Few singers and musicians in Co. Wexford are as renowned and well respected as Ger Busher. Ger, whose musical career spans four decades, spoke to Lucy Costigan about his early musical influences, the halcyon years of "the Bushers", the devastation of losing his brother and musical partner, Paddy, in a freak accident at Ferrycarraig in 1993, and his struggle to pick up the pieces and keep on making music.

"I suppose you could say we're a musical family. My father sang 'Boolavogue' at the first ever Singing Pubs competition. My sister Josephine used to play keyboards with us in the '70s, and Celine was a well-known pantomime performer. Everyone knows Paddy's prowess as a singer and accordion player, and Jimmy still sings and plays the drums. My first performance was in a show in the theatre Royal. I was four at the time. After that I played drums with the CBS school band, under the watchful eye of Brother Casey. Then I joined Byrne's Ceili band, and entered a few Fheis Ceoil competitions with them. I was about 12 or 13 when I joined "the Trend Set". That was the mid '60s, the time of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and Creedance Clearwater Revival. Wexford was alive with bands during the '60s. Everyone played some instrument and the place was full of music. I began playing the guitar. Then in '69 we started on the pub scene. Myself and the two brothers, Paddy and Jimmy, started playing gigs in the Phoenix, with people like Padge Reck and Joe Murphy."

“Wexford was thriving musically. Every second pub had live music at least three nights a week. Myself and Paddy played all over the place, through the showband era of the '70s, at weddings and dinner dances, and in the late '70s we were permanently engaged for three years at Whites and the Talbot. Then from '82 we played every Tuesday night in the Shambles. God, the place used to be really jamb-packed to the rafters. We played all kinds of stuff: '60s, rock, John Denver, Chris de Burgh, Neil Diamond, and numbers from the Irish music scene. The Shambles was the only pub in town to have a gig on Tuesday nights. Then of course there were the Swinging pubs during the festival. Out of about 15 years, the Shambles won the Swinging Pubs 10 times, and were second twice. Those were brilliant times.”
"We certainly had a few highlights over the years. We were on the Gay Byrne hour, where I remember doing a skit on Neil Diamond who was over doing a concert at the time. We played a gig at the Point before an audience of about 6,000. We played with some great traditional singers and musicians, including Christy Moore. We toured England in ’91 which was a great experience. We had a tape out in ’88, and I did a commemorative album for ’98, which was an audio-documentary. The album featured some great Wexford performers and musicians, including Thomas Murray, Des Whelan, Brendan and Alice Wickham, Nicki Bailey, Cyril Murphy, John Joe Sinnott, and the brother, Jimmy. So we've had our moments."

“I was absolutely devastated after Paddy’s accident. I still am devastated. As children we were inseparable. People used to think we were twins. For 24 years we stood side by side, singing and performing. There was the personal tragedy and the professional one. For about eight weeks afterwards I had no interest in singing. I wanted to finish with it. There were a lot of people who rallied around me. I received so many letters and phone-calls from people all over the world who had known Paddy. There was a lot of support. Liam Griffin was probably the one who really pulled me out of it. He asked me to play a gig in the Portholes in Rosslare, so that started me going again.”

“I took a long break in ’93 and ’94 and travelled to the States, to Chicago and San Francisco, and I went to Australia and New Zealand, playing a few gigs. I needed to get away from all those memories. It was something I really needed to do at the time. Slowly I got back into doing gigs in town. I started playing with the other brother, Jimmy, and John Joe Sinnott for a while, doing weddings and dinner-dances. But then John Joe and his girlfriend were in a desperate car crash and, although they recovered, it meant that he was out of the music scene for quite a while. Now I mostly do gigs on my own, but every so often there'll be a session with a few other musicians, so that's good craic.”

“I suppose I'm still on the scene today because I love it. There's a great camaraderie between musicians in Wexford. We're like a kind of family, really. There are so many great musicians who have inspired youngsters to play music over the years. People like Johnny Reck, Paddy Parle, Johnny Clancy, Liam Gall, Nick Kinsella, and Gerry Forde. Wexford is way ahead of a lot of places musically. Over the last few years Waterford and Kilkenny have caught up considerably, but Wexford was the start of it all.
Wexford Life

in the South-East. There is a certain aura about Wexford. Well, it's home for me. My family has never been one to leave Wexford for long. I get invitations from all over the world to visit other musicians who I've met over the years but I wouldn't like to leave Gwen, or our four-year old daughter, Jasmin for very long.”

“These days I do gigs seven nights a week in the summer, and five nights at other times. I'm in the Shambles on Thursday, and O'Faolains on Tuesday. I play a gig at least monthly in Hotel Rosslare, Powers of Ballycallaine, John Murphy's of Carraig-on-Bannow, Corcorans of New Ross, Kavanaghs of Enniscorthy, the Bridge and De La Salle in Waterford, Griffins of Tullow, Joe Doyle's of Ballon in Carlow, Hotel Kilkenny, Mat the Millers and Paris, Texas in Kilkenny. So I keep myself busy! As for the future, I'd like to think I'll be capable of performing when I'm 80, just like Johnny Reck. I suppose music is in the blood, and as long as people remain entertained, I'll never stop doing it."