



Galway International Retro Orchestra  
(LtoR): Kyle Borley, Anders Trabjerg,  
Mayo Yanachi and Geoff Ward.  
Photo: Mike Shaughnessy.

# GIRO-scope

Anders Trabjerg on the eclectic,  
exciting sounds of the Galway International Retro Orchestra

BY CHARLIE MCBRIDE

IN THESE times, when daily news bulletins and headlines are dominated by depressing tales of ethnic and sectarian strife across various international flashpoints, the Galway International Retro Orchestra joyously affirms the power of music to unite and celebrate disparate cultures and traditions.

The band, whose members hail from four continents and whose repertoire encompasses music from Ireland and Scandinavia, as well as Jewish klezmer music, Romanian gypsy airs, and tunes from Ukraine, are a very welcome antidote to the prevailing international tide of boiling dissensions and hatreds.

## All the way from Denmark

The Galway International Retro Orchestra (aka GIRO), was formed in Galway in late 2011. Its members came to the city largely for its music, and had known each other for years through the city's myriad Irish music sessions. The concept of a band playing traditional music from across Europe in the styles of the early 20th century had been an idea in the minds of founding members Anders Trabjerg and Kyle Borley for some time, after discovering that they shared an interest in klezmer and Romanian music.

Anders, who plays accordion, hails from the west coast of Denmark, and the little town of Hee while Kyle (flute and piccolo) comes from Winnipeg in Canada. GIRO's line-up is completed by New Zealander Geoff Ward (sax, clarinet and banjo) and Anders's wife Mayo Yanachi (fiddle), from Tokyo.

So how did a young Danish accordionist become smitten with Irish music?

"It started when I was in my teens," Anders tells me. "I used to go to folk music festivals in Denmark with my parents, both of whom played music. I first got interested in Scottish music and from there I started listening to Irish music and there was something about the Irish music that appealed more to me than the Scottish music."

"The Irish music had an energy about it. I'd go to the library and borrow records to take home and listen to. There was one record I couldn't get out of my mind it was a live recording by the accordion player Joe Cooley. It was wild, even on the record you could feel all this energy from all the people there. One of our aims is to generate that same kind of energy."

"After discovering Joe Cooley I really got into Irish music and began playing it in Denmark. I then got a scholarship from the Danish government to go to Ireland and learn more Irish music, in 1996, which was when I first came to Galway. It was because of the Joe Cooley record that

I chose to come to Galway when I arrived in Ireland.

"Also, some of the people I knew from the Danish Irish music scene spoke highly of Galway and how there was a lot of high quality music here. I stayed here for a year then went back to Denmark but I realised I had to come back to Galway again. In Denmark there is traditional music but you have to go looking for it all the time whereas here you can find it every day whether in a pub, at a concert or on the radio."

Prior to forming GIRO, Anders recorded a solo album *Boxed* in 2001, for which he received Roots Release of the Year at the Danish Music Awards. In 2004 he released *McBones* and the B Band, as well as *For the Same Reason*, a duo project with fiddler Tak Tamura.

That same year Anders' life in Ireland was featured in a documentary titled *Irish Heart, Danish Blood*, which aired on Danish TV DR1. Anders and fellow Danish musician Jonas Fromseier released their album *The Great Danes In Ireland* in 2008. Since then he has been involved various projects, such as with Macnas in the show *Rumpus*.

## Back to the future

Anders reveals how GIRO's interest in early 20th century traditional music came about.

"After playing Irish music for a few years," he says, "I started getting

interested in recordings of Irish music from America and there are so many fantastic recordings on these old 78s that are now being released on CD.

"There was also a certain performing style, instead of just playing a tune there are extra bits put in here and there to make it more appealing. With people like the Flanagan Brothers they used clarinet and Dan O'Sullivan's Shamrock Orchestra used piccolos so it was a different kind of style to the Irish music you hear nowadays."

"I'd always been interested in eastern European music and it was through the Irish music I started finding recordings of old klezmer bands and Ukrainian bands which were made in New York around the same time as the Flanagan Brothers. "You had all these people who had left their home countries and gone to a new country and in a way that mirrors our own experience because we are all far from home and all came to Galway and live here now and play music."

Earlier this year, GIRO released their debut album. A spirited, lively affair where a listener can envisage a roomful of revellers passing round the schnapps, thumping their tables, and whooping in appreciation as a ceaseless swirl of hongas, hornpipes, and rollicking airs from near and far cascade forth. Alongside the traditional tunes there are also three

original tracks, 'Inge Schottis' written by Anders' father Ejner; 'The Dancing Pancake' by Kyle Borley; and Anders' own 'The Devon Court Gypsies.'

While the album was released in April, it was immediately followed by the group taking a short hiatus. This was because Anders and Mayo were about to have their first child.

"We'd been working on the album since last October but by April we were getting close to the time where Mayo had to say 'I can't go onstage and perform' because of her pregnancy," Anders explains. "So we decided to take a break. GIRO haven't actually played a lot of gigs yet because we are all busy with other commitments, Mayo and myself play four or five days a week in sessions around town for instance. Our baby daughter was born two months ago - we then had to come up with a name that made sense in Ireland, Denmark and Japan so we settled for Hanna!"

The good news is that GIRO are now ready to resume live performances together and have a number of gigs coming up: upstairs in Kelly's Bar, Bridge Street (Friday September 12); Campbells Tavern (Cloughanover, Friday September 19, as part of Culture Night); The Crane Bar, Sea Road (Friday October 10). Check 'em out folks, you'll have a blast.