



**Máire BRENNAN**  
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Máire OPENS 'Whisper to the Wild Water' TOUR AT BLUEBERRY HILL'S 'DUCK ROOM'

On Friday, November 5th, Máire Brennan started her latest American tour in a city where she had never performed before—St. Louis. She could not have known whether or not we would take her to our hearts, but take her to our hearts we did. By the end of the evening, the crowd was happy, Brennan and her band were happy, and St. Louis had a promise we would see her again, and soon.

Máire Brennan has for years been the most memorable voice in the Irish folk/contemporary band Clannad, a group which consists of her brothers and uncles (and also featured, toward its beginning, her sister Enya). She continues to work with Clannad, but has side projects as well. This concert

was in support of her fourth solo album, *Whisper to the Wild Water* (Sony/Word Records).

The concert took place in Blueberry Hill's subterranean performance space, the Duck Room, but Brennan's presence gave it the atmosphere of a pub in her native Donegal. She had an excellent rapport with the audience, explaining the meanings behind songs sung in Irish, cracking wry jokes, and poking gentle fun at those who mispronounced the name "Clannad." (For the curious, it's "CLAN-ad," pronounced like the word "clan," naturally enough since the name means "family.")

The biggest mystery before the band hit the stage was how Brennan's songs would translate in a live setting. Her albums have a polished sound, with intricate layering of overdubs. On stage, her voice was sometimes augmented with heavy echo. She has a wispy soprano, so bolstering with echo was not out of place. Several members of the band also provided backup harmonies, softly but with great effect. Instruments used in the concert by Brennan and her band included harp, two keyboards, guitar, uilleann pipes and whistles, violin, and percussion. The keyboards gave several songs a more synthesized feel, which was probably not necessary during an otherwise gorgeous harp solo. The crowd did make clear what they enjoyed best, cheering most wildly after traditional Irish numbers in distinctive, less-than-traditional arrangements.

There is something captivating about Brennan's use of Irish. Spoken Irish can be guttural, harsh-sounding, but Brennan gives her songs a chiming beauty. Coming from Brennan's lips the language is a ghost of English, something you think you understand until you realize you don't recognize any words. Maybe it's because hers is Donegal Irish, with more in common to lilting Scotch Gaelic. Or maybe it's just that Máire Brennan is a great singer.

She introduced one traditional song, "Coinleach Glas an Fhonnhair," by saying she'd been singing it for "a long, long time. A very long time." And with good reason—it is simply stunning, one of Clannad's best. But when she performed newer material, such as her originals "Against the Wind" and "Follow the Word," she proved her own compositions stand well beside the traditional music which inspires her.

She and her band—six young, energetic musicians later introduced to us by

their Irish county of origin—mixed in several instrumental numbers during the evening, also a mixture of traditional reels and new compositions which sometimes had a jazzy feel.

Opening for Máire Brennan were local favorites One Fell Swoop, who set a laidback atmosphere. Their songs ("Feet of Clay," "John Henry's Blues") featured pretty harmonies and nice acoustic guitar work. Vocalist Cheryl Striker acknowledged Brennan's influence: "When I was 18 I was taken by this woman's voice. I even enrolled in a course to learn Gaelic." She said afterward it was an unexpected honor to play that evening: "I was planning on coming to the concert anyway. I hadn't thought our style would necessarily have fit with hers, but she asked for an opening act who was not Celtic based."

**From the unofficial Clannad website: [www.clannad.org.uk](http://www.clannad.org.uk)**  
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