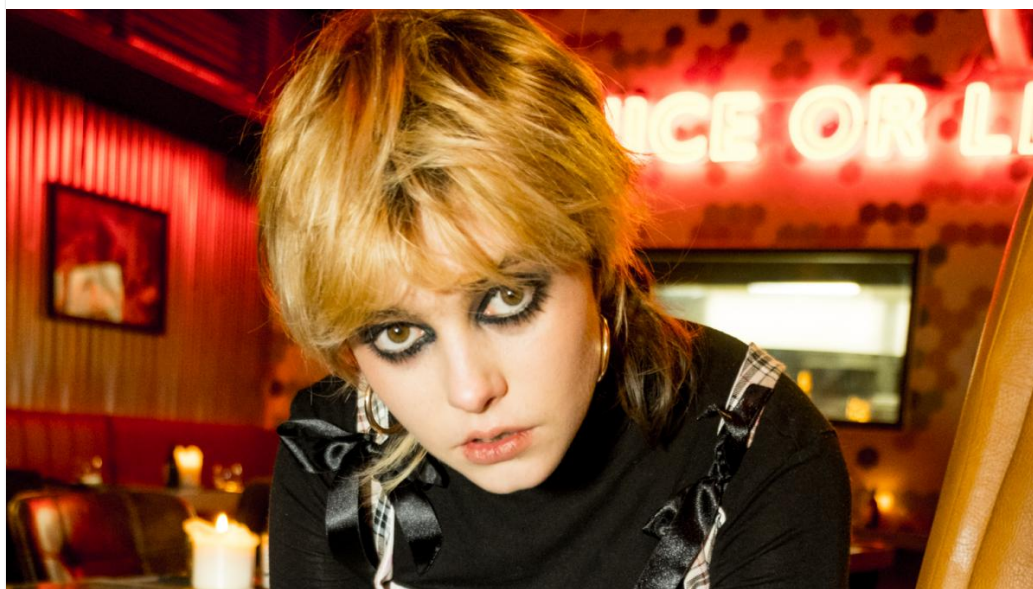


MUSIC

Ciara Lindsey, aka Kynsy: a fully fledged visionary

The Dublin singer-songwriter tells Kate Demolder about the ever-evolving musical experimentation that drives her 'colourful, rowdy pop'



Kynsy has a busy line-up of summer festivals this year

FNATIC

Kate Demolder

Saturday April 09 2022, 12.01am BST, The Sunday Times

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Right in the middle of March, the singer and songwriter Ciara Lindsey, now known as Kynsy, appeared on *The Tommy Tiernan Show* on RTE Television. She wore large heart earrings, thick and

emerald green, with an oversized T-shirt dress and hefty platform boots. Ireland was not yet fully in the grip of post-lockdown abandon, but a cultural shift was nonetheless in the air. Earlier in the evening, podcast hosts Vogue Williams and Joanne McNally had spoken playfully about new beginnings and going on tour.

On the show Kynsy, 24, performed her latest single *New Year*, a pulsating indie-pop track reminiscent of nu-rave and Arctic Monkeys-adjacent ennui. The Dubliner wrote the song on New Year's Eve, as the title suggests, while attending parties and listening to "a lot of Róisín Murphy".

"At the time I had a real desire to celebrate the turn of the year by doing something creative," she tells me. "With the song, I wanted to explore the idea of someone looking for meaning as the clock edges towards midnight." *New Year* does that, while feeling like a valuable relic from the era when large groups of people assembled, lush and wet, to hear music without worry.

Kynsy speaks to me from London, where she's recording EP number two ("it's under wraps still, but it'll be really fun") and she's trying not to disturb fellow Airbnb guests with the call. "I've been here the past two weeks," she says. "I'd love to live in London, and I keep thinking about it, really intensely actually. But I also love home. I'm playing loads in England over the summer, so maybe that will tide me over."

In conversation, Kynsy is as energetic and enthusiastic as any young artist on the cusp of something big might be, pivoting from the changeable back-and-forth nature of her sound to jokes about how "weird" she was as a teen. She's quick to satirise her own behaviour with a scornful quip, or to laugh about the gaffes of others, and yet her music emits a fraught tenderness.

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She grew up in Templeogue, in a family that Richard Curtis might have scripted to convey a creative dynasty. Her father, Steve Lindsey, worked extensively within the Irish music scene with acts such as Massive Attack, U2 and the Cranberries, finally branching into film-music supervision where he worked on *Mission: Impossible* and *Welcome to Sarajevo*. He still gigs, and is the managing director of Elevate Music, a music publishing company. Kynsy's mother, the journalist and playwright Fiona Looney, is best known for her *Irish Daily Mail* column and the play *Dandelions*. According to Louis Walsh lore, she played a role in setting up Dublin's answer to Take That, Boyzone, in the early 1990s.

