



In Bloom *Irish Bands Now*

Jenny Huston

The last few years have been an exceptionally healthy time in Irish music. Hundreds of bands are playing all around the country and many are touring and making headway internationally.

This book will tell you everything you want to know about your favourite Irish Bands and to put on record, the new Irish Headliners, the bands filling venues, receiving awards and enjoying critical acclaim right now. Their full history, their pictures, their stories, their successes to date and their plans for the future.

The Coronas, featured in the extract below, are one of a number of hot new Irish bands profiled by Jenny Huston in her forthcoming book, *In Bloom*. In frank in-depth interviews, band members talk about their early careers in music, their commercial successes and disasters and the things that motivate them to play, compose, record and meet their public.

The Coronas

- *Band Members:* Danny O'Reilly; Graham Knox; Conor Egan; Dave McPhillips
- *Albums:* *Heroes Or Ghosts*, *Tony Was An Ex-Con*
- *Label:* 3ú Records

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- Manager: Jim Lawless
- Website: <http://thecoronas.net>
- Myspace: www.myspace.com/coronaband
- Bebo: www.bebo.com/thecoronas-band

(Danny O'Reilly represented the band for the interview.)

The Coronas' success is due in no small part to the energy the members generate together on stage. The fact that lead singer Danny O'Reilly is usually grinning from ear to ear probably helps too. Danny has an affable, open, friendly nature that makes it virtually impossible not to like him. And he writes very catchy songs. The Coronas' debut album, *Heroes Or Ghosts*, is packed full of infectious anthems, songs of summers away and partying all night – songs that make you want to sing along and punch at the air during the choruses. It's no surprise that these guys captured the hearts of students across the country, but they didn't just win over the students, they won over daytime radio too, achieving platinum sales in the process. *Heroes Or Ghosts* was released in Japan and the UK before the Coronas headed back to studio to record their second album, *Tony Was An Ex-Con*.

So how did a young band on a small domestic indie label achieve all this without a massive advertising campaign or marketing spend?

The Coronas didn't quite reverse the traditional sequence of record album, retain PR company, release single to media, play gigs, release album, release second single, tour, but they certainly shook it up. The band had sold out Whelan's before they had even been written about in the press. Suddenly, there were questions flying around media circles: Who were The Coronas? Were they a boy band? Was it one of those *You're A Star* contenders?

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When the press eventually caught up with the lads, they realised that they were not a manufactured boy band but friends from school who had been gigging away quietly for years, building up a substantial following in the process. They also realised that Danny's mother was the famous Irish singer Mary Black, something that inevitably aroused interest, an interest that Danny finds somewhat bemusing, because to him, she's just a normal mother:

'It's funny that people wonder what sort of effect it had, the whole Mary Black thing. But she was just the same as the other mothers, just supportive. She never forced it [music] upon us. My older brother works nine to five now and doesn't really play music and my sister is in college. It was never, "Well, this is the family way..." Never! It was just the way it happened.'

Danny's parents may be steeped in folk and traditional music but they had very open minds when it came to the music he liked.

'When we were growing up, I would put on a Radiohead album and my mum would be like, "That's amazing!" She would never, ever tell me what to listen to. But in saying that, I remember she would then say, "Have a listen to this album." I remember when I was really young my mum and dad gave me *Revolver* [The Beatles, 1966] because I had been listening to Oasis and I was like – what the hell! This is great! I remember too my mum kept saying, "You have to get this album *Rumours*." [Fleetwood Mac, 1977]. I bought it for Christmas and I thought it was the best record I had ever heard! So it's great to have that, but they never ever forced it on us.'

It turns out that Danny is not the only one in the band to have had a musical upbringing. Graham 'Knoxy' Knox had a pretty cool musical upbringing too. His father owns a record

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store and used to be a DJ.

‘He used to DJ in Old Wesley and other places around Dublin in the late 1970s. Knoxy probably has a much wider musical taste than I do because he has been surrounded by CDs his whole life, whereas I have been surrounded by Mary Black CDs...which is great as well! ‘

Danny and Knoxy went to school together but their friendship goes even further back than that: they were born within two weeks of each other and have been friends since they were babies.

