

Clannad are actually cool? I'm reeling

POP

An unearthed tape by the Irish folk group is strange and beautiful, says **Will Hodgkinson**

Clannad

Turas 1980
Radio Bremen
★★★★☆

How we laughed at poor old Clannad. Their 1982 hit *Theme From Harry's Game* was a sober plea for peace, sung in Gaelic during the Northern Ireland Troubles, but all we kids heard was the kind of thing your hippy aunt who never had any Coca-Cola in the fridge was forever threatening to wait along to.

At a time when Madness and Adam and the Ants were singing about baggy trousers and dandy highwaymen, a family band emerging from Co Donegal to make a scented candle-friendly combination of traditional folk and new age mysticism didn't seem that exciting. All these years later, on a newly released double album made when they were at the height of their powers, the siblings Charan, Pól and Moya Brennan and their twin uncles, Noel and Pádraig Duggan, sound far more creative, affecting and downright unusual than we gave them credit for.

Turas 1980 is a live recording of a concert in Bremen, Germany, featuring pretty, unadorned versions of traditional tunes with some rather earnest explanations of the stories behind them. On *Paddy's Rambles*



Through the Fields, a tale of a man who hears a banshee singing in the countryside at 3am, Charan says: "God knows, he might have ate some of the magic mushrooms." Against all reason, Clannad became huge.

The Clannad story went from curious to curiouser in 1980 when the Brennans' little sister Enyra joined the band. Their managers, husband and wife Nicky and Roma Ryan, saw Enyra's potential and jumped ship with her in 1982. Sung in English, Gaelic, Eivish and Loxian — a language designed for a futuristic Celtic race who leave Earth for the star of Aldebaran in the constellation of Taurus — Enyra's brand of multilayered ambient faerie folk became an unlikely hit. Now she lives alone in a castle outside Dublin, with the Ryans in a nearby castle for

company. Meanwhile, her siblings and uncles have continued with Clannad. Between them the Brennans have sold more than 90 million records.

Turas 1980 presents traditional Irish music in an intimate and virtuosic but free-flowing way, with all the rain-soaked pastoralism you would expect. Bono, rarely afraid of over-egging the pudding, says Clannad "distilled the rugged landscape and melancholy sky of their beloved Donegal into a music that could not be contained on any one island", yet as you listen to a lamenting take on Yeats's *Down by the Salley Gardens* or Moya bringing surprising jauntness to *Two Sisters*, a ballad about a murder, you realise the man from U2 has a point. Clannad captured in music the spirit of the Irish countryside better than anyone.

Clannad

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