"Music was, and still is, a big influence on the house," Kynsy agrees. "And I think that's massively influenced my style and my songwriting. Dad was the one who introduced me to Bowie, John Lennon and Talking Heads, and then the Beatles were always on in the car. But, funnily, I didn't gravitate to that sort of music until I was in my late teens. I was all about chart music.

"Then I grew up a bit and found myself sort of depressed. My dad obviously noticed it and started showing me slightly 'weirder' music, and how the artists like the ones I mentioned were cool for being weird. I remember finding that really powerful."

In 2020 she released two singles, *Cold Blue Light* and *Happiness Isn't a Fixed State*. Her deft lyrics and opening riffs earned her comparisons to the Strokes' singer Julian Casablancas — a worn-out accolade, perhaps, but there was a precision to Kynsy's writing that rendered the songs deeper and more urgent. Then

NME proclaimed her an “essential emerging artist for 2021”, and *Dork* magazine soon followed.

Cold Blue Light was inspired by a New Year’s party where an attendee (“an actor we all sort of knew”) made racist remarks to those around him. “It was quite upsetting and stuck with me,” she remembers. “The song is about the bullies we all encounter, and looking for meaning and balance between destruction and hope. It was also filmed in this mad rich person’s house where it was freezing and, weirdly, had blue lights scattered about. So we were literally dancing in cold, blue light.” The result is a catchy pop hit, full of jagged intensity and co-ordinated synth.

Similarly, *Happiness Isn’t a Fixed State* teeters between the positive and negative. “I wrote that about a relationship ending,” she says. “And I wanted to convey that sometimes you have to laugh the pain away or look at negativity head-on in order to feel positive emotions and have positive thoughts again. I wanted to create a sort of yin and yang of colourful fun with complex emotions.”

Almost all of Kynsy’s music is influenced by real life, be it her experience or that of others. “I like to look at things from a character’s point of view,” she tells me. “The emotion is always there from my side, but I do try to maintain a distance and look at it from different viewpoints. I think a lot of it is dissociation though, and maybe self-protection too. It’s a lot easier to view a situation from someone else’s side when you’re having strong emotions about it.”

Her most recent single, *Mr Nice Guy*, co-produced by James Dring (Gorillaz/Jamie T/Sorry) brings a posturing, synth-drenched experimentation most young artists don't reach until later in their careers. It was nominated for the Choice Music Prize song of the year in 2021, losing out only to Dermot Kennedy. She's since racked up further praise from the musical elite — including being named as one of the *Irish Times's* 50 People to Watch in 2022 and hailed “an Irish heart with American-sized ambition” by UK music magazine *DIY*.

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“It's so refreshing to see artists like Kynsy coming out of this country,” says Malaki, the Dublin hip-hop artist. “The world she has created is pushing boundaries and truly genre-defying. Her music is chaotic and comfortable and always complemented with visuals that are so signature to her style.”

“She's a fully fledged visionary,” says Grian Chatten, the lead vocalist of Fontaines DC. “She has the ideas and the producer's knack to realise them herself. She eats the books up too.”

Kynsy begins listing the shows and festivals she's booked to play this coming summer. “It's so exciting but I'm also like 50 per cent terrified,” she laughs. “The two-year [Covid] break didn't help. Also, for me, my favourite part isn't necessarily releasing music, but pushing myself to make different, weirder songs every time. I actually sort of feel numb when the track is released. I'm at my most fulfilled when I'm in the thick of

actually making music, and I feel like it's kind of different to anything I've ever done before. That's success to me.

“When people ask, I describe my music as ‘colourful, rowdy pop’ but it's always evolving into something more interesting and unusual — which must be kind of annoying for listeners but it's what really drives me.”

Her latest EP involves strings — “which made me feel like I'd made it” — kick-starting another level of experimentation. “As I continue to push myself, I want to influence others too, like Bowie and LCD Soundsystem have done to me. I want to influence people to be weirder. And I definitely think I can.” c

Kynsy plays Electric Picnic, Forbidden Fruit and Sea Sessions this summer. Find her on Instagram at [@kynsy](#)

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MUSIC

Gaelic drill music pioneer Selló: 'I dream so big, man'

The pioneer of Gaelic drill music tells Kate Demolder why the world needs to know 'what black Irish voices sound like'



Selló says black Irishness is a theme in his latest tracks

BRYAN MEADE

Kate Demolder

Friday January 21 2022, 12.01am GMT, The Sunday Times

“Music has always massively influenced my life,” 21-year-old Selló, real name Michael Afam, tells me over a cappuccino. He’s Ireland’s newest prodigy, or so industry heads insist. As a teenager he chose to spend his pocket money on Michael

Jackson and Jay-Z albums, nurturing an instinct that blossomed in school, much to the delight of his classmates in Moyle Park

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that was the only time I ever lost a rap battle. Mr Anderson was sick, he spun me. Absolutely rinsed me. And the worst thing about it? He was a maths teacher.”