By the time Danny and Knoxy were in their early teens, Danny’s older brother and cousins were in bands and the boys thought they were amazing and wanted to give it a try themselves. By the time they were fifteen, they were in their first proper band. They went to Newtownmountkennedy to record with Gavin Ralston (a former member of the band Picturehouse) and recorded their first three-track demo. ‘We were listening to it the other week for a laugh,’ grins Danny. ‘Some of those tunes aren’t that bad, actually! We could come back to it for a dodgy third album if we were missing a few songs!’

Their first gig was in an afternoon all-ages show in the Clifton Court Hotel, beside O’Connell Bridge in Dublin, when they were around sixteen. About fifteen of their friends were there to watch them and they played a few covers and did one of their own songs. Danny recalls, ‘We always found gigs, even when we were under-age, at least one every two or three months.’

At that time, the band was called Kiros, with Conor Doyle as lead singer, Danny on backing vocals and guitar, Knoxy on bass and Conor Egan on drums. Even though they were all so young, tensions were developing and causing problems, a fact that amuses Danny greatly on reflection: ‘It wasn’t really

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working out for us and we weren't really getting on, so we sort of went our separate ways. Then myself, Egan and Knoxy started getting together again and jamming just because we missed it. We were just a three piece for four or five years. We were just called Corona then.'

Corona started gigging around and developing a bit of a following. They recorded a gig supporting Pugwash in Voodoo called *Live At The Voodoo Lounge EP*, followed by the *Corona EP* in early 2005. Initially, they were selling the EP for €5 at gigs, which proved successful enough. Then they started handing out the EP to anyone interested, allowing people to copy it for free. Then they went on holidays.

Danny and Knoxy went to Vancouver after their second year in college, when they were about nineteen. They were staying in a fraternity house at the University of British Columbia (UBC as it's known) when they bumped into a guy who was playing guitar in a circle at a party. Rather than being a new Canadian acquaintance, as expected, he turned out to be a fellow-Irishman: Dave McPhillips from Monkstown in Dublin. They had some friends in common back home so they hit it off right away and ended up playing together virtually every night in the circle of music that existed in the house.

When they came back to Dublin, Danny had a master-plan to bring Dave into the band, but Egan had not been in Vancouver (and had not even met Dave) and with Danny, Knoxy and Egan having been best friends since childhood, it was going to be a difficult sell. They had a gig that week so Danny suggested getting Dave in to do one song for the laugh: 'We were doing a gig at Slattery's and he came up and we did "The Wait" by the Band, He sang and we did the harmonies and stuff and the lads loved it.' McPhillips was in.

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About the author

Jenny Huston was born in Vancouver, Canada to Irish parents. Jenny joined 2FM in 2003, having started her broadcasting career at her university radio station. Her arrival on the national broadcasting stage had an immediate impact on Irish music lovers, particularly those hungry for Irish rock. She presents the pop programme, *The Annex*, on 2FM on Friday and Sunday nights and is a regular guest on *The Gerry Ryan Show*.

About the publisher

Launched in 2002, **Currach Press** quickly established a name as a leading independent publisher in all areas of Irish-interest non-fiction, including history, biography, lifestyle, cookery and business, as well as some illustrated books. Since 2005 Kerry native Jo O'Donoghue has been the woman at the helm. She enjoys dreaming up book ideas, commissioning, and working with authors to develop projects with a keen eye to the marketplace. Currach Press is happily commercial, numbering *How to Henparty: the Complete Guide* among its 2009 successes. Currach's autumn 2009 list is wide-ranging: from the political memoir of the late *Nuala Fennell, A Political Woman*; to *Kavanagh Country*, a collection of Patrick Kavanagh's poetry paired with superb specially commissioned photographs of Kavanagh locations; to *Candidate: the Election Diary of Susan O'Keeffe*; to *Real Irish Ghost Stories*, spooky tales compiled by Ireland's leading paranormal investigator, Paul Fennell; to *My Mother Always Used to Say*, maternal wisdom as recollected by famous people and collected by Valerie Bowe. Among Currach's bestselling authors are Mary Banotti, Terry Prone and Eddie Hobbs. Currach Press also publishes the Father Francis Browne SJ collection.

