



CLANNAD
HOTPRESS : THE CLANNAD SPECIAL
Date Uncertain (1990's)

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CLANNAD CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

TWENTY YEARS is a long time in anyone's language. I first met Clannad in Statterys of Capel Street in the early '70s when the group supported Eyeless, the band I was involved with at the time, on a Sunday afternoon gig. I was taken with the group's music I know - but even moreso I suspect by the beautiful girl out front who played the harp and sang like an angel.

Having watched them develop and grow from those early days, one motif

stands out: the Clannad family of Máire, Ciarán and Pól Ó Braonáin and Pádraig and Noel Ó Dúgáin were born to play. It wasn't easy in those days and it especially wasn't easy when you were based in Gweedore in Donegal and you performed the bulk of your material in the Irish language but the bug had bitten the Ó Braonáins and the Ó Dúgáins and there was no turning back for Clannad no matter how rough things got. Anyone who knows the bones of the story will be aware that they did indeed get rough at times. But there was a sense of adventure in the camp to match their commitment and when the road beckoned, they went once more into the breech every time. Sometimes things got extremely hairy. Dumped in the middle of one tour by a manager for whom a more promising option had opened up, they arrived wholly unprepared at one turning point - and entered into a phase of their career which was by any standards highly productive, under the combined management and production skills of Nicky and Roma Ryan.

By this time Hot Press was up and running and as the editor of a paper that's intimately involved in the business in all its quirks, strangeness and charm you tend to know who's doing a good job, and to some extent how they're doing it. I was certainly well aware of the hard graft that was going into keeping Clannad viable - the music deserved no less but European tours and album releases all over the continent were fought for and achieved at a time when, to put it kindly, what we now knowingly call the international A&R community had very little interest in what was going down in Ireland.

The music that Clannad made in those days was wonderful too - even now in my own imagination as I write, tracks like "Dulaman", "Nil Sé na Lá" and "Mhorag's Na hOro Gheallaidh" jostle and compete on equal terms with acclaimed tracks from the later years like "Harry's Game", "in A Lifetime" and "Robin (The Hooded Man)".

I remember all this now in the knowledge that there is an untold story about the period that Enya - a sister of Máire, Ciarán and Pól - spent with Clannad, and the manner in which she and Nicky and Roma Ryan parted company with the band. Now is no time to address these issues, nor indeed could I hope to imagine that I understand everything that happened, and particularly the inevitable complications attendant on the fact that it was, in so many ways, a family affair. But the Clannad story does cover twenty years and I do know from first hand experience the importance of the work put in by what was the entire Clannad team in those formative years.

The most positive outcome is that in the long run, in their different ways, everyone can feel vindicated by their separate musical achievements. Enya and Nicky and Roma Ryan have been enormously successful, beyond anyone's wildest imaginings, making great music that will stand the test of time. Clannad too have reaped a rich harvest in both their recorded output and the acclaim with which it has consistently been received.

And it is this that we are here to celebrate, the twenty years of fine music and crazy living that being in one of the most unique groups in contemporary music involves. Some of the key participants along the way are no longer involved - not just Nicky and Roma and Enya but also Pól Ó Braonáin, who split from the group to pursue his own musical vision in the not too distant past. But a core remains, and in this there is something for many young bands starting off to learn from.

The ideal when you're setting out is that the unit can hold together and stand the test of time as a unit. Strange is to reflect that U2, to identify the outfit which best reflects the extraordinary strength which this kind of solidarity can give, are fifteen years together now. But that kind of commitment is like a marriage - and not that many people can continue to live together and see eye to eye over such a protracted period.

What's important is that a band with a strong core can ride the changes and, if the strength of character and determination is there, keep the music vibrant and the creative juices flowing. Ten years ago even, the idea of a four-person Clannad, with just Máire, Ciarán, Pádraig and Noel on board might scarcely have seemed conceivable. Now that line-up has produced a fine new album "Banba" at a time when the group's previous album "Anam" - repackaged, with "Harry's Game" added for the American market - is climbing to spectacular heights in the American charts, and offering them a whole new lease of life as a unit.

So much of what happens in the name of rock 'n' roll is so short term. But like it or lump it, many of the self-styled young hotshots of today will desperately want to be in the position Clannad have established for themselves now, in twenty years time. Dave Kavanagh, who took over the management of the band just before their first major chart breakthrough with "Harry's Game" reflects candidly elsewhere in this special supplement that there is an element of good fortune involved, that luck has played a

part. It's something that most successful musicians will admit to also, looking into their heart of hearts. Success is a fickle partner and it often favours people of little talent and even less courage. But sometimes, too, good fortune truly favours the brave.

And there is, of course, a sense in which you make your own luck. The commission to write the theme of "Harry's Game" came about as a result of hard graft - but so many projects are still-born; if a different producer had been involved, so too might the music have gone in a very different direction - and so on, we might wrestle with imponderables until doomsday. The important thing is that afforded that opening, Clannad - and Pól Ó Braonáin gets the compositional credit for the track produced a work of towering, haunting, epic beauty that truly bears the hallmark of greatness in that it is magically, perfectly timeless.

Doubtless there are other opportunities which have been less fully realized. Certainly no one can look back over twenty years in the business without knowing that mistakes have been made, that if certain things could be done again, that they'd be done differently. But in real life, as the winged chariot of time hurtles forward, closing options off by the hour as it goes, that luxury is impossible.

And so we are, all of us, left with our work. Of this, Clannad justifiably can be very proud. Gaelic speakers from the far Northern corner of this small country, they have travelled the world in the name of Irish music. They have taken the folk tradition of songs and tunes from their heartland and married it to the most advanced recording technology to produce soundscapes steeped in magic.

And for all the turmoil and strife which showbusiness can entail - and there's no business like showbusiness for it - they have produced sweet harmonies that echo across the ages and over continents. I can hear those voices now, the songs and the tunes jostling together again, so many of them spectacularly beautifully memorable ...

When we started this special project we had no idea where it would take us. What we have learned is that there is a great well of good will and support for Clannad within the industry here, and then some.

To all of those who sailed in the good ship Clannad in the past, and to those

who remain on board today - the very best of fraternal wishes, always. . .

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