Selló is ambitious, you can sense it. He has never attended as a fan any of the arenas in which he now performs (“Imagine asking my ma for money to go? Good one”) and instead listened to rap records and Christy Moore (“he’s the original Irish rapper”) in his bedroom. He’s obsessed with Ireland’s culture, “from chicken fillet rolls to the Gaeltacht to Roy Keane”. He considers himself “as green as the grass”, despite a Nigerian birth certificate. “How could anyone not call me Irish? I’ve never been anywhere else,” he says, pulling away his black hoodie to display the AIG logo of a Dublin GAA jersey.

Being “unapologetically Irish”, he peppers his musical output with local references and snatches of the Irish language such as “Seasaigí, that’s my clann, my family” in *Dublin*. His videos feature friends eating Snax, wielding hurleys, wearing GAA jerseys and waiting for Dublin Bus. He samples Sinéad O’Connor and drinks stout. His message couldn’t be clearer: “I’m showing people that I’m black, and I’m Irish, and I really do this.”





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“One time I even rapped against one of the teachers — the only time I ever lost a rap battle”
BRYAN MEADE

A pioneer of drill music in Ireland, Selló has no acts to follow. “All I ever wanted to do was find my niche, and Gaelic drill [fusing Irish culture with the modern drill/hip-hop sound] secures that,” he says. “I want to be unique.” His lyrics in recent tracks such as *Oggy* and *As Gaeilge* communicate the narratives of home, his west Dublin accent standing in defiance of the main criticism of Irish drill: that it sounds too English. “The world needs to know what black Irish voices sound like,” he says, in an earnest tone. “Everyone knows what Irish people sound like, but most people outside of Ireland have never heard voices like mine — and I’m hoping to change that.”

Ireland has had a small but committed rap scene since the 1980s, rising in tandem with the hip-hop and breakdancing culture championed by artists such as the Rathcoole Posse and Craic Pipe. Apart from artists such as Rejjie Snow — who got snapped up by the team behind Migos and Young Thug — it was mainly parodies and comedy rappers who got the attention. That was until the drill scene began, based in two main hubs: Dublin and Athlone. “Drill” means to fight or retaliate, and “can

be used for anything from females getting dolled up to all-out war in the streets,” according to the Dro City rapper Pacman,

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(Nialler9), “but the potential in places like Dundalk and collectives like A92 [named after a postal code in Drogheda] is massive.”

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“Selló is one of the more underground artists doing his thing,” Nialler9 says. “And that’s interesting because it’s like he’s doing it for his fanbase. I really like what he’s doing, such as sampling Irish music on his tracks, which makes it really deliberate and memorable. Artists like him are getting huge numbers online without any help and big labels are recognising this. It’s a really exciting moment, as we don’t know where it’s gonna go. A few years ago someone like Stormzy would’ve been considered too small to make waves outside of the UK and I think Selló is well able to do something like that too.”

In November 2021 Selló supported the Belfast hip-hop trio Kneecap, also known for bilingual rap and articulacy. Both acts, though hellbent on promoting nu-wave Celtic diplomacy, tend towards scallywaggery. Staunch Kneecap fans and music critics certainly took note of the young Dubliner. Last December Selló was named breakthrough artist of the year at the Black and Irish awards, a black-tie gala held at the Hilton, Dublin airport.

In 2022 he has dropped a new track, *Take Me to Church*, and been featured in several “ones to watch” lists. “Dublin, and

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that’s embracing the drill sound, the trap sound and the grime sound altogether. His choices are distinctly Irish but also pay homage to his African roots, and the UK scene as well. He’s the one who has really brought them together.”

Selló often looks over his shoulder when discussing his next moves, such is his seriousness. “I have huge plans for this year, it’s gonna be big,” he grins. First he has to get through college; social studies and psychology in the Institute of Technology Carlow to be precise. “Music was actually my last resort,” he says. “I wanted to do acting or fashion, that’s why I came to music so late. But now that I’m here all I want to do is pimp up Irish music and bring it international. There are 80 million people with Irish links around the world, so there’s an appetite out there for my sort of thing.”

