Cooking up a storm

Down on her farm Larissa Tormey is cooking up a storm. The ingredients are novel to the music scene, Irish country with a Russian flavour. The recipe is going down a treat with fans, writes Michael Commins

Cougars Don’t Cry

is the third album from Larissa, the Russian opera singer who met a Westmeath bachelor at a party night in Moscow. From Russia with Love weaved its own spell and the girl who had hardly a word of English back then is now fluent in the language and very much at home on the farm in Kilbeggan.

Larissa is delighted with the response to her latest album, which was produced by Peter Ware over in the UK.

The blend is good and warm, with a healthy sprinkling of country classics, some newer songs and two traditional Irish songs that have charmed hearts around the world.

Danny Boy has been covered by some of the best-known names in show-business history, including Elvis Presley, Jim Reeves, Johnny Cash, Bing Crosby and Judi Durham and The Seekers, but never before (to our knowledge) has it been sung with such beauty in both English and Russian as by Larissa.

The gentle beauty of her native language lends a special mystique to this rendition and you don’t have to understand a word to know that something special is happening here. Music truly is the language of the soul.

“I am amazed at the response to Danny Boy,” says Larissa.

“People have different views on their other favourite songs on my new album, but they all seem to like my version of Danny Boy. It is wonderful that people here in Ireland like me singing this song so well. They certainly do like the Russian flavour to it and I am so happy about that.”

Larissa has also included I’ll Take You Home Again Kathleen on the album. “This is another beautiful song with a melody that suits my voice and style of singing. I love it and I had to put it on the album.”

Such has been the response to these two songs that Larissa is thinking of choosing material for a folk-oriented album. “Some people feel my voice is especially suited to folk music and it is an avenue that I might go down for my next album. “Folk music crosses all boundaries and I feel I would be very comfortable singing folk songs too,” says Larissa.

Country music dominates the rest of the new album, with a delightful re-working of the John Denver song that has now some fresh lyrics courtesy of Peter Ware and Larissa, and appears as the bouncy Thank God I’m A Country Girl. Other well-known songs include Rambling Man, Everybody’s Somebody’s Fool, When You’re Not

A Dream, Cougars Don’t Cry and Yellow Roses.

The story of the Russian opera singer who ended up living on a farm in the Irish midlands and singing Irish country music continues to fascinate many around the country.

* Keep up to date with Larissa’s music career by checking larissatormey.com or the Larissa Tormey page on Facebook.

Ireland mourns Big Tom

The death of country music legend and farmer Big Tom Mc Bride has evoked a huge outpouring of sadness and regret all over Ireland and further afield.

Big Tom, from Oram near Castleblayney, was the undisputed king of country here in Ireland and remained the foremost country attraction for over five decades. Big Tom and The Mainliners had their first chart success with Gentle Mother back in 1966. Several other hits were to follow down through the years.

The Monaghan farmer was an iconic figure and truly was a national treasure, loved and respected in every parish in the country.

The passing of his beloved wife Rose (nee King) at the end of January, impacted greatly on Tom. He died after a short illness in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda on Tuesday morning.

Tom is survived by his sons Thomas and Dermot, daughters Aisling and Siobhan, the family circle, relatives, neighbours and a vast army of followers who were ever loyal to him down through the years.

RTE GOES COUNTRY

The Late Late Show Country Music Special goes out on RTÉ One on 20 April at 9.30pm. This is the third year of the popular series and aficionados can look forward to a night of music and chat as country comes to town.

The debut country show, which featured Big Tom and a host of younger singers from the circuit, attracted phenomenal viewing figures.

The response to the show took many in RTÉ by surprise and a follow-up show was broadcast on Good Friday in 2017. It is expected that the show on Friday night, hosted by Ryan Tubridy, will adopt an even more casual feel on this occasion, with a nice balance of music and banter. Many of the leading names from the Irish country scene will be in RTÉ for this special night.

The show also hopes to include some short contributions from music followers who have some special stories to tell about the role of country music in their lives.

NELLIE AT MIDDLES

Nellie Duncan has carved out her own niche on regional radio in Ireland. The Offaly woman is regarded by many as the best reader of death notices in the country. It is all in the voice and the ability to empathise with the nature of the occasion.

Nellie always delivers in style. Rural listeners throughout Offaly, Westmeath and Laois have an instant rapport with Nellie. Her accent is pure midlands, as if matured and distilled in the Slieve Blooms. They sing from the same hymn sheet. The lady from Rahan, a few miles from Tullamore, is now in her 23rd year as Midlands Radio. She is as much in love with radio now as the first day she entered the studios, which were then located in William Street in Tullamore. “I love my job and meeting people,” says Nellie. “I think I have only missed three or four days in over 22 years here in reception and administration. It doesn’t take much to make me laugh. The only time I am serious is when I am reading the obituaries.

“All the undertakers know me. I ring them if I am ever in doubt about the pronunciation of some townland or village. The local pronunciation is always the correct one and it is nice to get it right. I read the death notices every weekend and bank holidays and the listeners know me well after all the years.”

Nellie is also one of the best-known radio receptionists among the country music fraternity and has worked on the country shows on Midlands Radio for many years. She is the person who takes all the calls on Joe Cooney’s country shows on Midlands Radio each night from Monday to Friday.

“I absolutely love country music and dancing. I remember when we started off, a guest presenter from the music scene would come in every Wednesday night and host the two-hour show. I got to meet so many of them during those times. I remember one special night when the American singer George Hamilton co-presented the show with Sandy Kelly. We all went out to dinner afterwards. He was so nice and a proper gentleman. We had a few scoops as well.

“Paddy O’Brien, Mike Denver, John Hogan and so many more, I’ve met them all and enjoyed their music. Brendan Grace and Conal Gallen are among my favourite comedians.

“I am always in good humour. I can’t understand people being in bad humour. There is too much doom and gloom out there. I just laugh and they can like it or lump it, but that’s me and the way I am and I’m not going to change now.”

There’s only one Nellie Duncan, the pride of the Midlands.

CL