



**MÁIRE BRENNAN**  
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Steve Stockman

**KNOCK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, BELFAST**

Máire Brennan is the voice of Clannad who, for nearly thirty years have been one of Ireland's leading exports. Just last year they won a Grammy for their recent 'Landmarks' album. Over the history of the band, Máire found faith and recently signed a recording deal with Word Records. 'Perfect Time' was her very successful first release with Word and now on the eve of the launch of the follow up, 'Whisper to the Wild Water', I got the chance to interview her. She was in Belfast to be part of a musical evening at Knock Presbyterian Church.

**Máire:** God's been really wonderful in my life and blessed me so much in the sense that he didn't throw me into the lion's den. It's been such a gradual thing with me. He wanted me very much to be in Clannad, to be

known as Clannad, and I was very comfortable with that. I prayed whether I was meant to do something, and it never led to be record a solo album until a year and a half, two years ago. I'm watching a jigsaw and all these pieces are going in, and it feels very comfortable. God's been good to me as well in the sense that He has given me a platform which is me not saying this is a Christian album but a Celtic Christian album. So it's a very comfortable stage for me. When the album came out here and I thought of doing interviews with rock journos down in Dublin that I've been doing for years, I was really surprised that out of twenty interviews that I did, only one sneered a little bit, but it was just out of complete respect. They saw that what I was doing wasn't jumping on the band wagon, it was a genuine feeling for me. It was something I was reading, that I was interested in, that I became a part of. And they were kind of interested as well."

**Stocki:** After all the Clannad albums, and with this very distinctive voice of yours, how do you come up with something fresh? I've listened to Whisper to the Wild Water a lot and I love it. I think it is very different. Is that a conscious decision?

**Máire:** - I did feel I could be a little freer with this album. I was put in a very privileged position because I was signed for America. But instead of recording over there, they let me make the album all by myself, and then I presented them with the tapes. So no one even came into the studio or hounded me or said "You must do this, you must do that."

So it being the first album, Perfect Time, I suppose I treaded carefully. I knew what they might have liked. I had a battle with how contemporary and how much worship it was meant to be because it was my first Christian album. It was so new to me, so I prayed a lot about it, and the Lord led me. I was really pleased with it, and it turned out that when I presented it to them, they were thrilled. And I was thrilled, because though they think they know what they might want and what your sound is about, there can be a conflict-- well, we thought it might be a bit more like this or whatever. I was a bit scared about it.

But anyway, we got over that hurdle. I had a great year exploring all of that. It's been difficult as well. People know me as Máire from Clannad. So I had to get it across that I was genuine, that I wasn't jumping on the bandwagon, but it was a genuine move. I'm still doing stuff with Clannad, but I'm able to concentrate a lot more on this because Clannad isn't doing much because

after 29 years you can take gaps here and there. We won a Grammy this year as well with the last Clannad album, out last year. It was difficult for people to realize I was genuine, for them to realize it was outside of Clannad.

I think more people are ready for me, as far as, "Okay, it's her second Christian album, so it is genuine." It's not New Age even though I'm in that category in America. But they started giving me the impression that maybe I should try some American producers. I said, "Well, you know, having the experience of like 16 or 17 albums with Clannad and having tried so many different things, excuse me, but I kind of might know a bit more than you in this situation." So I said, "If you signed me because of what I can bring into your market, into the Christian world or whatever else, please let me do it on my terms. If you put great producers with me that produce Point of Grace, Jaci Valasquez and Cindy Morgan - I might end up sounding like those Americans." I was trying to reason with them and I said, "Please trust me on this."

I'll tell you what also made it different for me. For the first time I did a solo tour. When I toured I was doing Clannad stuff and Perfect Time, it showed me where I could go with my music. It kind of develops on its own. So with the help of that I knew where maybe I could go with the album, but when you go into a studio you really have no idea where it's going to end up or what it's going to be called.

