



LOCAL HEROES

Roe McDermott meets with some of the Other Voices IMRO acts, and talks to them about the challenges facing these new fish in a very big pond of Irish music.



Lisa O'Neil

Apart from showcasing the biggest and best of both Irish and international acts, RTE's *Other Voices* festival has also become a mandatory stop-off for the very best bands and solo performers only just emerging on the domestic scene. The latest festival was no different.

The line-up featured a plethora of completely different acts, including the sweet sultriness of one-woman project The Danger Is, the quirk-filled sounds of chanteuse Lisa O'Neill and the neo-fiddle twangs of Daithí Ó Drónaí, as well as the unique stylings of Planet Parade, Jennifer Evans, Ciara Sidine, The Man Whom and finally the enigmatic solo artist Sacred Animals. Given that the latter was also handpicked to play at Eurosonic this year, it's clear *Other Voices'* knack for showcasing the best of new Irish talent was yet again on target.

So after each recording their individual sets in the back of a miniscule Dingle pub, I made sure to catch up with a few of the acts, just so that in a couple of years I could say I interviewed these musical sensations back when they were small and humble.

And humble is the name of the game for Lisa O'Neill, the unassuming and easy-going singer-songwriter from Cavan. Her intriguing and endearingly quirky voice is sweet and almost childlike, but the gorgeously simple refrains of her songs clearly reveal her to be a mature and accomplished songwriter.

Having released her typically bluntly-titled album *Lisa O'Neill Has An Album* last year, she's currently working on new material, and reveals the difficulty of writing personal songs.

"It's like a diary really, and sometimes you do have to edit, and decide what you're comfortable sharing with people. But I still think it's amazing that the album went down so well, and that people are buying it, strangers are buying it. It means people I don't know are connecting with the music, and that's a privilege, really."

Though her second album is underway and O'Neill is clearly eager to continue writing and making music, it's clear that every achievement along the journey to success is huge to the 28-year-old.

"To be honest, if it all ended tomorrow, just to have been down here at *Other Voices* would have been incredible, and it'll be a lovely thing to look back on."

Another act grateful for the opportunity to showcase their music is Kildare trio Planet Parade, who garnered great reviews with their debut EP, *Ghosts To People* in 2009.

Though they've since released a follow-up EP *Zulu Sound*, not to mention completely changed their set-up and instruments of choice, the band are finding that releasing their debut album is being hampered not only by their perfectionist tendencies, but also a lack of all-important funds.

"The music scene in Ireland is really exciting at the moment, but there's only really money to be made for an elite few – the rest of us have to keep our real jobs!" reflects singer and guitarist Michael Hopkins. "But the scene in general is just fantastic. Basically the trick is learning how to live the dream without any money. God knows we're trying!"