



Máiréad Rains Supreme!

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Máiréad Nesbitt is one half of the fiddling twosome in Lord of the Dance, Troupe 1.

The gorgeous thirty-something has managed to take time out to record her debut solo album, Raining Up, and is chuffed to bits with the end result! IDM's Claire Spreadbury got chatting to her in the middle of the show's tour in Germany, to find out her favourite tracks, family contribution and future plans...

So how did it all come about?

I had actually started the album a few years ago and put it on hold because the shows were a priority. We were so busy travelling around that it was hard to concentrate on it. We came off the first Feet Of Flames tour and had some time off before we came back to Lord Of The Dance so I decided to use that time off to finish the album. I got Manus Lunny to produce it and Colm O Foghlu produced some of the tracks too. I wrote some stuff myself and my brother wrote the title track. Basically, everyone got together which was great! I decided it would have to be done and I'm really glad now. It's actually been recorded for a year but it's taken that long to go through all the different channels to be released.

Raining Up is a lovely album containing a selection of tracks that express the different styles Máiréad enjoys playing. A musical blend of traditional Irish, Scottish and contemporary come together to form a debut to be proud of.

I'm very pleased with the end result. Obviously it was a busy time - I just took the only time off I had and did the album in about three months. I think I've put it together in a more

modern way, although the tunes are not messed around with or anything. I like to play in a traditional style if that's the way they're meant to be played but I like the backing to be a bit more funky. For me it's quite a mixed album and I hope there's something for everyone on there, and for every age group. That's what I wanted to do and I'm pleased a few members of my family are on it as well, that was very important to me. We hadn't actually all been on a CD before so it was nice to do something all together.

This included all but two brothers and her dad, who were busy at the time!

It was just something I wanted to do. I thought, first of all, they're brilliant musicians, and I'd had it in my mind to do a track with the 3 fiddles - my mother, sister and myself - because it's fairly rare that you'll get three fiddles in the one family. I think it worked well because we're used to playing together. Our styles aren't too different and we gelled on the album. My brother wrote the track, Raining Up and there's a bit of a story behind the title. He called it that after he was walking on the Cliffs of Moher one day down in Clare. It depends on what kind of a day you have but it was a misty, humid day and if you're up on the cliffs and you look out to the ocean, there's a condensation that rises from the sea. It looks like little drops going up into the clouds. It's very unusual looking. I've seen it myself, like Raining Up.

As if you hadn't guessed, Máiréad comes from a very musical family which perhaps had something to do with the fact that her parents taught music! She even used to Irish dance before the fiddle took over, but how does it feel to make music your life?

It really is a vocation and you wouldn't do it unless you really, really loved it. It's hard work and you have to be very flexible and versatile, and you have to be able to play with different types of people as well as in different styles because it's not the most steady job in the world. But I absolutely love it.

And she really must adore it to play night after night for five and a half years in Lord Of The Dance. So, I had to ask: How does it feel to be in such a hit show and do you think being beautiful helps in the business?!!!

It's just fabulous watching all the performers because they're so good. Nothing is wrong, all the lines and formations are just perfect and I really enjoy the accuracy of the dancing and just watching that whilst I'm playing. Obviously we can see what we're playing for and it's very exciting which is what I like most about it. I'm sure my looks did have something to do with me getting the job. I don't think I look anything special at all but in a show like this, or indeed in any show, it's entertainment. I certainly wouldn't be naïve enough to believe that it was only my fiddle playing that got me the part. You have to look a certain way for a show and to go out in front of approximately 10,000 people every night. You have to make sure your hair looks ok and put on a bit of make up. You just have to be professional about it. People pay huge money a ticket to go and see the show and it's not fair if you go out looking untidy or not looking as well as you possibly can. It goes with the whole package in

a show like this and I do think that my looks will have been 50% of the reason why I was asked, and that would go for everybody else in the show too.

And tell us, do you play the whole show completely live, every night?

Yes, we play 100% live! The fiddle numbers aren't on track at all so if a string breaks, a string breaks! It has happened! You just have to look meaningfully at the sound man or hold your fiddle up and hope he'll turn you down. Or if a string goes out of tune, you have to stop for a second to try and get it back. A lot of things have happened in the past but that's the beauty of something being performed live. You have to be careful not to move around too much because your playing can be heard so you can't be scratching and your tone and tuning can't suffer. You do your best to get a happy compromise so as long as you have that in your head and you concentrate, it's fine.

But the burning question, of course, is whether our funky female fiddler is trying to break away from the show to concentrate on her new solo career?!

[Bursts into hysterical laughter!]

No! To get the album finished was an ambition of mine. I had started it before and stopped it so that I could concentrate on the show. Then I had some time off and decided I'd finish the album when I had the chance. So I didn't actually sacrifice anything from the show to do the album, I concentrated on the two separately. It's just something I had to do for myself. I think it's good to keep your own interests going, otherwise you can stagnate. Also, I think it gives you a fresher approach to everything you're doing - like the show - because you're improving yourself and therefore everything else improves as well. Nobody knows how long any show is going to last and as long as it doesn't take away from what you're doing - which it hasn't, I think it's a good thing and I think everyone can benefit from that. I'll keep doing what I'm doing for the moment and we'll see what happens!

As Raining Up gets ready for a global release, Mairead is choc-a-block with Lord Of The Dance, at least until Christmas anyway. Look out for a full review and giveaway of her debut album in next month's IDM!