

Christmas Time in Dublin with Lisa Hannigan and Dylan Haskins

What happens when you pair a Mercury Prize-nominated singer and a counterculture-obsessed broadcaster, set them up in a London radio studio and let them talk about all things arts and culture? You get *Soundings*, the awesome podcast that despite only being two months old has already welcomed very special guest, the Simpsons' Harry Shearer, on to the air. Taking a break from talking about Bjork, Brian Eno and the Barbican, hosts Dylan Haskins and Lisa Hannigan talk us through their perfect Christmas in Dublin.

Lisa: Usually I spend the last few months of the year away singing so the feeling of coming home is a big part of Christmas in Dublin. That [old electricity advert with Dusty Springfield and the hot press](#) has a lot to answer for.

Dylan: Last year was the first time I 'came home' for Christmas. I've always loved Dublin at Christmas time. From 5pm it's dark and when Grafton Street glistens under the sparkling Christmas lights, it's hard not to turn into bit of a sap and start smiling at everybody. When I was younger every Christmas Eve I'd be brought 'into town', as Dubliners call the city centre, to see the Christmas window display in Switzers shop front – now home to [Brown Thomas department store](#).

L: As a country bumpkin, that was one of my favourite family Christmas traditions - driving into town to ooh and aah at all the Christmas lights. Exchequer St and that little lane between Bewley's and Powerscourt are the best as they've the most lights per square inch, which is without doubt the most important criteria in these matters. I am always glad to see them.

D: I love that little lane – no idea what it's called (ed. Johnson's Court, off Grafton Street), but if you're a visitor to Dublin you'll know it when you see the person who's always playing violin there. It's also where [Appleby's Jewellers](#) has sold its wares since the 1950s. I'll usually get something in there for my Mum or my little sister. Further on down that lane and through a few side streets is [Cocoa Atelier](#) – the best chocolate shop in the city and one of the many independent shops that seemed to open up after the 2008 crash when space finally became more affordable – see also [Elastic Witch Records](#) on Middle Abbey Street and the [Gutter Bookshop](#) in the quieter OId City part of Temple Bar.

L: I always end up in [Hodges Figgis](#), the big bookshop on Dawson Street, and like many Dublin establishments is mentioned in the pages of James Joyce's Ulysses – it's the perfect place to spend a few hours wandering amongst shelves, simultaneously trying to buy all your presents at once and warm up again. Failing that, there are always hot whiskies in [the Long Hall](#). If you sit in the window you can easily spot people you know and drag them inside for a Christmas pint.

D: There's something about the Long Hall and its dark red and mahogany interior at Christmas time. There's never any room, but that's the sign of a good pub in Dublin. There's a particularly giddy buzz in Dublin at Christmas as recent emigrants return from Australia, New York, Canada and London and reunite with friends. What excites me most is knowing that everyone will be there. I remember one night last year that began with the civility of the Long Bar and ended early that morning sitting by the canal with friends drinking a bottle of wine purchased under the counter from a late night Indian restaurant. It's important to appreciate the canal.

Dublin likes its music and one of the main things I noticed when I first came to London is how much more fun people have at gigs in Dublin. [Vicar Street](#) is the best medium sized venue in the city and can have a great vibe when one of our best Irish bands are playing a Christmas gig. Two years ago I actually saw Lisa play there. This year it's [Villagers](#).

L: It's strange to say this about an event I've only ever been to once, but I feel that [Glen Hansard's Christmas Eve busk](#) on Grafton Street is already a part of what that day means. I had never been a part of it before as I was usually snowed in down the country on Christmas Eve, but being there last year was one of the most joyful experiences I've ever had. Though I'm a pretty useless busker as I'm under 6 feet and have a very quiet voice. This year I'll bring some sleigh bells to be audible.

D: After Christmas day is done I try and get out of the house. What I love about Dublin is that even in the very centre of the city, if you go to the top of a building, you can still see the mountains sheltering it to the west and on south into Wicklow. A winter walk to somewhere like the ruined and haunted [Hell Fire Club](#) at the summit of Montpelier Hill in the Dublin Mountains is a good bet. When you reach the top and turn around and the city is laid out beneath you, you get a good idea of just how small Dublin really is.