

# Philip Chevron talks life, love... and facing up to death

**I know I'm dying. I can't sing or even speak. But I can still play and I can still write, so I've decided just to keep on living**



Remaining upbeat: Philip Chevron is determined to live his life to the full

'With patience and grit.' Living on his own in Santry — the same Northside suburb he grew up in — Philip, who is gay, is reflective about how he never settled down with a partner.

'I chose poorly and I chose well, like most people in a position where one's judgement might be considered vulnerable and therefore questionable. Unfortunately, life itself adds an extra dimension. The man I loved most died in 1992.'

It's clear that the death of his former lover is still painful for him to discuss because it's the only subject he was unwilling to elaborate on further.

'I have nothing more to say about Achim,' is as much as he is willing to venture on the subject.

Same-sex marriage is currently a contentious issue for the public and Government alike.

Enda Kenny is refusing to reveal publicly his stance on the issue, but in an interview with me in 2007 he told me twice that he was against same-sex marriage.

Philip clearly isn't impressed with the Taoiseach's refusal to discuss the issue. 'I don't think much about Kenny at all. I'm a little sur-

prised he hasn't taken the Obama line — that his thinking has "evolved" on the matter. But what does it matter? If it's not Kenny it's [Micheál] Martin, if not Tweedle Dum then Tweedle Dee.'

Would he have liked to have been married?

'As a gay man, I look around in awe at how quickly we're arriving at equality in the realm of marriage and child-rearing.

'It's wonderful. It all adds to the diversity that will be the one thing that saves the world from itself, the rejection of status quo.

'It's nothing short of remarkable that we have only just buried Margaret Thatcher, the woman who dared to outlaw us as "pretend families" as recently as The Pogues' heyday.

'That said, I'm not sure, given the choice, I would ever have gotten married.

'Too selfish, too set in my ways. But I never found the right man anyway. Got close a few times.'

Being set in his ways also brought Philip close to death several times — he twice underwent life-saving operations on his liver back in 1994 as a result of his heavy drinking when

The Pogues were enjoying their most successful years with hits like Fairy-tale of New York.

'I had spent most of 1994 in and out of hospital in England trying to deal with an ever more troublesome liver which almost killed me twice. So, I took some time out [from the band].

'I had ascites — they drain out about 20 litres of excess fluid from your liver area over a period of time. It drains into a bag, it's not pretty. Second time I vowed there would be no third. [It was a] life changing experience, yes.' He has been sober for 18 years now. 'I was fortunate af-

ter they saved my liver to get into a residential six-week rehab programme in Nottingham, where I was able to focus uninterrupted on my illness, and from there to find a way of life that allows me to stay away from my poison, alcohol, in 24-hour increments.

'This becomes important because you can't tell an alcoholic he or she can't drink for the rest of their life, it just doesn't compute.

'But 24 hours, one day, seems like it might be manageable, even if, at first, you have to break it down into hours or minutes. At first I was astonished not to have had a drink for a week, a

month, a year. But after a while people are sending you gift cards congratulating you on 18 years of sobriety because you are vigilant, always.

'Because you are just one drink away, one day away, from disaster. But sobriety becomes habitual too. It becomes who you are, someone you have no cause to feel shameful of.'

It's an unfortunate twist of fate that after vowing to give up alcohol to save his life, and believing he had beaten his head and neck cancer, Philip eventually contracted terminal cancer at just 55 years old.

However, he makes it quite clear that the last thing he is seeking is sympathy and plans to make the most of whatever time he has left.

'I am a gay, Irish, Catholic, alcoholic, Pogue who is about to die from cancer — and don't think I don't know it.'

While still working on writing new material, his next appearance will be at Whelan's in Dublin on July 15, when fellow Irish music legend Christy Moore will play a special one-off gig in his honour.

'I am humbled and moved by his gesture.'

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