



CLANNAD
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Hearlding the return of today's quintessential World Music group, "LANDMARKS" bears the lush yet engaging sounds and native styles that - when so instinctively combined with a contemporary sensibility - stand as the Clannad hallmark.

Gathered in a house on 33 acres in the remote Ballybetagh Wood outside Dublin, Clannad's Máire and Ciarán Brennan and their uncles Noel and Pádraig Duggan discovered much of the new album's contemplative and stirring tone within the natural beauty that surrounded them. "Looking out on the Ballybetagh Wood everyday was truly inspirational and became a

starting-off point for a number of the songs," says lead vocalist Máire of the recording sessions.

As was the case with the Irish quartet's previous album - 1996's #1 World Music hit, "LORE" the songs of "LANDMARKS" are representative of Clannad's uniquely crafted form of musical story-telling. Sung in both English and Gaelic, the songs reverently tell of the Irish countryside, its history and people. *"Back in the days when the English occupied the land, and you weren't allowed to write directly about Ireland, people would write about the country in other ways - perhaps by singing about Ireland as a woman,"* says Máire. *"Over time, that came into our own writing as well. It's a cryptic kind of way of relating to feelings or describing emotions."*

It is that idea that gave "LANDMARKS" its title. *"With the song 'Loch Na Cailli,' we're talking about a lake in Donegal,"* explains Máire. *"These are things that Irish people have always talked about. I mean there's hardly a stone in Ireland that there isn't a song written about it. The difference with us is that we paint pictures with our songs. It's not so much telling a story with verses and choruses. Instead, it's done through emotions and feelings."*

Written by Noel, "Bridge of Tears" - highlighted by its seamless, stirring vocals - is about a place where loved ones would go to say their good-byes. *"Whether it was to immigrate or go off to England for jobs, this bridge is where they'd shake hands or hug,"* says Máire. *"it's a very precious place."* Máire's "Of This Land" relates to the history of Ireland and its future. *"There's a lot going on about Ireland with regards to how we'll be able to live together in peace, you know?"* she says. *"The sadness of that predicament is what I describe in the song. If you think about it though, there's always been a lot of sadness attached to Irish songs, but there's also a lot of hope ... always hope. A song can be melancholy but, at the same time, have this great feeling that everything's going to be better."*

With "LANDMARKS," the familial quartet also journeys back to the most fundamental aspects of their internationally heralded sound. Skilfully produced by Ciarán Brennan (also the group's chief songwriter), the Irish foursome's sixteenth album (and fourth Atlantic studio release) boasts such delicately powerful tracks as "Let Me See"; "An Gleann" (with its sparse but melodic piano touches and melancholy guitar lines); and "A Mhuirnin Ó" (a

stand out for its quick, fluid rhythms and bodhrán-driven call to dance).

In addition to the group's core members, the album's cast of musicians features an impressive list of familiar names and longtime collaborators: keyboardist Ian Parker, a musical partner for more than a decade; Scottish guitarist/composer Ian Melrose, a top artist on the German acoustic music scene (also well known for his work with the Duggans and harpist Thomas Loefke); guitarist Anto Drennan; drummer Paul Moran, a fixture with the band since 1982; whistle player Vinnie Kilduff, a veteran from “ANAM” and the last Clannad world tour; piper John McSherry, a young Belfast piper; soprano sax player Mel Collins, the Clannad confidante and road vet; and Brennan sibling Deirdre on bodhrán. “It's a real family atmosphere,” says Máire of the mood when this crew of friends and players assemble.

Recorded last year over a period of six months, “LANDMARKS” proved especially momentous in its ease of creation. Work was completed at the band's deliberate pace, and as the demands of family allowed. “*We took three weeks off in the summer, another two weeks off here and there - the schedule wasn't at all rigid,*” says Máire. “*It's lovely to be able to do an album like that. Making ‘LANDMARKS’ was a pleasure and I think that shows. When you have a relaxed atmosphere it makes everything possible. We're all sharing musically and really enjoying our work together. To be able to say that after so many years and so many albums is really great.*”

Taking their name from the Gaelic language of their native Donegal - an abbreviation of “an clann as Dobhar,” meaning “a family from the townland of Dore” - Clannad have woven a unique and timeless sound from the various strands of music which surrounded them as they grew up in the remote coastal region of Gaoth Dobhair (pronounced ‘Gweedore’).

In their earliest days, the members of Clannad were - like typical teenagers - influenced most immediately by the pop charts. They would master Beach Boys, Stones, and Joni Mitchell covers, which they'd perform at local dances. They soon graduated to playing at the bar run by the Brennans' father, Leo, himself a former cabaret band leader. The influence of Leo's wife Baba, a schoolteacher who ran the local choir, provided an ideal counterbalance. Soon, the group were attuned to so many different styles of music that they were able to hear the potential in sounds few others appreciated - the folk music of their own homeland.

“Donegal wasn't called 'The Forgotten County' for nothing,” Ciarán explains. “It's so remote to the rest of Ireland and so its legacy of traditional songs wasn't as well appreciated as those of, say, Kerry and Galway. Contributing to the lack of awareness was the fact that many of these songs had never been arranged. A lot of local people were convinced that their own music was somehow uninteresting. We saw the beauty of it.”

