

Ed Sheeran's hero opens up on success, regrets & importance of speaking out

Boston based Luke Concannon - the man who inspired Ed Sheeran

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“Luke Concannon is my childhood hero. I grew up listening to him. I went on tour with him doing guitar tech and learned everything there is to know about performing, writing songs, singing, playing guitar, everything. I owe a large amount of my career to him.” – Ed Sheeran



A young Ed Sheeran with Luke Concannon

Luke Concannon, cited by Ed Sheeran as a childhood hero, is a Boston based English singer-songwriter with deep Irish roots. Since finding success at an early age with cult duo Nizlopi, Concannon has gone on a journey of self-discovery that has been heavily influenced by his cross-cultural upbringing.

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In a revealing new interview on the Love and Courage podcast, Concannon talks openly of searching for newfound meaning after early success, regrets over his 2005 BBC Top of The Pops appearance, and his long-standing relationship with Ed Sheeran.

Concannon attributes his social consciousness to growing up in middle England in an Irish-English family that straddled the class divide.

“Both my grandparents lived a hard, working-class life, and I remember that soaking into me. Why is it hard? Why do people have to work this hard, and be so stressed?”

“I think having a foot in both worlds – in England and in Irish culture, in a working-class world and a middle-class world – created some tension that had to be resolved.”

Growing up with Irish music and song, in particular, helped him start singing at an early age, and led him to form Nizlopi with friend John Parker at the age of just 13. In general, Concannon points to the influence Irish culture has had on generations of British artists, from Lennon and McCartney to the likes of Ed Sheeran more recently.

And it's not just a political consciousness and a love of music that he got from his family. Nizlopi's success was also boosted by the band's DIY, family business approach; County Clare-based musician Kieron Concannon was their manager, his mum worked on finances, his cousin was their social media manager, and his girlfriend also worked with them.

"It was like a cottage industry - and somehow we outcompeted the major record labels. And it was like your local grocery shop selling more vegetables than all the Tesco's in the country one week. It was mad, what we managed to do."

His one major regret from that period came in 2005, when Nizlopi performed live on Top of the Pops to four million viewers – Concannon found himself torn between the desire to make a statement about the Iraq War, and paralyzing fear of the consequences.



Luke Concannon

"My soul, my heart, was saying: 'There's something bigger than your little career here. You've got to say something about the fact that we're in this racist, imperial war in Iraq that has since led to the Syrian refugee crisis, to ISIS, to a lot of the crises that we see now in the world.'"

"But I was too scared to do it. There was this fear that came up. Everyone around me had worked so hard to get us there – had broken their back, risked their health, money, livelihood – to get us there. And if I go on some political rant we could get shut down, and never allowed on any radio or TV stations, because this is the guy you can't trust. Sinéad O'Connor was shut out from a lot of things because she was "too dangerous." And so I didn't do it – and I've regretted it ever since."

"At some point, if you want to have longevity, you have to raise consciousness – you have to serve something bigger than just fame, sex, drugs, rock and roll. It doesn't have to be totally political, but you need to raise the consciousness of the people that you're singing for."

After Nizlopi disbanded in 2010, Concannon found himself on a "dark path," searching for new meaning and new inspiration. It brought him on what he calls a hitchhiking vision quest to Palestine where he volunteered as a peace worker.

"In the middle of the journey there are shadows that we have to confront, and I think I've needed to get help to navigate through the dangers that are in the middle of life –we haven't got the same natural energy as we did in the beginning, and yet we know that we're trying to get somewhere."

Now 39, living in Boston with his partner and still writing, performing and touring, Concannon shows no signs of slowing down his creative output and he recently recorded a duet with Ed Sheeran for his forthcoming album called Streets of Boston, which is about the Irish immigrant experience.

With Nizlopi behind him now, Concannon's solo career continues to flourish in different guises –and while he seems very much at peace with himself, he also gives the impression of a man who will always be restless, exploring and creating.

"I've always had a vision of where I'm called to go. I have to keep in touch with it. But yes, there's certainly been this middle stage of my life, where I've been in the wilderness, trying to find that new home. The new land, the new world."

You can listen to Luke's interview with Ruairí McKiernan on the Love and Courage podcast, available on our podcast app, iTunes, Spotify, or Soundcloud. More info www.loveandcourage.org

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- Listen on iTunes: <https://t.co/Pz6ktxl5nH>
- Full transcript: <http://bit.ly/2Cb3hlj>
- Video of Ed Sheeran citing Luke as hero: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XixJSjolzHI>
- Video of Luke and Ed Sheeran perform Stevie Wonder: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibCuAVAWUGwthe>
- Nizlopi on Top of the Pops <http://bit.ly/2BHmxML>
- Photos of Luke: <http://www.lukeconcannon.com/media-2/photos/>
- Photo of Ed Sheeran and Luke: <http://bit.ly/2CyGdiv>
- Luke Concannon website: <http://www.lukeconcannon.com/>
- Love and Courage podcast: <http://www.loveandcourage.org>

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