

Singer/songwriter and musician Joe Kenny speaks of his life in music

Belfast 89 FM
LOVIN' THE 60s & 70s



Nigel Blair, Belfast 89FM.

My column this month features singer/song-writer Joe Kenny, a man with a wonderful personality and smile that could light up any room.

Joe was born in Newry, and in his early years he lived in Dromintee, a small village in County Armagh; he now resides in Belfast with his wife and family. Joe was born with the condition glaucoma and had limited sight until he was five, when he lost his sight completely overnight.

At our interview I asked Joe had he any memory of having sight. Joe said, "I have retained some memory of colours, and really that's about it." Joe also told me his mother insisted he attend piano lessons at the age of six. He recalled hating it at the time but now knows these lessons were the foundation of his musical journey. Joe smiled and went on to say, "I took up playing drums at the age of 11 and tortured my neighbours for hours playing along to bands like Guns n Roses and Metallica. I started playing guitar at the age of 12 with an old acoustic my granda gave me. It had been battered about to

"the point it was hardly playable, the strings were so high above the fret-board it hurt my fingers to play. The years of torturous piano lessons paid off though, giving me a good grounding in musical theory, meaning I was able to tune the guitar and work out some chords.

"I was always keen to play for anyone who would listen or pretend to care. When I was at school there were many bands. I can't recall just how many times I went to class late after lunch break; we were so loud we couldn't hear the school bell. I was always messing about with cassette tape recorders, recording myself and sharing song ideas with friends etc., so I guess I really was into song writing from the word go. I found that writing music came much easier to me than writing lyrics; it's something I've had to work at over the years.

"Covid-19 was a big wake-up call for me, with no gigs and with venues closing. It was around this time I took my writing seriously; if not, life would have just passed me by. At that time I recorded my first self-penned songs and released a 7 track EP 'Perfect Fool.' Since then I have released three singles. I am currently in the process of returning to the studio to record some new songs and just can't wait; the next album will be entitled, 'It's Been Too Long.'"

Joe was keen to mention a few people that had influenced him along his journey. He recalled at school how his music teacher had secured funding to buy guitars, drums and amps. He



said, "As young children, we thought this was amazing and great encouragement to budding musicians.

"So many people have shown me so much over the years, my thanks to them all. I moved to England for a while to study sound engineering. Whilst at college I met a fantastic person, a producer by the name of Paul Cobbold, who had worked as sound engineer for many of the chart toppers of the day. He somehow found himself teaching a lot of students, who were blind or partially sighted, the finer points of sound engineering and music production. He was inspiring, both in the way he taught and with his enthusiasm for music. He became a good friend of mine and ended up co-owning a recording studio in Leeds. He was also blind. I was in my early twenties and he was ten years older and he inspired me with

his 'Never settle for anything other than the best' attitude.

"Thank you Nigel for inviting me on to your radio show, it has been a highlight for me. You have a way of making your guests relaxed. I have been able to speak of my first ticket-only show at the Sunflower, and play my own music live on air. Shows like yours are vital for us independent musicians to showcase our work and hopefully increase our audience, switching their interest to the music we make."

Joe told me his wife Louise and children, Niamh age 17, Struan 13, Oisín 6, and Eunan 7mths, endure his tapping on the table, chairs, and anything that comes to hand. Whatever he is tapping out, I appreciate his music and hope to have him back in the studio soon with his new album.

Nigel