Once their interest in the sounds of Donegal was whetted, the young Brennans and Duggans collected as many examples of local traditional songs as they could by persuading old and young alike to do a turn on stage in Leo's bar. Regulars from across the locale would sing their personal repertoire into a tape recorder and offer any background history they could on particular songs. It was painstaking work, and not everyone was won over to their cause.

Máire remembers those days well: *“Even in Ireland, people said to us, ‘Look, you're a good band. You've got great voices and everything, but stop singing those Gaelic songs. You're never going to get anywhere with them.’ Now, we might have decided to take heed of that advice back in '72 and '73 if we wanted just to make money, but we continued to work at it because it was something we loved.”*

To further add to their growing archive, the group even visited such outlying communities as Tory Island off the coast of Donegal, where only some hundred people now live. Soon they had more than 500 Gaelic songs at their disposal, and they set about giving simple arrangements to even 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 all around him. He credits Donegal's MacGrianna family from Rannafast, writers and poets from the '40s and '50s, and various writers from Gweedore with opening him up to this rich historical and cultural legacy. *“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,”* Ciarán has oft been heard to say.

Clannad's musical promise was confirmed when, in 1970, they entered and

won the local Letterkenny Folk Festival - first prize being a recording contract with the Irish arm of Philips. Borrowing money for a P.A. system and a van, the group threw themselves into touring, sometimes playing as many as three times a day - at colleges, convents, or anywhere there was a willing audience. The line-up at that time comprised Máire on lead vocals and Irish harp, with Ciarán on double bass and vocals, brother Pól (who left the band in 1989 to work on a number of projects, including WOMAD) on tin whistles, flute, and vocals, and twins Noel and Pádraig on guitar and mandolin/harmonica, respectively.

During the '70s, Clannad recorded six traditional albums, each of which helped to shape and refine the band's now unmistakable sound. Soon, their touring schedules began to spread to mainland Europe. A standing ovation in Berlin in 1976 persuaded them to turn professional. In 1980, Enya Brennan joined the band, singing and playing keyboards on "CRANN ÚLL" and "FUAIM" before leaving to pursue her own highly successful solo career.

Clannad's big break came in 1982 when Yorkshire television asked the band to write an original theme for 'Harry's Game', a three-part adaptation of a fictional Northern Ireland-based thriller by Gerald Seymour. In doing so, the company was instrumental in helping the band towards an achievement they are still immensely proud of - the legitimizing of their native language as a medium for pop music lyrics, throughout Ireland and around the world. In the process, the group ended up making history. The million-selling "The Theme From Harry's Game," with the first Gaelic lyric ever to chart in Britain, hit the top five and won the band a British Academy of Film and Television Arts award nomination and an Ivor Novello award in the best television soundtrack category.

The group continued their success on the small screen in 1984, when they began composing the music for the English television series, Robin of Sherwood. The series, which also introduced Clannad to American audiences through continuous domestic broadcasts, earned the band the esteemed British Academy of Film and Television Arts Award.

The timeless appeal of "Harry's Game," on the other hand, was further illustrated a decade later by its inclusion in the 1992 hit film Patriot Games and the song's selection as the theme for a nationwide Volkswagen advertising campaign.

“When ‘Harry's Game’ came out, I remember somebody asked us, ‘Where’d you get the sound?’” says Máire. “We were all a bit taken aback with that -‘Wow, we do have a sound.’ It was a surprising thing for us to consider because our sound was something that gradually grew along with us through our collecting of Gaelic songs. It wasn't a conscious process on our part.”

Clannad's debut Atlantic album, “ANAM,” was released in the U.S. in 1992 and became an enormous American success - spurred on by an overwhelming reaction to “Harry's Game,” including extensive video exposure on VH1. The song went on to garner the Billboard Music Award for “World Music Song Of The Year.”

Also in 1992, Máire released her first solo album, simply entitled “Máire.” Working in yet another new arena, Máire also sang on Robert Plant's 1993 solo album, “FATE OF NATIONS.”

Clannad's Grammy-nominated 1993 album, “BANBA,” which took the group to #1 on the nation's World Music chart, garnered considerable radio airplay with “I Will Find You: The Love Theme From Last Of The Mohicans” (the track was also included on the movie soundtrack). Coinciding with the release of “BANBA,” Clannad embarked on their first U.S. tour in five years, a series of concerts which won critical raves and audience ovations across the country. In support of the “LORE” album, Clannad stepped out in 1996 on ambitious SRO tours of Europe, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand.

For this close-knit group, their musical journey is both remarkable in its personal accomplishment and historic in its contributions to Irish culture - thus, in 1996, they received a lifetime achievement award from the Irish recording industry (the Irish Recorded Music Award).

It is indeed fascinating to consider that what today is so widely regarded as Celtic music was first called “Clannad music.” There is perhaps no greater testament to the impact of this groundbreaking group than that. It all begins with Clannad.

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

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