



CLANNAD FOR IT
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by Shelley Marsden
www.theirishworld.com

Noel Duggan (uncle to both Moya Brennan and Enya), has been guitarist and vocalist with Ireland's original supergroup for an incredible thirty five years, and the original members of the groundbreaking group – Moya Brennan, Ciaran Brennan, Noel and his twin brother Padraig are now embarking on their first UK tour together in ten years.

They are the band whose sound Bono described as “like hearing the sound of angels singing.” And Clannad have come a long way from playing to the locals in Leo's Tavern. They graced the red carpet in Los Angeles for the Grammys, performing their breakthrough song ‘Harry's Game’ on Top of the Pops, creating the soundtrack for films like Last of the Mohicans and, perhaps most memorably, were behind the stirring, ethereal soundtrack for the TV series Robin of Sherwood.

They might have a few more grey hairs, but one thing they haven't lost in all these years is their passion for pushing Gaelic music into new territories and introducing audiences the world over to their unique and epic sound.

This is the band's first tour in ten years. Excited?

Oh I really am. Two years ago, my sister (the Brennans' mother) had an anniversary in Letterkenny, and they did a one hour documentary about it

on TV. Of course, Clannad had to play there. We hadn't been together for so long, then last year we did Celtic Connections in Glasgow and honestly, we got the same reception we got twenty years ago. So we decided it's about time we got out of our bunks and marched! We picked up where we left off, really. It was like going back to school after the summer holidays.

Who are Clannad for anyone who's lived in a cave for the last few decades?

We're a family from Gweedore, in Donegal. We started off in 1970 playing at the Letterkenny Folk Festival, where we won first prize and ended up with a record deal. We all wanted to do different things at that point though. Myself and my brother Padraic wanted to be radio officers at sea; Moya wanted to be a teacher; Ciaran still wanted the music. We never 'decided' to go on the road – we didn't think singing Gaelic songs would work out, but to our surprise it did. 'Harry's Game' brought us to a wider audience and then when the younger generation heard us playing with Bono for In A Lifetime, it really opened doors for us.

Is there the same interest in Clannad today as ever?

There's certainly a whole new audience – ten years is a long time. At concerts there'll be a cross between old fans and new, so our song list will reflect that, it will consist of the old Gaelic songs of the 70s right up to Harry's Game, In A Lifetime, the Last of the Mohican songs, Robin of Sherwood. We'll throw in a bit of everything, you know?

How did you change Gaelic music?

Well the old Gaelic songs you heard years ago were all sung as sean nos by 75-year-old women [here Duggan gives a fine live example]. We jazzed it up, softened it, made it more contemporary. We were given the Robin of Sherwood soundtrack to do in the mid 80s and we really didn't think it would suit us at all, but we ended up getting a British Academy Award for it. Then a few years ago we got the Grammy Award; that was unbelievable – red carpet, stretch limousines, you name it, they had it.

Who are your big influences?

Each of us is different. Talk to Ciaran and he'll tell you he's very much influenced by the old jazz singers. I was influenced in the 60s by the Beatles and the Stones; we grew up with them. But my father and mother were the ones that told us to get a hold of Gaelic songs in the parish, and try and modernize them. In England, bands like Pentangle and Fairport Convention

were doing the same thing as Clannad were doing in the 70s. English folk in general had a great impact on me.

For the full interview, get your copy of The Irish World.

The UK tour begins Sun 2 March in Gateshead, takes in London on Sun 9 March and ends in Liverpool on Fri 14 March. For more info, visit www.clannad.ie

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