

# STRINGS AND THINGS

Source Arts Centre, Thurles, County Tipperary, December 18th 2021. Seán Laffey reports for Irish Music Magazine.

Photo : Seán Laffey



Neo-folk-trad group Strings and Things are looking forward to their return into Raglan Road, Florida where their latest album *The Unsolicited Dance* was recorded.

Back home in Thurles for Christmas, this was their last Irish performance before returning Stateside; and it was also the last local hurrah before the 8pm curfew would kill late night gigs in Ireland.

The first thing I noticed when I drove into the theatre's riverside car park was the band's white 11-G Transit van. Emblazoned with their logo and contact details, telling the world these lads are a tight team with ambition, and an identity.

Covid restrictions had the Source's capacity set at 50%. Masks were obligatory and theatre director Brendan Maher checked Covid-certs at the door before entry. We get it. With Christmas just a week away you wouldn't want the "rona virus" as a surprise present, would you?

Singer songwriter Sam Rappaport was the opening act. He has been a regular at the theatre's excellent summer camps that run every July, a

that all the tickets had been sold and "although it was half-full it was a full house".

Eoin Salmon on bass and Eoin Shelly on cajon and cymbal gave their songs a depth that kept the front row rocking and swaying throughout the night. Singer James O'Meara Ryan and banjo/whistle player Seán Mongey worked the crowd to perfection. There were times, such as on *Jigtime* and a cover of the Dead South's *In Hell I'll Be in Good Company* (a song tailor made for the banjo) when the two came physically closer together, trading licks and making that eye contact which is so thrilling, when you see music being made on the edge.

Being a week before Christmas there were seasonal songs too, an eerie version of Chris De Burgh's *Spaceman Came Travelling*, the retelling of the visit of the Magi with a von Däniken twist. Shakin Steven's *Merry Christmas Everyone* and McGowan and Finer's *Fairytale of New York*, a song that had been hijacked by a German discount supermarket and had had very little airplay in Ireland over the holiday

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training in stagecraft that stood him in good stead tonight. He settled in easily, playing finger style on a metal strung acoustic, with his own songs and covers of Dylan's *Knocking on Heaven's Door* and Toots and the Maytals' *Love is Gonna Let Me Down*.

Then the main event and as if by magic the front row filled with a group of die-hard Strings and Things fans. The lads opened with their own composition *Fuaim Gathering*, a rousing crowd pleaser. Their next number *The Unsolicited Dance* with the stage lights, dry ice and a party going on, this was live music like we used to know it. Lead singer James O'Meara Ryan said it was great to see

period. The crowd singing along to each chorus and greeting the final chorus with thunderous applause. More was to follow with banjo maestro Seán Mongey giving us a terrific version of *Transformed/Father Kellys*. In a quieter moment James O'Meara Ryan reflected on the band's beginnings: "About 8 years ago we played in the Foyer here, we had no gear and barely had our own instruments. The staff at the Source believed in us, and we believed in ourselves, and that's a message we'd like to leave you with, anything is possible even in these dark times, all you have to do is believe." They left us with an anthem, a manifesto for a better future, *Folsom Prison Blues*.

Afterwards there were chats and selfies with friends, family and fans who have known the lads and watched their development as musicians, entertainers and all round good guys.

At the car park at 11pm I took a picture of their logo on the side of that white van, remembering a similar shot I'd captured 40 years ago of another vehicle that would carry a bunch of friends on a lifetime of music, that was Clannad. Strings and Things do it differently of course, but from what I saw tonight they have so much love from their own people to keep them entertaining us for many years to come.

For more [www.stringsandthings.band](http://www.stringsandthings.band)  
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