First of all, if I didn't have God there's no way I'd have such a great album. I can say it's a great album because of all the prayers of people in my church. I can listen to it knowing that God's present in it because it's not all me. I know my own capacity.

**Stocki:** So is it a record of your spiritual journey as well as this musical journey you've just being telling us about?

**Máire:** Oh very much. But I've also tried to relate to books. I'm probably reading six to eight books at one time, never finishing some of them because of things I would like to have influence me within the album. I want to still retain the message of Celtic spirituality, Celtic Christianity. Reading the great stories of our saints and just the whole development of Christianity in this country you know the way it initially was. It was Christianity and not all the different categories. It was also based on the

genuine praise of thanking the Lord for being such a wonderful Creator. We love nature. Irish people do love nature. We love life. We love things that people might be afraid of because they are under the New Age category. We're allowing it to be.

**Stocki:-** It has been hijacked.

**Máire:-** It has and rather than being afraid to touch it, we should take it back. Christianity was brought to Irish people within their traditions. God was brought into their lives and became part of the world they were living in. And sometimes we go to Church to worship and then we go to a non-Christian lecture or sit down to watch a TV show and we feel if we haven't spent two quiet hours with the Lord earlier we are feeling guilty. We shouldn't feel guilty because we should include Him in everything and His presence with us.

**Stocki:** So what were the books? Are you going to give us a few leads?

**Máire:** There was a book I was reading about angels. It was by a woman called Hope Price who was a pastor's wife. She was fascinated by the number of angels that have actually appeared to people in all different forms, and she collected them, and it was just fascinating.

There's Celtic this and Celtic that. 'They Built on Rock' is one of them; it's another book on the saints. The letters of St. Patrick. The life of St. Columcille. Reading a story about St. Bridget. Just in general, I suppose.

**Stocki:** So that's where "Mary of the Gaels" came from?

**Máire:** It was a nickname that St. Bridget had. When I read that and thought, "What a great name. Wow! I love it!" She had a fascinating life. She was such a woman of humility and gentleness, and she just gave. She gave all her life. She gave her money. She gave her father's money and everything else as well. Her father got very annoyed!!!! But she was just such a person for the poor. She was a wonderful woman. It's just admiration because of how much material things mean to us in this world. It didn't affect her. You read of these saints, and they were just in awe of the Lord, in all sorts of ways and relied on the way that they behaved on Him and praised Him for the woods and the earth. It seems simple, but I wish our attitude would be as simple rather than criticizing each other as we

end up doing.

**Stocki:** Something that has always fascinated me about you is that you are from a Gaelic speaking area of Donegal with obviously a traditional Roman Catholic upbringing. Now you live in secular Dublin and attend a new church. It's such a richness of diversity. I mean I as a Protestant wouldn't even think about investigating St. Bridget. Is that diversity valuable to you, and is it evident in your work?

**Máire:** Very much so. But it's also just the curiosity of our Christian background and having on my heart reconciliation. I'm just wanting people to throw away the burdens of tradition just for a moment. To humble themselves and accept what it is for people to have a relationship with the Lord being the most important thing. That we all come to that in different ways and to acknowledge and accept rather than always being critical about it.

It's probably coming from that background and being married to a Protestant from England as well as being curious about the whole thing. And being in the music business, in the rock genre, losing my way, wanting very much something else because I knew there was more to life than rock 'n' roll or whatever else. I've had ups and downs in my life that probably made it enriching, to feel pain slightly. I know a lot of people who would feel they've been through a lot more pain than I have, but I still have gone through a certain amount and feel the need to know what it is that make people tick or where it's coming from for us all to at least respect each other.

There's a song on the album called "Hard to Break the Seal," and it is talking about how much we want to stick to the traditions--how much we feel we might lose from it if we do let go. We don't know how long ago any of these traditions were! It's only a couple of hundred years old. Jesus Christ was here 2000 years ago. When you say Jesus Christ, sometimes it puts people off. But (it offends less often) if you say Jesus of Nazareth who is just this cool dude or just broke rules but was so humble.

