

DEARBHLÁ MC TAGGART TALKS...

“The harp rates higher than horse riding”

SHE is a keen kid – one of these many living proofs that young people now are no less interested in going places and getting somewhere in life than the generations before them - if they get half a chance, that is.

She has chosen to master one of the most difficult musical instruments for her first solo-concert, where she will be part of the prestigious line-up at the 21st Yard-Fest at Derrylane's Flax Mill.

Talking to Hermann Glaser-Baur at a quiet place in Dungiven's Station Avenue, away from parents, younger brothers and sisters and all the buzz of life during school-holidays, she outlined her dreams.

The amazing thoughts of 13 year-old Dearbhlá McTaggart from Dungiven will be published by several German papers, however we thought local music-lovers should be able to share them first.

Q. Your next birthday will be your 13th. What is the attraction for a girl of your age to the harp – one of the hardest instruments to play?

A. The harp is a beautiful instrument. I was taught the violin at primary school and it didn't do much for me. Just over two years ago, the chance for eight pupils to learn the harp became available, over 20 applied. We were tested for things like sense of rhythm and other skills needed. When I was chosen, I felt that this was a dream starting to come true. I suppose the spark jumped over to me from Nodlaig Brolly who was involved in organising the scheme.

Q. Nodlaig is one of the highest rated harp-players on these shores and far beyond. Is she still teaching you now?

A. Yes and hopefully for a long time yet. I am by no means a 'finished' harp-player and it's good to avail of the skills and knowledge of someone like her.

Q. Others of your age would spend long hours at computer-games or going to discos. Isn't it hard, having to practise the harp instead?

A. Not really, I know that I have to practise every day – otherwise I won't go anywhere. At the beginning there was a certain amount of frustration but when you notice that things you couldn't do on the instrument for a long time become easier and you're able to do them with your eyes closed, it's a great feeling.

Q. Your first solo-gig takes you on the stage at Flax Mill. Many big artists have been on this little stage, Tommy Sands, Eleanor Shanley, Germany's top-guitarist Jrgen Ehle, the French fiddle-maestro Jean-Pierre Rudolph and indeed your teacher with her band, to mention but few. Some artists like Cara Dillon and her first band Oige have stepped from there onto the large stages of this world. Is that frightening?

A. Not frightening, maybe I'll be a little bit nervous but mainly it's a great challenge to give my very best to this very special audience. I have picked tunes for my set which I really love and I think that might come across to the crowd.

Q. Talking about the love of tunes, what other types of music matters for you, any 'heroes'?

A. I like some pop-music, no particular heroes. I think, folk-music is my favourite and within that, I am very fond of Mary Dillon. My mother listens to her a lot, she is an outstanding singer.

Q. There's talk about you going to play in Germany shortly after the gig at Flax Mill. I have been writing about a group of artists – mainly painters – from Berlin recently. They are called “Tendenzen” (tendencies) and their latest project is influenced by Marion Baur, your host at the Flax Mill. They are trying to capture the brutal situation of textile-workers in Bangladesh in paintings. Would you like to meet people like that out there? Do other arts play a role for you?

A. If a musician looks at a good painting, he can write a song about it. If someone has a



13 year-old Dearbhlá McTaggart from Dungiven will perform at this year's Yard-Fest.

song with a meaning, a painter can put that into a picture. Artists should always appreciate each other and I would love to meet up with others from elsewhere. I don't write music – the mastering of the instrument comes first. But some day I hope to do so and if someone else is inspired by my music for whatever his or her art may be – that would be a wonderful thing.

Q. Many famous musicians from Ireland started at young ages and in many cases their parents weren't too impressed at the begin-

ning, worried about the kids playing gigs instead of studying for school. How is your music appreciated at home?

A. I class myself as fortunate, my mother not only appreciates my music, but she also makes every effort to support me and my father loves the fact that I play the harp. My grandfather keeps horses and has cultivated my love to them and my horse riding skills. He knows, the only thing I rate higher than horse-riding is the harp and that doesn't seem to be a problem to him.

Q. September 13th, as every year, will see a high-profile crowd of musicians at the Yard-Fest: German singer/songwriter Reiner Frankl and Willie Drennan with his undoubtedly top-of-the-range special guests from various parts of the planet. How does the 'new kid on the block' feel amongst those big names?

A. Feels good – I can't wait to meet these folk who have performed the world over. To be on stage with them means a lot and hopefully I can play a little part in a great concert.