

With 36 years of sobriety, 48 years of marriage and a long and fruitful music career under his belt, Mick Flavin is busy reminiscing on the past while cocooning. **By DEIRDRE REYNOLDS**

AFTER half a lifetime on the road, Mick Flavin has finally been forced to hang up his mic, but promises it's only temporary.

Although not yet 70, the country music legend isn't taking any chances, cocooning at home with his wife Mary during the current health crisis.

Seven weeks on, he tells **Magazine+** how he's eventually relaxed into a routine of Skyping his grandchildren and tending to the vegetable garden, while dreaming of a big comeback.

"It's hard to come to terms with it all," concedes Mick over the phone from the Longford base he shares with his partner of 47 years.

"When you're a person like me, the whole lockdown thing is very, very tough — if I wasn't on the road, I'd be doing a bit of farming and stuff like that.

"The days are very long — but I have a lovely vegetable garden [where] I sow potatoes and beetroot and cabbage, and I listen to CDs.

"We're all hoping this thing will pass as quickly as possible," he adds.

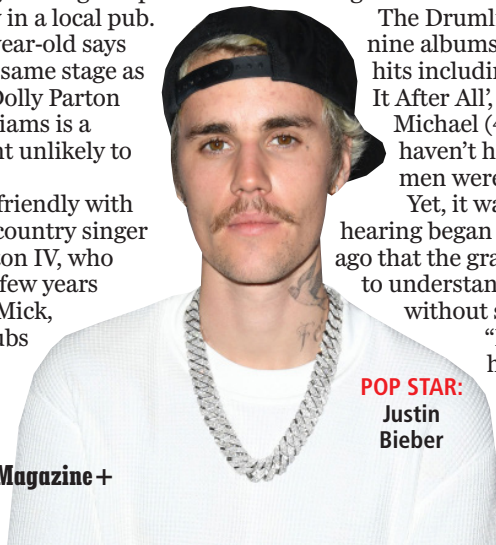
"When it's all over, people will be mad to get out and enjoy themselves again, and mad to go dancing, whenever that'll be - it could be next year."

Facing an uncertain future, O'Farrell County's most famous son can at least reminisce on a remarkable past while staying at home.

Former county council worker Mick got his lucky break after performing at a charity night alongside pal Declan Nerney in a local pub.

But the 69 year-old says singing on the same stage as Elvis Presley, Dolly Parton and Hank Williams is a career highlight unlikely to be outshone.

"I was very friendly with the American country singer George Hamilton IV, who passed away a few years ago," explains Mick, who sang in pubs on the side in



POP STAR:
Justin
Bieber

the beginning. "When I was in Nashville in 2006, George asked me would I come to the Opry and sing with him, and I did that.

"That was a huge highlight because not very many Irish acts get a chance to sing at the Grand Ole Opry."

The Drumlish star has released nine albums, furnishing dozens of hits including 'I'm Gonna Make It After All', but his proud sons Michael (47) and Brian (46) haven't heard a single one as both men were born deaf.

Yet, it wasn't until his own hearing began to degenerate a decade ago that the granddad-of-six truly began to understand the reality of a world without sound.

"I remember having a hearing test and they told

'A DUET WITH JUSTIN BIEBER?

I WOULDN'T RULE IT OUT'

me I had lost about 90pc of my hearing in my right ear," tells Mick, who also suffers from tinnitus. "Of course, I didn't do much about it because for years you're

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singing into a mic, and if it's not loud enough, you keep turning it up. I'd be at home here watching the television, I'd have it up at 90 and my woman would be



THE GENTLE GIANT:
Country singer and family man Mick Flavin is pictured above with his wife Mary and their family

going off the head, and I'd say, 'Sure it's not loud!'"

Today, the Gentle Giant of Country Music boasts perfect hearing thanks to the intervention of nationwide clinic, Blackberry Hearing.

Last year, he got two subtle but life-changing hearing aids, which can even be controlled by an app on his smartphone.

"I never liked wearing hearing aids, but eventually I took the bull by the horns and went in," says Mick.

"They put hearing aids into both ears and it was just unbelievable. There's a huge difference in my life with them.

"They're so small and so powerful — even Mary does say to me, 'Have you your hearing aids in? I can't see them!'"

It's given him no excuse not to listen to his missus while cocooning ahead of their 48th wedding anniversary next month.

"The secret to it all?" he repeats, when asked about the key to a successful marriage. "Keep well apart — keep isolating all your life!

"Ah no, Mary's a great woman, honest to God, because in all fairness, I'd be away a lot. In the early days, I'd be away for weeks at a time, and she'd be always holding the fort when I was gone.

"We get on great and, of course, since I stopped drinking, it made such a difference in the house as well.

"It's just a much happier house."

After marking 34 years of sobriety in February, now Mick is hoping to get the chance to celebrate his milestone 70th birthday with "a bit of shindig" in August too. Until then, he's busy planning his next career move, and after seeing Billy Ray Cyrus join forces with rapper Lil Nas X on Grammy-winning smash 'Old Town Road' last year, he teases that it may not be what his older fans expect.

"People like Nathan Carter and Derek Ryan have brought out a whole new young audience," agrees Mick of the country music revival.

"It's lovely to see the youngsters, the way they're able to jive — it gives you a lift on stage. I've done quite a few duets. I did a full album of duets with Philomena Begley way back in 1990.

"Would I duet with Justin Bieber?" he laughs heartily. "You never know what's ahead of you! I wouldn't mind doing something like that to be different."

● *Blackberry Hearing has 70 locations nationwide. See blackberryhearing.com to find your nearest clinic.*