Pushback is common, he agrees. “It’s an everyday thing. I think they see me as someone who is trying to be Irish, but how could I be anything else? Listen, I’m out there. I’m going to get hate regardless. I think that influences how I design my videos; I try not to overdo it. I know other Irish groups will reference intrinsically Irish things like gardai and spice bags, but I feel like there can be a barrier to me doing that, ’cause I might look like I’m pretending I’m from here. Saying that, I’m totally pushing the boat out in my next two videos. I’m gonna overdo it.”

Black Irishness is a theme in Selló's latest tracks, something we're also going to see from the likes of Denise Chaila and Feli

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— on to which the fada was added. Just don't call him Stormzy. "Ah, people always say it to me — that we look alike. And I get it, because I'm tall and have a beard, but I do want to be my own man," he says, checking over his shoulder again. "Saying that, if anyone is set to play him in a movie of his life, it better be me."

So what's next for the 21-year-old with the world at his feet? "I dream so big, man," he says, swaying in his seat. "Small-minded people tend to look at me differently when I speak about them [dreams], so I'm hesitant to do so, but I want to do big things. I want to have that Jay-Z status, because at the time he started making music the scene wasn't what it was — like it is now in Ireland. I want to do that for me and for others, to make a scene and pioneer it."

Can he do it? "He's gonna be massive," Nealo predicts. "If he was from the UK he would already be huge. The Irish hip-hop and drill scenes are a little bit behind, but we're catching up. Ireland has incredible rap and drill artists, but there's nothing really here for them in terms of industry. As for Selló, it's only a matter of time."

Dublin

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MUSIC

Kneecap: the bad boy rappers of Belfast

Lairy, anti-establishment and censored by RTE, the hip-hop trio reveal their thoughtful side



From left: Kneecap's Mo Chara, DJ Próvaí and Móglaí Bap
TIMOTHY O'CONNELL

Kate Demolder

Saturday June 25 2022, 12.01am BST, The Sunday Times

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When the three members of Kneecap — Móglaí Bap, 29, Mo Chara, 24, and DJ Próvaí, 34, were teenagers, growing up in Belfast amid curfews, ceasefires and peace agreements, they had something in common: a poster that each had Blu-Tacked to their bedroom wall. And what was it of? “Bobby Sands,” they

reply in unison. “He was the subject of our folk tales, our lullabies,” DJ Próvaí laughs. “He sat up next to Eminem for me.” Mo Chara, a decade his junior, chimes in: “My room had Bobby and a load of page 3 cutouts. Not much has changed.”

We meet in the group’s shared home: a terraced red-brick, a stone’s throw from one of the city’s dividing peace walls. The house boasts all the trappings of a bachelor outfit — empty Buckfast bottles, a fireplace-cum-ashtray, unwashed boxers, a dog-eared copy of *The Catcher in the Rye* — something akin to an early Bosch painting. They’ve been here about six years. “Too long,” Móglai Bap says. They met while “taking MDMA and speaking Irish. It’s hard not to be friends after that,” Mo Chara laughs. “There was a mini subculture of us back then, [in which we] all played music and organised club nights and festivals and stuff, and we just decided one night to make Kneecap. It came about really naturally, actually.”

That night was December 16, 2017, seven months after more than 12,000 people marched along the Falls Road calling for an Irish Language Act that would grant the Irish language equal status with English in Northern Ireland. The group’s first song, *Cearta* (Irish for “rights”), was the group’s response, coming about in a typically anti-establishment style, which the trio now court.

“A fella and I were spray-painting the night before the march,” Móglai Bap says, pointing out the wall he used, “and it was only when I got out ‘Cearta’ and an arrow that would direct people to the start point [of the organised march] that undercover [police] in a Ford Insignia caught us out. We ran separate ways and he got caught, only to refuse to speak English to them, and he spent a night in a cell. We knew we wanted to do something from there.”

Since then the group’s popularity has increased around Ireland and in diaspora-heavy hubs such as Liverpool, Glasgow and New York. Their sound is distinctive: a signature blend of Bolshevik rap, lairy hip-hop and republican-bent lyrics. They write in Irish and English, mainly the former as they hail from

families full of staunch Irish language supporters, many of whose efforts for the culture are still recalled.

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“My da set up the Cultúrlann [cultural centre in West Belfast] along with a few others,” Móglaí Bap says, “and Mo Chara’s da is a black-cab taxi driver, giving tours up and down these roads all day.” Their decision to conceal their identities, they say, is a legacy of those times and the Irish language activists that preceded them, acting as an allure and disguise; a disguise that doesn’t always work. DJ Próvaí, whose bid at anonymity includes wearing a balaclava at every public-facing event, lost his job teaching children owing to his involvement in the band.

