

# Interview With Máiréad Nesbitt

The Celtic Café  
By Bruce Somers

***Your new CD is entitled "Raining Up", you told me. Is there a story behind that, a particular interpretation?***

Well, "Raining Up" is the name of the CD and the title track of the album written by my brother Karl. He was at the Cliffs of Moher one day. While walking along one notices evaporation from the water in the distance. This looks like drops of water going upwards into the sky, this is where he got the name.

***I am certain that your musical training began, as so often the case, at home within your family. That's correct, isn't it?***

Yes, that's correct. My parents John and Kathleen are well known music teachers and all my family are musicians. They never pushed music on any of us, but with them playing all the time it was natural that we'd want to join in! We learnt a lot at home listening to them and to tapes, records and CDs of great musicians.

***I know that Irish musicians generally begin learning very early, just as do Irish dancers. At what age did you begin and what did you first begin to play?***

We all started playing at an early age. I started the piano at 4 years and fiddle at 6, playing both traditional Irish music and classical. I played the whistle a lot at that time and tried other instruments, the flute and pipes, but didn't keep them up!

***And where did you continue after that training at home?***

I carried on at College with a degree, H. Dip. and post graduate studies at Waterford, Cork and London with the fiddle and piano, studying mainly classical music.

***I know of course, that you took part in competitions, but the question only now occurs to me - does that normally take place shortly after completion of formal training, or does one first gather experience in playing with various groups?***

That's a good question. For me, I played in competition from a very young age in solo and group competitions. I have to say, even though it can be nerve wracking, that you gather great experience and confidence as a child doing this.

You meet, interact and work with kids your own age and that's great fun! If you're lucky, you get to play with them and, more importantly, the more mature players in sessions. You listen and learn how they play the tunes and get to know the different styles.

***You told me one day after my return from a stay in Co. Clare, when I enthused about the music sessions I had experienced in the pubs there, that you used to play in Doolin. Were you a member of a certain group, or were those sessions in which the musicians come and go all evening? Have you taken part in both sorts?***

Like a lot of musicians in Ireland and abroad, I do visit Doolin to have the few tunes and visit people there. Whether or not you're a member of a band or whatever else wouldn't be an issue. You'd listen, have respect for the music and for who's playing it. If it is okay with the musicians, you join in and contribute in a positive way. It's very spontaneous, the best sessions are usually not organized, they just happen!

***I know that Doolin is often called the music capitol of Ireland (I DO wonder what the rest of Ireland***

***thinks of that!). Have you participated in such sessions in other places as well?***

There are sessions like this happening all over the country, not just in the well-known places. People of all ages join in, most of them of a very high standard with tunes one wouldn't hear very often. These are the sessions that happen consistently.

Then there are the festivals, e.g. the Willy Clancy week (or two) in Miltown, the All-Ireland Fleadh, the Fiddle Weeks in Donegal, etc. The sessions are always great at these and you bump into people you haven't seen in ages!

I've also had good sessions in Paris, Melbourne, Manchester and the US, so there are great musicians and sessions everywhere.

***Did your participation in such sessions precede your engagement with more formal organizations, orchestras, other groups, etc.?***

Yes, they preceded and then also ran concurrently with the more formal work. While working with other bands, with the R.T.É Concert Orchestra and doing formal session work in studios, it was and is good to keep playing other music, both solos and in sessions. It keeps your playing up and keeps you in touch with new tunes.

***You participated in the original soundtrack of Riverdance. Did that lead to your engagement with Lord of the Dance, or was there no direct connection?***

I did participate in the original soundtrack but there was no connection between that and Lord of the Dance.

***It seems very certain that the lion's share of visitors to the CelticCafe web site are familiar with you because of your engagement with Lord of the Dance and Feet of Flames. You and Cora Smyth have been called Rock Stars in that connection, which was undoubtedly meant as a compliment. Is that a direction which you had followed or engaged in, before you joined Lord of the Dance?***

God, Rockstars! We're just glad that people enjoy the show and our contribution to it!

To answer your question, I did do gigs and studio session work with a lot of Rock musicians and musicians of different styles and I hope to keep doing that when I can because it's great to play with people from different genres of music, and it's good fun also!

***Quite apart from Lord of the Dance and Feet of Flames, you do find time and opportunity to engage in several other projects. Please tell me about those you are currently engaged in.***

Yes, the shows are a priority as they are busy all the time. Over the past two years. I was lucky enough to do different things also.

With the band "Coolfin" I toured Japan twice playing with the famous Kodo Drummers.

Participated in two T.V. series of "Sult".

Did a programme with my family in the T.V. series "Geantraí".

Recently did a programme for the T.V. series "Tacsí" and completed my CD

***And now we have your new solo CD, Máiréad! Please tell us about it and about the content.***

It's called "Raining Up" and it's mainly instrumental, there's one vocal track. It has a strong leaning towards Irish and Scottish music. There are some newly composed tracks also that have a slightly Latin feel and have string arrangements.

"Raining Up" conveys to an extent the different styles that I've been involved in, so I hope there's something there for everyone!

***Mánus Lunny and Colm Ó Foghlú are involved, I've been told. When did you begin it and how long has it taken to complete?***

Yes, it was fantastic having Mánus Lunny and Colm Ó Foghlú involved. Mánus produced nine tracks and Colm five; Colm also composed four of those tracks. We began in October 2000 recording at Secret Music Studios in Glasgow and Solitaire Recording Studios in Dublin. It took about three months to complete.

***Máiréad, there are members of your family playing with you on the album, aren't there?***

Yes, two of my brothers, Seán and Karl, my mother Kathleen and sister Frances.

I'll have to rope in my father and my other two brothers for the next one! My sister-in-law Caroline did the artwork and design. So there was great involvement and support from my family.

***Your mother Kathleen has also been busy with her own project at the same time as yours.***

That's right, she has written and recorded her fiddle tutor of Irish traditional music. It's called "fidil" and consists of the book and the double CD. It is expected to be released in October.

***Thank you very much Máiréad, for the chance to chat with you; always to my great pleasure!***