



**Máire BRENNAN**  
RYTHM MAGAZINE 03/1999  
Christina Roden

### BACK TO THE ROCK

Clannad's lead singer takes a spiritual solo flight.

Máire (pronounced Moya) Brennan is the angelic soprano lead singer and harpist of the Irish folk band Clannad. The group had a big hit with the theme from the British television series *Harry's Game*, which later turned up in commercials and on the soundtrack to the movie *Patriot Games*. Brennan's soaring voice also graced *The Last Of The Mohicans* and, most recently, the best selling *Back To The Titanic* album. But with her solo release, *Perfect Time* (Word), she has made the intensely personal decision to testify openly about her Christian beliefs.

That "Clannad" translates to "family" is no accident. Clannad originally

consisted of Máire, two of her brothers (Pol has since moved on and is now a producer) and identical-twin uncles. A sister sat in briefly but later achieved solo fame as the New Age star Enya.

At first it was hard to find an audience in Ireland. "When we sang in English, they loved it," Máire remembers. "When we sang in Gaelic, they wouldn't clap. People were literally laughing at us." Clannad's now-legendary early recordings were financed by whoever would spring for studio time. The genesis of their second album was typical. "Gael-Linn brought it out and distributed it, but it was financed by a sewage company," Brennan says with a comical grimace.

Clannad decided to hit the road and headed for Europe, where they developed a solid fan base and did some cloak-and-dagger distribution. "We'd smuggle out as many albums as we could in the doors of the van. I remember coming into Hamburg on the boat, and we were searched. It was tough going."

When stardom finally arrived in the '80's, it brought vindication, personnel changes, growth and compromises. Brennan's desire to write her own songs evolved slowly. "I did very little in the beginning, from laziness," she says. "I was looking at other people's songs before I started to write myself. I was listening to world music and different rhythms. I was fascinated with what I was coming out with." The idea of a solo record was growing on her, too. "A change is as good as a rest," she says, laughing.

The decision to make a Christian album was born of Máire's own return to the fold, although not to any particular doctrine. "There's so much interest in Irish music, dance, mythology and folklore," she says, "but people outside Ireland don't see the spiritual side of the Celtic race. Our ancestors' courage, love and humility came from their Christian background."

She was especially drawn to St. Patrick, a heroic figure who has been trivialized into a kind of patron of saint of party animals. "St. Patrick is celebrated all over the world. Well, do you know who he was? We celebrate, we drink, we get silly. But who was this guy, and what did he do? He was an extraordinary man."

Given her beliefs, Brennan finds the sectarian violence in Ireland especially disturbing. "Christians fighting Christians, Catholics, and Protestants," she

says wistfully. "It breaks my heart, because we're all stemming from the same rock. We should look at that and not at what we've become. I discovered an awful lot, being from a Catholic background and getting married to a Protestant. The biggest thing about Christ is love and humility. People think being humble is a weakness. I think it's a strength, because the hardest thing to do is to forgive and give in, and not many people can do that nowadays."

Perfect Time turned out to be another kind of Brennan family enterprise, as well as a declaration of faith. "It was very important to include something that was precious to me and part of my childhood," Máire says. "Recording my mom's choir in the local Catholic church was so earthly and real. I love that. My mom, my dad, and two of my sisters are in it, and the people from the parish."

Brennan has only to look back home for living examples of the fabled spiritual resilience of the Irish people. "For me, it is important to make an issue of this," she says. "It's amazing how a race that has known so tagedy can make melancholy songs that are never dark. There's always a sense of hope, and Irish is such a language for blessings."

**From the unofficial Clannad website: [www.clannad.org.uk](http://www.clannad.org.uk)**  
The image in this article is © Clannad: [clannad.ie](http://clannad.ie)