

Me, Myself & I: French captures new audience



French, a young girl with an ageless talent on guitar and voice, will someday be a national name in music. Her debut album, *Me, Myself & I*, is musically rich, lyrically introspective and mixes folksy instrumentals with gentle, yet firm, vocals.

JEREMY STALLWOOD
Feature Editor

"I call this my Soulmate Tour," said singer Danielle French at the Aladdin Theater last Tuesday, March 2 where she opened for Irish musician Máire Brennan.

French, a Calgary, Alberta native calls this, her fourth tour in the States, the "Soulmate Tour" because of all the right people she's met at the right time. Her first album, *Me, Myself and I* (Scarlett Raven Productions), was placed in the 'best of 1995' lists in both *CORE* magazine and the Calgary Herald, and ever since, French, very eager and very talented, has been financially struggling to produce her second.

In concert, French's voice produced extremely well, maybe even better than on the album. She has a very strong singing talent, evoking emotion through her as strong lyrics. In her song "Rain Me Down," she sang:

Consumed by the fire whose flames I've fed

Recalling a memory of lives I've led.

"I'm more comfortable on stage," French said after the concert. The stage and the spotlight, is where French be-

longs.

When asked what her inspirations were, French said that life experiences give her a lot to write about. Before the song "Scarlett Wishes," she said, "This is about abuse." The song concludes:

*Scarlett wishes
He would die in the front
lines
Buried with her fears.*

*Scarlett wishes
She could...*

French's album does not simply contain drums, guitar and voice, like most pop musicians of today. Her musical talent is showcased by the fact that she writes all the musical parts on her songs, including the violin solo on the title track, "Me, Myself & I."

In 1996, French made two major U.S. appearances. She was invited to participate in Portland's North by Northwest Conference and also was included in 1996's Lilith Fair until it stopped in her hometown of Calgary.

French said, somewhat unexpectedly, that her musical inspiration has been Tori Amos and Tom Waits.

"I can't understand why she's not a superstar," one audience member said after hearing her for the first time. "Her music is far better than most of the crap they play on the radio lately."

Ireland superstar Máire Brennan performs at the Aladdin Theater

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An eclectic audience, with more age-range than most, nearly filled the house at the Aladdin Theatre last Tuesday, March 2, to see and hear Irish musician Máire Brennan.

You probably haven't heard her name, but you have heard her voice. Even if you don't know who Máire Brennan is, you know her ethereal sound. It has graced the soundtracks to *Last of the Mohicans*, *Patriot Games*, *Back to Titanic*, and *Message in a Bottle*, amongst countless others. Her haunting voice has also been heard in Volkswagen and Irish travel commercials, singing in English and her native Irish Gaelic. Even if you don't know Máire, chances are you know her younger sister, multi-Grammy-winning singer/songwriter Enya.

Máire (pronounced "MOY-uh") was born the eldest daughter of eight other brothers and sisters in Dobhar, a small town in the Gaith Dobhair area in County Dun na nGal ("County Donegal"), Ireland. This area of Ireland is known as the Gaeltacht area, where children learn Irish Gaelic as their first language. In this area, Irish music pulses like blood through everyone's veins.

It is hardly surprising, with a father performing in a band and a mother teaching piano and voice, that Máire would end up joining the now-famous (and Grammy-winning) band Clannad (Irish for "family"). Clannad had originally been formed in 1968 as "An Clann as Dobhar", meaning "The Family from Dore") by Máire's brothers Ciarán and Pól along with their twin uncles Pádraig and Noel Ó Dúgáin. When Máire joined, they shortened their name to "Clannad" and their musical career took flight. It was only a matter of time before they convinced their sister Eithne, who was studying classical music in college, to join them at age eighteen. She would leave two years and two albums later (*Cran Ull*, and *Fuaim*) in 1982 with the band's producer to pursue her solo career, phonetizing her name to "Enya". Pól also left Clannad in 1990 to pursue new musical horizons.

What is surprising is that the Brennan clan has been so amazingly successful. They are acknowledged as having paved the way for the now-popular "Celtic sound". Enya's talent has won her many awards and two Grammys (for albums *Shepherd Moons* and *The Memory of Trees*). And Clannad, though winning countless other awards, finally won their long-overdue Grammy this

year (for recent album *Landmarks*).

"I think if the public sees another Brennan coming on the scene they're going to puke!" Deirdre Brennan (who tours with Máire, singing harmony vocals and playing bodhran) joked several years ago. Now she tells me that she and another Brennan sister will soon release a duo album. And there couldn't be a better time for this change of mind.

Yet, these twenty successful years with Clannad were not challenging enough for Máire Brennan, and parallel to the Clannad albums, she has released three solo albums. Her third, *Perfect Time*, distributed by the Christian label Word, is her best yet. It has the peculiarity of being classified "Celtic Christian" . . . but this is a term Brennan embraces.

As she explained during the concert at the Aladdin Theatre, she was born a Catholic but has only become a Christian ten years ago. Amongst all the success of Clannad, she still felt as if something were missing. Brennan knew what it was, and she sought it out. She has long since wanted to share what she found in her music, but she wasn't sure how it would be received. When talking with fans after Clannad concerts, she found herself asked if she were a pagan, or a druid, or such. She found that people were surprised when she told them, "No, actually, I'm a Christian."

Her most recent release, *Perfect Time*, feels like the next logical next step in Brennan's music career. Despite the fact that several of the lyrics contain subtle

expressions of faith, this album is not a self-imposed style change, nor is it "preachy." Mostly, it is a reflection of self-discovery ("I know forgiveness is the key, not pride/I want to heal this pain I hide inside . . ." from the title track) of hope and of praise with songs in both Irish and English, a song about the history of Saint Patrick (who brought Christianity to Ireland) and a song sung by her mother's choir, a choir both she and Enya once sang in, and sometimes still do.

The concert was amazing, to say the least. Both those familiar with her earlier solo albums and those familiar with Clannad were treated to some old favorites, and those familiar with Irish music were treated with some ancient favorites. Each song, be it hers, Clannad's, or traditional Irish, was infused with admirable spirit—spirit which she expressed even in dance when not singing or playing harp. And to Brennan's credit, her voice and harp playing were as moving live as they are on her albums. It was fascinating to hear the many gorgeous vocal harmonies of "Perfect Time" reproduced so perfectly on stage.

The warm spirit that fans saw extended even beyond her music, and reached out into her personality. After the concert, Brennan was overjoyed to meet the many fans and sign their CD's. I found her extremely approachable and personable. At one point she even reached out and hugged me, saying, "I like this boy!"

We like you, too, Máire, and your music and warmth touch all who take the time to experience them.



JEREMY STALLWOOD / Clackamas Print

Máire Brennan, older sister of the famous Enya, is renowned for her talent as a harpist as well as for her delicate vocal skills.