



RSVP

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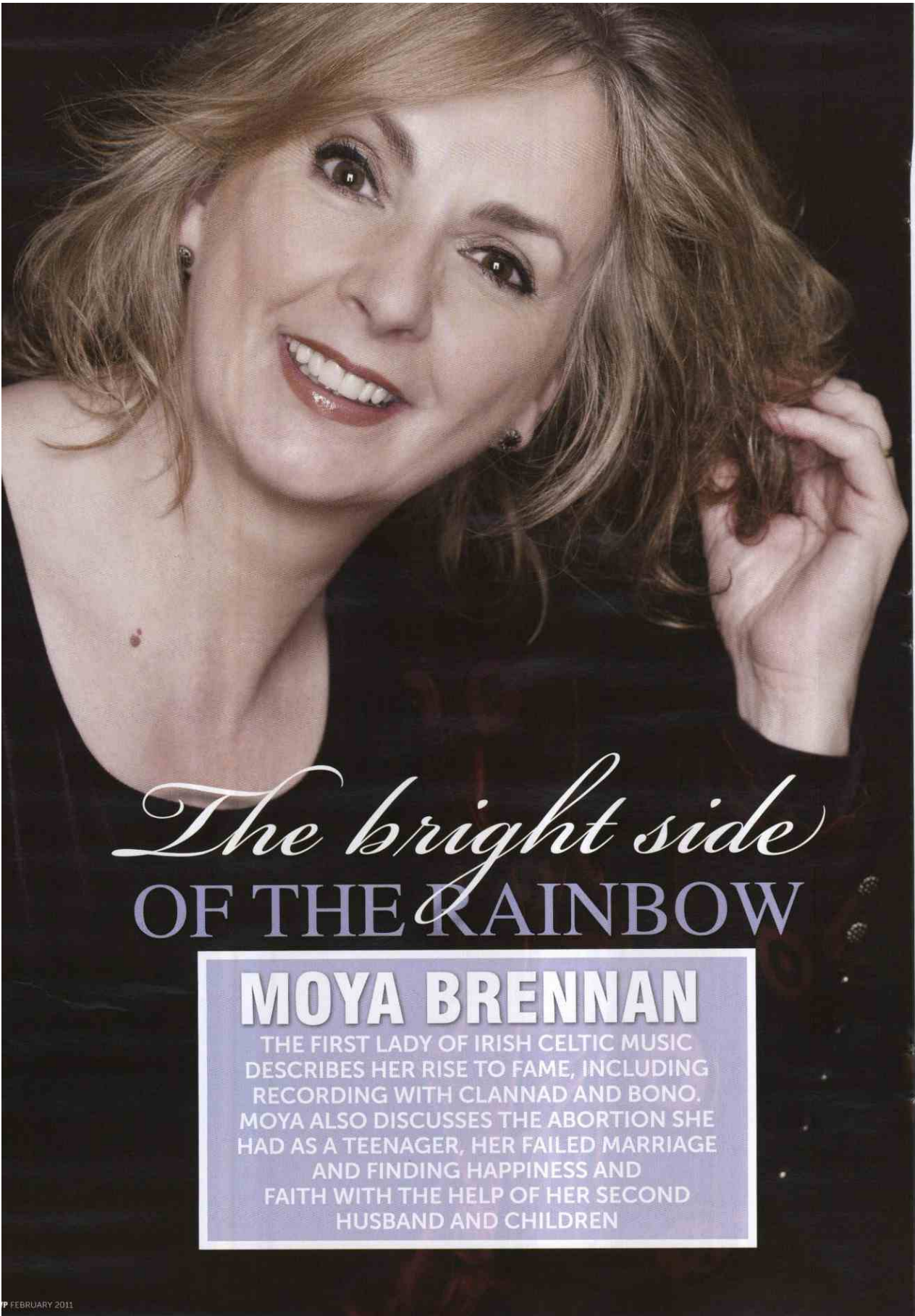
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The bright side OF THE RAINBOW

MOYA BRENNAN

THE FIRST LADY OF IRISH CELTIC MUSIC DESCRIBES HER RISE TO FAME, INCLUDING RECORDING WITH CLANNAD AND BONO. MOYA ALSO DISCUSSES THE ABORTION SHE HAD AS A TEENAGER, HER FAILED MARRIAGE AND FINDING HAPPINESS AND FAITH WITH THE HELP OF HER SECOND HUSBAND AND CHILDREN

She's a best-selling solo artist and a founding member of Clannad, a band that has sold over ten million albums worldwide and has been honoured with Grammy, BAFTA, Ivor Novello, and two lifetime achievement awards.