I mean somebody said, "Would he be sticking up for principles or marching down for something he believed in?" I'd say He might be on the other side of the fence, saying, "Well what are you believing in?" We've complicated things. And we sometimes think it's simple, but Jesus actually came and

made it simple for us. We've lost our way a little bit.

“Follow the Word” is a song relating to the people from this country that have gone out as missionaries. It's all about sailing, going off and bringing the Word with them. We were so well known to have brought it all back to so many countries, and I think the Irish culture has touched every culture in the world at this stage from just people having gone there somewhere along the line.

**Stocki:** I know that America is a big market for Word. I want to think about Ireland, though. Gaelic language in an evangelical Protestant culture. How has that gone down?

**Máire:** I couldn't believe the response last night (concert in Knock Presbyterian Church, East Belfast). I was a bit nervous about it, but I was talking to people today in church about it - that their fathers would have found singing Gaelic songs in a Presbyterian church very difficult yet they were coming away saying, “Wasn't that great?” Well, it is a step in the right direction.

Music and prayer. It is no mistake that singing and harps and music are very much something we think of in heaven. There must be some sort of bonding and some sort of crossover within music itself. The Lord did give me a talent of my voice and music, and it is wonderful to be able to do things like this now.

**Stocki:** How did the Clannad audience react to a "Christian" album?

**Máire:** I've had one negative feedback in the last year after having been in America, Europe, and England, and that's not bad. Somebody said, “Well when are you going to stop singing the Christian songs.” I just looked at him and said, “Is something bothering you?”

**Stocki:** - Sing them in Gaelic and he will never notice!!!!

**Máire:** Obviously he has a problem...whatever. But it's amazing. During the tour last year in America I was singing in rock venues, in clubs, and in theatres. I wasn't doing any Christian venues which would be the normal thing for a Word artist to do. So that's where God has put me, and most of my audience would have been non-Christians, and I got a standing ovation

every night. Some of the people that I met you wouldn't believe. A guy, a biker, very tall, saying "Hey, you know it's my birthday and you made me feel great, and I want your album". I don't know how much it's going to affect their lives, but maybe it's doing something. There are people out there that don't know His love, that don't know anything like that. They might be searching like the way I was searching.

**Stocki:** The tours that are coming up. Are they in the same venues?

**Máire:** They are. Yeah, I've been asked back to those venues. The funny thing is I've been asked to do some Christian ones. Well it's not funny. Some churches want me to sing now, which is great, but I feel that where I'm led to be at the moment is in places that are not Christian. But if you look at it, people buy Enya's albums and feel a spirituality to it. They sometimes get that from Clannad as well. Like Clannad songs "Something to Believe In," "Many Roads," and "You Are the One." They can relate to a vast range. Look at "New Grange." We sang a song about New Grange, but it wasn't saying anything except talking about the place. The Druids lived in it. The High King. But it wasn't praising anything; it's like a monument to me. Sometimes people get the wrong impression of what Clannad were about in that way. But I include in my program some of these songs. "Something to Believe In" and "Harry's Game" because "Harry's Game's" message is based on Ecclesiastes. It's straight from there. Everything is and will be and not be.

**Stocki:** So tell me. Is that your son's voice on "Peacemaker?"

**Máire:** It's my son.

**Stocki:** What age is he?

**Máire:** He's six.

**Stocki:**-It is so well read.

**Máire:** Well, I was saying it and then he was saying it. But isn't it gorgeous? And it's relating to "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace." It's just a simple message.

**Stocki:** The innocence of it comes across so powerfully. And "Be Thou My

Vision." Your grandfather arranged that?

