



CLANNAD
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ATLANTIC RECORDS PRESS RELEASE

Over the past two decades, Clannad has made music that entwines the traditional and the modern, the past and the future, with stunningly beautiful results. The acclaimed Irish group consists of two siblings - Máire

(pronounced Moya) and Ciarán (pronounced Keeron) Brennan, who are joined by their twin uncles Noel and Padraíg (pronounced Poric) Duggan.

Clannad takes their name from the Gaelic language of their native county of Donegal. An abbreviation of “an clann as Dobhar,” it means “a family from the townland of Dore.” In weaving their unique and timeless sound, Clannad has drawn from the various strands of music which surrounded them as they grew up in the remote Western coastal area of Gweedore. As Ciarán comments, *“Our music stems from a traditional root, with many influences along the way.”*

Clannad made their Atlantic label début in 1992 with the release of “ANAM,” which had been originally issued in the U.K. and Europe two years earlier. The album dramatically expanded the quartet's U.S. audience, as it took off at retail outlets nationwide. The American edition of “ANAM” featured the song “Harry's Game,” which garnered huge exposure when Volkswagen used the song in a major TV advertising campaign. The tune was also included in the soundtrack of the film Patriot Games.

Clannad has now completed a brand-new studio collection, entitled “BANBA,” which is an ancient Gaelic name for Ireland. Although it follows just one year after the Stateside release of “ANAM,” “BANBA” in fact marks the group's first new recording in three years. Joining the quartet are several supporting players, among them long-time associates Mel Collins (saxophone, flute) and Ian Parker (keyboards), as well as Altan's Frankie Kennedy from Belfast (flute).

“BANBA” was produced by Ciarán, who also penned all but one of the songs (the exception being a tune written by Noel). Recorded in England and Ireland, “BANBA” features such thoroughly compelling tracks as “I Will Find You” (Theme From “Last Of The Mohicans”) and “Mystery Game”. The album also includes two stunning new Gaelic compositions: “Na Laetha Bhí”, which means “the bygone days” ; and “Banba Oir,” which translates as “a journey through a tunnel from the mythological era to the Celtic age.”

Remarkably, Clannad is celebrating their 20th Anniversary with the release of “BANBA.” And so it seems the perfect occasion to reflect on just how far the group has come.

Back in the early days, like teenagers everywhere, the future Clannad members were heavily influenced by the pop charts. They would master covers of hits by such artists as the Rolling Stones, The Beach Boys, and Joni Mitchell, and then perform them at local dances. A few years later, the nascent group began to get up and play in the bar run by Máire and Ciarán's father Leo, a former cabaret band leader.

At the same time, the musical interests of Leo's schoolteacher wife, Baba, who ran the local choir, provided a perfect counterbalance to the group's pop influences. Soon the two sets of siblings were able to hear the potential in a genre few others appreciated - the folk music of their own area.

“Donegal isn't called The Forgotten County for nothing,” Ciarán explains. “It's so remote that it could be Russia as far as many people are concerned, and so its legacy of traditional songs wasn't as well appreciated as that of, say, Kerry and Galway. A lot of local people were convinced that their own music was somehow uninteresting. We saw the beauty of it, though.”

Once the young Brennans' and Duggans' interest in the sounds of Donegal was piqued, they collected as many examples as they could. Soon they had more than 500 Gaelic songs at their disposal, and set about giving simple arrangements to the most obscure ones. Ciarán's skill at bringing a contemporary sensibility to this material stemmed from his own increasing sensitivity to the cultural heritage around him.

Meanwhile, the ground for Clannad's professional launch was being prepared via the various members' frequent involvement in public performances with Leo Brennan. *“If a band that was due at some dance didn't turn up because they were, snowbound, we'd be called upon to collect together as many pop songs as we knew and stand in for the night,”* recalls Máire.

Years later, during a performance at their father's tavern, they decided to slip in a melancholic Gaelic tune about sea gulls over a cemetery. It was greeted with a stunned silence that only increased the group's determination to sing more Gaelic songs.

It was eventually decided that the idea of fusing traditional and modern elements should be given a fighting chance. *“At first, there was no thought*

of going professional, because Noel and I had gone up to Dublin and trained as radio officers,” says Padraig. “By chance, almost as soon as we had the qualifications in our back pockets, it was suggested that we give the music a proper go - so we never went to sea, and I doubt if we'll ever do so now”.

In 1970, Clannad's musical promise was confirmed when they won the local Letterkenny Folk Festival, whose first prize was a contract with the Irish arm of Phillips. Borrowing money for a PA system and a van, the group threw itself into touring. Clannad would sometimes play as many as three times a day - at colleges, convents... anywhere there was a willing audience. At that time, the Clannad line-up was comprised of Máire on lead vocals and Irish harp; Ciarán on double bass and vocals; brother Pól (who left the band in 1989 to work on other projects) on tin whistles, flute and vocals; and twins Noel and Padraig on guitar and mandolin/harmonica, respectively.