However, if you were to ask Moya Brennan what the highlight of her life has been, she has no hesitation in attributing it to someone very dear to her heart.

"It was marrying Tim, without a shadow of a doubt, as meeting him changed my life around," she says, of her husband Tim Jarvis. "It was such a special day and all of my family were there, and they all sang and read and performed and played at it."

Moya and Tim, a professional photographer, were married in 1991 after they met when Clannad was promoting the album *Sirius*. Tim came from London to Donegal with a journalist, to do an interview with the band for the *New Musical Express* (NME).

"He was blown away by Donegal and blown away by me," smiles Moya. "It was love at first sight but we didn't realise it at the time. I knew there was something special there, but I didn't really think about it. When Tim went home, he tried to write me a letter, but it took him about ten days because he kept throwing it into the bin. He said in it that he'd nothing to lose and called me "the grandest lady of Ireland," and asked me to give him a shout if I was in London and he'd take me out for a meal. I was over and back to London with the album quite a bit, so I called him and we got to know each other very slowly." Part of Moya's initial caution possibly related to the demise of her early first marriage, for which she takes her share of the responsibility. "I suppose because of the carefree world that I was in, maybe I didn't look at it as seriously as I should have," she says. "It takes two to make mistakes, and that was something I made a boob of!"

Happily, Tim and Moya fell madly in love, and have now been married twenty years last month. They have two children, Aisling, 19, and Paul, 17, both of whom are very musical. They both sing and while Aisling plays the pipes, whistle and guitar and is doing a music sound course, Paul plays the fiddle and bodhrán.

"You wouldn't think they'd be into the music I do at their age," says Moya, "but my songs are on their iPods and they're very proud and come to the gigs, which is really nice. I always wanted to have a family, but I left it quite late, so thank God I was able to have two wonderful children. It was thanks to Tim that I could work too, because he put his own career on hold to look after them when I was on tour."

These days, travelling musicians can easily keep in touch with their children, thanks to the wonders of Skype and other technological advances. When Moya's children were small, it was a different situation, and while she tried not to be away for more than two weeks at a time, she once had to do a six-week tour of Australia, New Zealand and Japan.

"That really killed me, because Paul was only two," she says. "It was really heavy and I'd say that was the worst time for me. We didn't even have mobiles back then, so if I was stuck in a dressing room somewhere, I couldn't even call them to say goodnight."

Motherhood came naturally to Moya, because as the eldest of nine children from Gweedore in Donegal, (then called Máire), she played the role of a typical older sister with her four brothers Pól, Ciarán, Leon and Bartley, and four sisters, Olive, Bridin, Deirdre and Eithne (better known as the world-famous singer Enya).

"When the younger children came along, I became their second mother in a way, to help my mother out," she says. "The great thing is that we all very close and we're great pals. With such a big family, there's always a special anniversary or wedding or birthday to celebrate, and as many of us as possible get together. And we have a sister Olive in Australia who comes home for very special occasions, and when she's over we all try to make it home."

In fact, three of Moya's siblings are married to Australians, which she says came about because they had an uncle living there who facilitated a couple of introductions!



Moya and her husband
Tim Jarvis

The family was very musical because their musician dad Leo was in a showband, and their music teacher mother Baba made sure that they all had singing and music lessons. When the showband era was drawing to a close, and despite not drinking or smoking himself, their father opened a bar called Leo's Tavern in the late 1960s, because he wanted to have a place where people could come and join him on stage. Over the years, it has played host to many famous musicians, including U2, Ronnie Drew, Christy Moore and Paul Brady.

This is where the young Brennan family began

performing in a very natural and organic way, and their talent saw them beginning to win their own admirers. One of these was the garda sergeant from nearby village of Annagry, who suggested that the family should enter the Letterkenny Folk Festival. For this purpose, they needed a name, and their grandparents came up with An Clann as Dobhair, as in the family from Dobhair, but they thought it was too long and shortened it to Clannad. They went on to win the competition, and a prize of an album recording set them on the road to their long and illustrious career. The original line-up was comprised of Moya and her brothers Ciarán and Pól, as well as their twin uncles, Noel and Pádraig Duggan, who were only a couple of years older.

Clannad became world-famous, releasing 17 albums and selling over ten million albums, with hit songs like Theme From Harry's Game, In A Lifetime and Robin to their credit. As the only girl initially, what was it like for Moya travelling the world with her family?

