kerbside'. It was great to hear Doug Wiselman's bass clarinet featuring throughout most of these entrancing numbers, and their superb set also featured a well-received encore.

Some of the audience were seeing Martin Hayes for the first time and were enthralled with the sound and there's no doubt that they would love to see Hayes and his fellow musicians perform again. If there's any opportunity to see him play, please do so: you'll not be disappointed.

Our next stop that same evening in Kilkenny was to the Set Theatre where we heard Syrian musician, the London-based Maya Youssef (based in London) plays the Qanun, a flat-harp like instrument which is traditionally played in the Middle East, West Africa and the Maghreb (Northern Africa). Her set featured a mix of numbers blending Arabic and Western influences, many of which were calls for peace given the strife which continues to bedevil her native country – she also recalled previous wars and events in Syrian history, such as the end of the Ottoman Empire and its time as a French protectorate. She was joined by cellist Barney Morse-Brown and percussionist Elizabeth Nott and we greatly enjoyed their efforts, and was pleasantly surprised

to see the theatre full for such a niche performance. Several of the harmonies featured jazz influences, in addition to a hint of flamenco in numbers including 'The Sea' and 'Firestorm'.

Creating music is Maya Youssef's life and she is striving to create happiness through her sound. On that front, we feel she is scoring highly. Its proximity to Waterford makes the Kilkenny Arts Festival easily accessible. Just as we welcome our neighbours into the city fort Spraoi, Waterford Walls, Imagine and Winterval, a trip to Noreside for this festival will not disappoint. It's well worth pencilling in for next August.