During the '70s, Clannad recorded six traditional albums, each of which helped shape and refine the band's now unmistakable sound. Their touring schedule began to include mainland Europe, and a standing ovation one night in Berlin convinced the quintet to turn fully professional. In 1980, Enya Brennan joined the band. She sang and played keyboards on two albums, “CRANN ÚLL” and “FUAIM,” before leaving to pursue her own highly successful solo career. In February 1993, “FUAIM” was officially released for the first time in the U.S. by Atlantic.

Clannad's big break came in 1982, when Yorkshire TV asked the band to write an original theme for its three-part adaptation of a fictional, Northern Ireland-based thriller by writer Gerald Seymour. By doing so, the company was instrumental in helping the band achieve the international legitimizing of their native language as a medium for pop music. The theme from “Harry's Game” became the first Gaelic lyric ever to chart in Britain, where it reached the top five, and the band subsequently won an Ivor Novello Award for Best Television Soundtrack.

Later, fellow Irishers U2 used “Harry's Game” as the exit music for their live performances. And more recently, the song's timeless appeal was illustrated by its aforementioned inclusion in the film “Patriot Games” and its choice as the theme for the Volkswagen campaign. The public's response was so overwhelming that the “ANAM” album became Clannad's first U.S.

chart placing.

The decade following the original release of “Harry's Game” was filled with European hit singles and albums, as well as successful world tours and awards. In 1983, Clannad released “MAGICAL RING”, which remained on the U.K. album charts for over six months, earning the group their first gold record award.

After a lengthy European tour, Clannad returned to the studio to begin working on songs for the television series, “Robin Of Sherwood”. Aside from the resulting album, entitled “LEGEND” the group wrote and performed the entire score for all 26 episodes. In 1985, the group received the BAFTA trophy (the British equivalent to an Academy Award), and the “LEGEND” album earned the group their second U.K. gold award.

Clannad's next album, 1986's “MACALLA” (“echo” in Gaelic), yielded the hit single, “In A Lifetime” a duet between U2's Bono and Máire, the song hit the charts as Clannad undertook a 23-date, SRO English tour.

The one consistent element running through these endeavors has been a continuing commitment to change. For example, 1987's “SIRIUS” was recorded in Los Angeles with celebrated American rock producers Greg Ladanyi and Russ Kunkel, while its studio successor, “ANAM,” was conceived and recorded at the band's home studio in the Dublin hills.

“By continually approaching things differently, we've enlarged the scope of Clannad and opened up its musical possibilities,” comments Máire. *“If we hadn't made a record like “SIRIUS”, we might still be itching to work with a big American producer. As it is, we got it out of our system, and there was a lot learned from the experience.”*

“It wasn't a case of us deliberately trying to break into a bigger market, but more the sense of us wanting to try something new. Music is a gamble, and we're a band that likes to take chances; sometimes we've suffered for it in the short term, but i think it's generally been proved to be worthwhile.”

“Initially,” Máire continues, *“we experienced resistance to our singing in our own language; then people wanted to know why the “ROBIN OF SHERWOOD” album didn't have any Gaelic songs on it. It seems to take*

awhile for people to catch up with our need for experimentation. We've always offered a fusion between the traditional and the modern, it's just that sometimes the balance shifts between the two."

The track listing of the 1989 compilation, "PASTPRESENT," proves Máire's point: while encompassing a wide range of material, it embodies a distinctive and unique quality which links everything the group records. That, Máire insists, comes from the landscape and the atmosphere of their native Donegal.

"PASTPRESENT" was really important in emphasizing the common root that runs through all our music - a geographical root," she says. "When people ask me to define the Clannad sound, I always say that if they were to visit Donegal they wouldn't need to ask."

In the ensuing three years since the recording, of "ANAM" Máire's life has been a whirlwind of activity. She has managed to find the time to marry English photographer Tim Jarvis and give birth to their first child, daughter Aisling. Máire has also written and recorded her self-titled debut solo album, produced by Scotsman Calum Malcolm (Blue Nile).

Given all that, it seems almost extraordinary that Máire was able to move directly into the recording of "BANBA." But, she insists, it was Ciarán's two years of pre-production that made the album possible. *"Having written and discarded over two hours of music, I realized that I wanted to compose very spontaneously,"* he says of the project. *"With the exception of one song, everything on the album can be reproduced live."*

Both Ciarán and Máire see "BANBA" as a natural successor to '86's "MACALLA." *"It concentrates very much on vocals and harmonies,"* she says. *"At the same time, it shows how the more contemporary side of the band has developed, but in a completely natural and unforced way. Plus, Ciarán does a beautiful vocal on one song, which also makes "BANBA" very special. Throughout the past two decades, we've always searched for that musical place where we can feel totally comfortable. Something about this album makes me think that's exactly what we've found."*

From the unofficial Clannad website: www.clannad.org.uk

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