

## Interview

# Theme Nights are back in The Hawk's Well to showcase the best of Sligo's musical talent

Marking 15 years since this novel idea grew into one of the most anticipated fixtures of the local events calendar, **Kieran Quinn** talks about his first big Theme Night since early 2025, what audiences can expect and reflects on some of his favourite memories since the first Theme Night in 2011.

By Cara McHugh

KIERAN Quinn has been running Theme Nights for 15 years now, bringing musical communities of Sligo together and showcasing the talent in the county.

He spoke about his experience in the music industry, and how he initially came up with the concept in 2011.

"There was a wine bar at the bottom of Harmony hill called Source. I used to have a different guest with me every week as I had a weekly residency and a beautiful baby grand piano," he said.

"Eventually, I decided at around Christmas time that it would be a nice idea to get all the guests in together, and that's how the concept formed as it was a band and a group of about 20 guests at the time.

"We did a show the very next week, and then it started to evolve. Now it takes a year to recover from one!" he said.

It developed rapidly, as the group started to perform in other venues across town, gaining popularity. He cited what was once known as The Velvet Room in Andersons, but he said their spiritual home is the Hawk's Well Theatre.

He notes the progression of the project since they first began.

"Over 500 people have been involved in the shows throughout the years," he said. "In that first ever show at Source wine bar, there were about 50 people and there will be about 1,000 people in our audience in the Hawk's Well next week."

He spoke about the upcoming show, as he said that there are about 80 people involved in the production. This consists of 15 people in the band, as there are drums, percussion, bass, two or three guitars, piano, keyboards, string quartet, and backing vocalists - showcasing the best of Sligo's musical talent.

"It's a real community event. Seeing the impact that it can have from both us on stage and the audience, the shared experience is lovely and it's why we all keep coming back," he said.

Next week's theme for the Hawk's Well show is the 80s.

"It's been a year since we've done a show, and I felt like we had to come

back with a bang," he said.

"The 80s is fun, it's so broad and there is a massive choice of work. I suppose the main thing is it's full of great music from every genre.

"Our audience is really enthusiastic for this one as it would have been music for many of them that they would have grown up with. So that's a challenge in itself as we need to live up to those expectations as well."

Last year, Kieran set up the Theme Night Academy, which catered for teenagers who are in fourth, fifth and sixth year of secondary school as they currently have about 100 youths involved in this project. The academy welcomes complete beginners to musically inclined teens who want to develop a career in music or just simply enjoy the community he has created.

He said that he used to run teenage Theme Nights, which has evolved into the academy for more focused learning and development.

"We have a series of open mic events, masterclasses, and workshops," he said.

He was asked about the gifted young individuals that he meets and coaches in his career.

"Part of it is the talent, and there's so many young musicians now in their early 20s, mid-20s who are writing music, releasing music and touring that have come from this - but that's only part of it," he said.

"The other part is the person who never dreamed of singing on a stage.

"What these teenagers get out of the academy is partly the music, but it's also the community - finding like-minded people that they can express themselves with."

Some of these teenagers will get the chance to perform in the show next week in the Hawk's Well, as well as past graduates.

This is going to be the 37th show, as the appetite for this type of performance in Sligo has displayed itself through the numbers.

"It's hard to keep doing the same thing, so we have to keep them fresh and evolving for the audience and us," he said.

"It's never the same cast and it's always new faces. We've also

developed the visual sides of the show throughout the years, through lighting and production. It's a full show now rather than just being a gig."

Everyone from the production to the people on stage showcase the best of Sligo's talent, as Kieran said that "the creative team is everywhere if you look for it".

Quinn also spoke about the 'special' times that the group have performed in Vicar Street in Dublin, in 2019 and in 2024.

"It was Sligo taking over Dublin for a night basically," he said.

"It was a feeling of pride with us looking out to so many people we knew that had come up to Dublin to support us and them looking back up at us thinking it's great to see all these Sligo people on a national stage."

He said the moments that have stayed with him are when the unexpected goes on stage and blows the crowd away.

He spoke about how he figured he was musically inclined himself, saying that he took piano lessons as a child but gave it up when he was 12 years old, as he disliked reading music.

He came back to it naturally when he was 17, but this time he was playing by ear, a talent in itself.

"I started playing stuff by U2 or The Cranberries, stuff that was relevant to me - not just songs that you do for your exams that you've never heard before," he said.

Asked about the future of Theme Nights, he said "we have plans for a residency in the Hawk's Well, as we'd love to do monthly shows, starting next September.

"They would be more intimate shows, but the Theme Nights would still continue once a year.

He is looking forward to next week, as the nerves and excitement are starting to kick in. "When you're sitting at the piano and you see the whole thing come together that has been in your head for months, that's the pay off," he said.

You can book tickets for next week's shows from Wednesday, February 4, to Saturday, February 7, on the Hawk's Well website, [www.hawkswell.com](http://www.hawkswell.com).



Kieran Quinn.



WHERE IT ALL BEGAN: The Theme Night in Source Sligo.