As for their chosen names, the decision-making process was considerably tongue-in-cheek. “Kneecap” refers to the infamous and barbaric IRA method of punishment. Móglaí Bap’s mother used to cut his hair with a bowl “and I kinda looked like Mowgli from the *Jungle Book*, and then a bap is a common nickname in Belfast because of the Belfast Bap, which was created for poor people during the Famine,” he says, his thickset accent rolling over vowels.

“Mo Chara is a common enough phrase in Belfast,” Mo Chara chimes in. “Have you ever seen [the 2004 film] *Man About Dog? Aye*, that explains it.”

“For me it was obvious,” DJ Próvaí laughs. “I was actually called Próglaí [a mix of Próvaí and Mowgli] as a child. But DJ Próvaí kind of suited me more as I got older.”

There’s a saying in West Belfast, Mo Chara tells me, encapsulating the tendency towards self-sufficiency. “Ná habair é, déan é [don’t say it, do it],” he says with a smile, condensing the group’s ethos. “Talk about it after doing it,” Móglaí Bap says with a laugh.

“We want people to take whatever they want from our music,” Mo Chara says. “We’re not looking to politicise or radicalise or teach or anything. We’re just looking to have a good time.”

A good time to Kneecap, one gleans from listening to them, can range from Class A drugs to collecting dole to chastising Stormont, which has led to them being “banned” from outlets like RTE (owing to “drug references and cursing”). In 2019 they were condemned after leading chants of “Get the Brits out now” at a pub that the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge had visited 24 hours earlier. *Brits Out*, their most popular number, was written shortly after. Their lyrics are aggressive — not a natural fit for mainstream events — but the bad-boy image is good for ticket sales.

“RTE banning us was the best thing that could have ever happened,” Móglaí Bap says, laughing. “What’s cooler to a teenager than three banned lads rapping?”

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“Kneecap is one of the most authentic bands I’ve ever seen,” the Dublin rapper Mango says. “They’re a middle finger to the status quo, but also welcoming to anyone who wants to buzz with them or their culture. They’re true rock’n’ roll stars but they rap *as Gaeilge* [in Irish]. They’re also the nicest buzzers you’ll ever meet.”

In this lies the intrigue of their endless contradictions. They are respectful: as we speak, a woman learning Irish asks them to help with her homework and each of them graciously contributes. Yet their music is combative: the line “It’s gonna be a bloodbath” echoes through one of their tracks. While they profess to be open-minded (they are trying to cut down on meat consumption, but “love ham”), they are politically dogmatic (“Why are bins privatised in the South?”). They are deeply cultured but often market themselves as “low-life scum”.

Theirs is the fast-growing, Good Friday agreement babies, demographic of working-class, politically charged young people, bolstered by successful social campaigns. “It’s happening in the North and the South,” Móglaí Bap says. “The same-sex marriage and abortion referenda have allowed people to believe that change is possible and worth going for.”

“People in the South believe that just because of 1998 [the Good Friday agreement] that everything is hunky-dory up here,” Mo Chara echoes. “It’s not. Móglaí Bap’s dad was sectarianly abused on the bus the other day. More people have committed suicide in the North since the Troubles than people were killed during them. There’s a whole, complicated cocktail of reasons as to

why that's happening — lack of support, poverty, identity, and drugs too, which people have accused us of glorifying, but we're not. Was Al Pacino glorifying them in *Scarface*? We're glamorising nothing. These are just the things we see every day."

Each member of the group knows men who were "lifted" (interned without trial owing to suspicion of being involved with the IRA) or beaten with "nails sticking out of hurls", the punishment still meted out by paramilitaries, or even shot. This is why they say they are looking to pivot from the "idiots we have in government now" to a more socialist administration, focused on people rather than houses.

"Sinn Fein is topping polls by speaking to young people across the country and allowing us to believe that a progressive, socialist, united Ireland is possible," DJ Próvaí claims. "If you were to ask us to have a conservative punt at when that will be? Fifteen years, tops."

As we close the double doors of Kneecap's studio, passing by murals of the boxer Michael Conlan, hunger strikers and the Celtic footballer Jimmy Johnstone, the three men agree that their immediate aims are to unite the working class, play the festivals that allow them, record a debut album and hit the big screen.

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“There’s a movie being made about us,” Móglaí Bap says, later declaring that filming on the “documentary but also kind of fiction” project starts in September. “We’ve learnt not to drink too much Bucky [Buckfast] before you go on stage. A good thing to know before going in front of the camera.”

Kneecap play Feile an Phobail in Belfast on August 12

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