

Tommy Sands, Co Down's singer, songwriter and social activist has achieved something akin to legendary status in his own lifetime.

From the pioneering days with the highly influential Sands Family, bringing Irish Music from New York's Carnegie Hall to Moscow's Olympic Stadium, he has developed into one of the most powerful songwriters and enchanting solo performers in Ireland today.

His songwriting, which draws the admiration of Nobel Poet Laureate Seamus Heaney and father of folk music Pete Seeger, prompts respected US magazine "Sing Out" to regard him as "the most powerful songwriter in Ireland, if not the rest of the world".

His songs, like *There were Roses*, and *Daughters and Sons*, which have been recorded by Joan Baez, Kathy Matthea, Dolores Keane, Sean Keane, Frank Patterson, Dick Gaughan, The Dubliners and many others have been translated into many languages and are currently included in the English language syllabus in German secondary schools.

Although constantly performing on stages all around the world he prides in taking his music down from the lights and into the darker corners of society. One of his current projects, teaching underprivileged prisoners in Reno, Nevada to write their own song with which to defend themselves in court is currently creating a wide spread stir in the world of community art in the United States. Back home in Northern Ireland he has just completed a CD written with Protestant and Catholic schoolchildren about their own areas, in towns and villages around Northern Ireland. During the Good Friday Agreement Talks, his impromptu performance with a group of children and Lambeg drummers was described by Northern Ireland Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon as "a defining moment in the Peace Process".

Mary McAleese, who was cast in a romantic role with Tommy in a local play just before she became President of the Irish Republic has kept up the friendship and periodically calls upon him for advice on cultural events.

Sands, "It would take a mean bastard to dislike him", according to Eamon McCann in Hot Press, has a way with words to charm and disarm and coax a chorus out of the tightest jawed audience.

In May 2002 Tommy Sands received an honorary doctorate of Letters from The University of Nevada for his outstanding work as musician and ambassador for peace and understanding and, May 18th was pronounced "Tommy Sands Day in Reno".

In December 2002 although the Northern Ireland Assembly had been stood down, Sands managed to persuade the Members to return for a special Christmas musical party together. As one politician after another joined him on stage for a song, Loyalist leader David Ervine was heard to remark, "Tommy Sands is the only man, without a private army, who can intimidate me."

The concert which was recorded for the Sands weekly radio programme, later received a special award at the "World Festival of TV and Radio" in New York.

Notable Quotes

Tommy Sands is one of the most important songwriters in Ireland if not the rest of the world.... SING OUT (USA)

The gentle songs of a gentle man, ringing out above the tumult and the shouting....Through people like Tommy Sands there will be an answer....BELFAST TELEGRAPH

Most gifted songwriter...with an ability to write on serious subjects which come across as songs rather than sermons...also well able to be extremely funny in the way he puts words together....IRISH TIMES

You'd have to be some mean class of bastard to dislike this music...Eamon McCann (HOT PRESS)

"There were Roses" is certainly one of the best songs ever written about the "Irish Problem"...TO BEAT THE DRUM (Scotland)

Timeless Sands still with irresistible lure....IRISH NEWS

Tommy Sands has achieved that difficult but wonderful balance between knowing and loving the traditions of his home and being concerned with the future of the whole world....PETE SEEGER

I love the version of 'Where Have All The Flowers Gone' by Tommy Sands. That is the best version that has ever been recorded. It is just chilling, isn't it?.....JOHN STEWART (KINGSTON TRIO)

In two minutes the entire audience were singing with him "Armenia, Armenia", a very moving performer...PRAVDA

Richly talented singer and songwriter....BOSTON GLOBE

One moment my tears were of sorrow, the next moment they were tears of joy, his songs are unforgettable stories.....RADIO LEIPZIG

You feel you can trust the singer as well as the song.....SEAMUS HEANEY

Sands sang two ballads... everyone in the room was mesmerised. Hairs stood at attention on peoples arms. Eyes moistened....Wayne Melton (RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL)

Sands is a true weaver of dreams and spells.....Oliver P Sweeney (HOT PRESS) (December 2001)

Stirring spellbinding performance...Earle Hitchener (Irish Echo and Wall Street Journal)

Tommy Sands is the only man, without a private army, who can intimidate me.....Loyalist Politician David Ervine

(After being coaxed onto stage to sing with Sands at "Re-Imagining Ireland", Charlottesville VA May 2003).