"It was great and we were so excited being out on the road and meeting people," she says. "It felt very secure and very homely, and of course we had the odd fight, but you forgive and forget much quicker with family and you'd just get on with it. When you're with the guys in bad B and Bs, you can either leave them or join them. So one of the things I really got into was sports, and I ended up as bad as they did, so people are often surprised now when they hear me talking about football and darts and cricket!"

While life was great on one level, as part of a very successful band, several years ago, Moya wrote her autobiography, *The Other Side of The Rainbow*, in which she discussed the struggles that she has had in the past with drink and drugs and low self-esteem. A deeply honest read, she says that writing it was the last thing she wanted to do initially.

"I hated doing it but it's a great way to learn about yourself, and deal with things that are within you," she admits. "I totally refused to do it at first, but the person who approached me said that it might help other women, so I thought about it and decided that it would be worth it if it even helped one person. It's that sense of hope that no matter how bad things are or what you have done, you can still get your life back."

One of the things that concerned Moya was that her parents would read it and would learn about some aspects of her life, so she made sure to advise them of the contents of the book in advance.

"It was difficult," she admits. "I explained to them that I had done this and that so it wouldn't be a surprise to them, and said that that there was no point in me writing it if I wasn't honest about things. They would have seen me drinking a lot, and they're not stupid and they knew what was going on, but I suppose every parent hopes that their kid won't go through something like that. My parents are so supportive and are fantastic with all of their children. They always were and always will be, and that's why we are the way we are." Moya says that given that her family were involved in the music world, it was amazing that they were not more affected by the drink and drugs

culture that surrounded them, which she says was as endemic in the folk world as the rock and roll one. "Thank God I pulled out of it, and it (addiction) hasn't been a plague in our family, which is amazing," she says. "In those days, people weren't warned as much about the dangers of alcohol and the drug scene. When you're on the road, you meet people all of the time, and they think they're doing you a favour by handing you a joint or a line or another pint, when you should really be going to bed."

The other deeply personal and sensitive matter that Moya discussed in the book is the abortion she had as a teenager, when she became pregnant after a brief sexual encounter. She thinks now that abortion is a mistake, and after she disclosed her experience, she got letters from all over the world, thanking her for her honesty.

"For me it was a terrible mistake, but you have to move on and not feel guilty for the rest of your life," she says. "I was only 18 or 19 and was so naïve - I hadn't moved outside Donegal until I was 16, although I went to boarding school in Sligo. It's a difficult thing to come out in public with, but I was trying to encourage women and say that while it affects you, it's not the end of the road and you have to be positive. I realised also that I can be forgiven - that's the biggest thing. It's not a great thing to do, but you don't have to penance yourself for the rest of your life if you've done it."

When it comes to explaining what gave her the strength to get through her past difficulties, Moya says that her strong faith played a huge role. She found waking up in the morning feeling miserable and depressed, which she attributes to not having enough substance in her life.

"I was looking dreadful and feeling dreadful and I knew I had to change something," she says. "One day I opened a drawer and found an old prayer book that my grandmother had given to me, and when I read it, I got such encouragement from it. I'm a huge believer in prayer, and my faith is one of the things that pulled me through, that's for sure. I don't go around blabbing about it, and I think that people sometime get scared that of what I'm going to say, but it has nothing to do with that. I strive to be a good person - kind, gentle, patient - even though I'm not those things all the time, of course. I'm a happy-go-lucky person really and anyone who knows me will say that I try to see the good in everything. I like to think that I'm a kind, generous person, and I'd like to be remembered for that when I die, even more than as a singer."

While working with Clannad, Moya was also pursuing a very successful career, and when the band took a break for a while, her career continued to soar. Her beautiful voice saw her working on many exciting projects and collaborations, including performing with Bono, Michael Crawford and Robert Plant, and as part of *T With The Maggies*, along with Maighréad and Tríona Ní Dhomhnaill and Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh.

And as a very special treat, to celebrate 40 years in the business, the original Clannad line-up is coming together for three live concerts, and will be joined by some very special guest musicians on the night. They're having great fun rehearsing and picking out

songs, says Moya, and she can't wait for the concerts to come around.

"There's a real feel-good factor going on," she laughs. "We feel really young again, even though we're not." I'm living an amazing life now, and I can't ask for anything more other than it will continue. And I'm really excited about performing with Clannad again - it's a dream come true and it really tops everything off."

- To celebrate their forty-year career, Clannad will perform in the historic surrounds of Christchurch Cathedral on Thursday 27th, Friday 28th and Saturday 29th January, as part of **Temple Bar TradFest**. www.templebartrad.com.
- Moya Brennan's website is www.moyabrennan.com and Clannad's is www.clannad.ie



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