

HEADLINE ACT

FIDDLER ON THE HOOF

He's the electric fiddle playing bad boy who claims Foals as an influence and found fame via-reality television. No, you haven't seen anyone quite like Daithí Ó Drónaí before! WORDS **Roe McDermott**

XAVIER HENNELL



As I shake hands with Daithí Ó Drónaí, something about him seems very familiar. I'm ready to put it down to his passing resemblance to Justin Bieber until Ó Drónaí puts me straight. "Hey, I thought I recognised you. You taught me in the Gaeltacht!"

That's depressing. I now not only feel old, but thoroughly unproductive. While my former student was off making waves on the Irish scene, garnering a huge following on televised talent shows and playing acclaimed sets at festivals like Electric Picnic, I seem to have spent the last couple of years doing nothing more than sitting around re-watching episodes of *House*. And while knowing the symptoms of lupus is incredibly helpful, I think Ó Drónaí's skills may be slightly more transferrable in the long run.

Playing original compositions on an electronic synthesised fiddle, 20-year-old Ó Drónaí uses loop pedals and sounds to create complex melodies, breathing some much-needed life into traditional Irish reels. He even uses his Nintendo DS to get distinctive sounds for his music – hipsters, eat your heart out.

"I played fiddle when I was about seven but gave it up at 13, because I thought it was just kids' music," he

admits. "My auntie has taught me to play traditional Irish music so it was my background but then started playing bass guitar, because come on, at 13, saying 'I play bass' just sounds so much cooler!"

Joining up with some schoolmates who were equally eager to up their cool factor a few notches, Ó Drónaí played bass and guitar in a band for a few years, which he now refers to as his "hibernation period."

"It was really a development period, I learned not only how to play music but exactly what music I loved, how to start writing my own stuff and just developing my own style and taste, really. And when I went to college, it all exploded, because there was so much space and opportunity to develop my own kind of stamp and style of music."

Constantly reeling off the names of bands and musicians from a huge range of genres and backgrounds, it's clear that Ó Drónaí just breathes music, listing artists like Foals as huge influences on his style.

"I love Foals' really clear guitar tone and I wanted something that was that crisp and different, and literally just went, 'Oh yeah, I have a fiddle, don't I!' And I realised that when you pluck a fiddle it gives a beautifully clear tone, so that's where the idea for plucking it instead of just playing with a bow

came from. Then I saw guitar players and people like Final Fantasy and Andrew Bird using loop stations with classical music. I realised that this was how I could perform the kind of music I wanted on my own, so I just bought a loop station, put a pick-up on the fiddle, got an effects processor so I could drop octaves and turn the fiddle into a bass guitar and distort it if I wanted, and that was the beginning of this epic – if string-destroying – journey!"

It's the first epic journey I've heard of that owes its beginnings to Daithí Ó Sé of all people, but it was Ó Drónaí's performances on RTE's, ahem, "talent" show that gave his career its first major kick. Though clearly grateful for his break, Ó Drónaí is aware that *The All Ireland Talent Show* isn't exactly revered as a beacon of innovative talent.

"I wouldn't say it was a mistake because it was how I realised that I could do it, and it just propelled me into playing my dream gigs at iconic Irish venues like the Roisin Dubh, but in hindsight, it was a disaster, I mean the show has just dropped off completely in terms of talent." He pauses. "Actually, maybe that's why I did so well!"

The Galwegian student also went on to the finals of Sky 1's *Must Be The Music*, where he performed in front of 10,000 people in Wembley Arena. Though he was beaten by singer-songwriter Emma's Imagination, his music became a downloading sensation, earning him a top twenty slot in the UK iTunes charts and, more importantly, enough money to record an EP.

"When recording the EP I really got into an electro dance vibe, which is just so much fun, particularly at live gigs when everyone gets up and starts jumping around. Even on stage, I myself just go mental, you have to – I want to create a really fun, crazy gig, so I dance around, and usually end up breaking strings and bows, so while a bit expensive, it's all fun!"

But it's clear Ó Drónaí's also prepared to do some bloody hard work to get his music exactly where he wants it, and is confident enough to make some pretty big plans.

"I want to start working with some voice samples and spoken word and use that in the music, and am planning Irish and UK tours. And then I'm also going to try break into Japan, that's a huge one," he throws in casually. Obviously, I'm planning to do the same myself actually... just, you know, after I watch this final box-set.

Daithí Ó Drónaí can be seen performing on RTE's *Other Voices* this February. You can listen to Daithí's exclusive track 'Sleep Like A Stone' on hotpress.com.