**Máire:** No. My grandfather wrote "Be Thou My Vision" many many years ago, in Gaelic. When you translate Irish to English and vice versa, it's not a direct translation so he wrote two verses basically on the whole thought of "Be Thou My Vision" and what it's about--the glory, the father, the whole vision of King of the universe. I'd sung it last year at a couple of conventions. So many people came up to me and...I thought, well, what a nice way to finish the album. I just wanted to do it as simple. There's thirteen tracks on this album and it's nice to finish with that.

**Stocki:** So the choir on the album. They are from Gweedore?

**Máire:** That's my mum's choir. In the Catholic church. I wrote a song with a translation of a Psalm, and I did it with my mother's choir. It was very important for me because you know my Catholic background and everything, and I still respect that. I think my parents are great Christians. I really respect and honor that. When I brought out my Perfect Time album it wasn't "Oh, Máire is some kind of Christian and she has brought out a Christian album." They were part of it. It was, "Hey, this is an album about God and about church" and it became a very important piece.

Would you believe it's being used for the next three years in Detroit for an ad for a Christian hospital? So I thought. "Okay, I'm going to do another one of those." It just worked so well. It was such an important step into what I have on my heart. It was just like I'll do a song with my mum in a Catholic church in Gweedore. I'll sing Gaelic songs in Presbyterian churches. That's what I want. I don't want barriers. God doesn't have barriers, and it is very important for us to realize this.

**Stocki:** Did you write this time with the choir in mind?

**Máire:** Oh very much. This time I got them to do ooohs and aaahs and everything!!!!

**Stocki:** It seems perfectly placed on the album to me.

**Máire:** I wondered actually if I'd put it in the wrong place. The song "Sign of the Hills" is relating to Colmcille.

**Stocki:** 'Í' is the Gaelic for Iona.

**Máire:** It is the Gaelic for Iona. When I played it for my husband, first he said, "All the druggies will say where is this island with all the 'E'?" I thought, "Oh dear, I better put an asterisk beside it to show it's the Gaelic for Iona!" Isn't it gorgeous? Island 'E'. Things like that. By reading books, that is where you come up with things like that, where you go, "Wow I like that!"

There's a beautiful story about St. Colmcille. It's about his birth and everything. There was a sign came over hills--a veil--to his mother, declaring it. And they were quite a well-to-do family. It was declaring that she was going to have an important son, and when an angel came to take the colored veil away she said, "Why are you taking it away now?" The angel said, "Because he is for the world." I like things like that. They kind of inspire me.

These are very much parts of me in it. "Where I Stand" you can relate to when you're down, spiritually dry - feeling you might have wasted it. But it also relates to our church which is very involved in Teen Challenge. In the last year, there's been incredible testimonies of young heroine addicts who've been at it since twelve years of age, coming in and just finding Jesus. You hear these stories, and that's where that song actually came from--listening to them and trying to find how far they were but knowing that it can bloom. That's the most important thing. But only with the Lord.

**Stocki:** So Clannad. Is there more to come?

**Máire:** Well, we're hoping next year. I mean 29 years. It's been a long time. We recorded our last tour. Live shows. We recorded all of the English tour. Ciarán is going through that. There's things happening but it's just on a slower basis. But it's just, yet again, God providing me with the time to be able to do this. It's wonderful. To have two albums out in a year and a bit...

**Stocki:** I was surprised that there was another one so soon.

**Máire:** Were you? Well we were supposed to have it in June, but I was doing lots. I sang at The Franklin Graham Crusade in Scotland. I was with Ann Graham Lotz. Then I did the Streams album. We launched that in Israel. We were in Israel doing another concert. I was with Chris Rodriguez,

Cindy Morgan, Jaci Velasquez, and Michelle Tumes. It was really nice because we did a lot of sharing together. So I've been busy, and then the American tour I did in February and March.

**Stocki:** Are you happy enough with Word to do another?

**Máire:** They are very enthusiastic. They actually came over to hear the end while I was doing this. When I had said I'd take it a bit further myself, they were a bit anxious, and when they heard where I'd brought it, rather than them doing it, they were thrilled. I am thrilled with the album. We'll see how it reaches people.

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