



Screaming Orphans Biog

There are several famous names scattered throughout the history of Screaming Orphans, whose new album, *Life In A Carnival*, is released at the end of March. These names include Christy Moore, Sinead O'Connor, Luka Bloom, Babba Maal, Damien Dempsey, Peter Gabriel, and The National – and they all play a part in the Donegal band's passage from inexperienced child singers to fully-fledged songwriters/performers.

Their story – a valuable tale of shared strength and commitment – begins at home and hearth. Four sisters (Gráinne, Joan, Marie Thérèse and Angela) were born to the exceptionally musical Diver family in the resort town of Bundoran, County Donegal, Ireland. Uncles, mothers, fathers, and relatives were all either directly involved with or drawn towards music.

"We were born into it," discloses Joan. "There were always musicians in the house, and even though our dad couldn't play an instrument he loved, lived and breathed music. It was inevitable that we all became immersed in music – we would have had no choice! The great thing is that we grew up in a household that had very varied musical tastes; it certainly wasn't one dimensional in that regard."

The young sisters started out singing with their mother (in her own right a highly regarded vocalist who performed locally and in the UK) but settled into their own creative temperament when they played gigs at surf festivals in their hometown. As with many novice bands, their gigs comprised mostly covers, but gradually, reveals Gráinne, "we formed our own identity. In some ways, we were trying to be everything, but slowly we got there."

Despite their naiveté, says Joan, they had "confidence from the very start, as well as a good balance of music styles that ranged from pop music to traditional." It took a while for things to develop, but gradually Screaming Orphans started to emerge from the shell of artistic inexperience.

A helping hand came in the form of a friend of the extended Diver family - acclaimed Irish writer, Nuala O'Faolain, who through various personal connections secured for the band a much-coveted slot on Ireland's prestigious *Late Late Show*. "We had one song written," recalls Gráinne, shaking her head at the cheek of it. A shaky start to national prominence, perhaps, but certain people were watching the show and liked what they heard. Music bookers soon got in touch, and before you could sing *The Parting Glass* from start to finish Screaming Orphans were playing gigs in Dublin venues such as the Baggot Inn.

It was at one of these gigs that they met Irish singer and songwriter Luka Bloom, who alerted a friend of his to check out the band. The 'friend' was Sinead O'Connor, one of Ireland's most successful performers. As soon as O'Connor heard the band, she invited them to not only be her backing singers

for a forthcoming US tour but also her support act. It was, recalls, Joan, something of a baptism by fire. “We had about six songs written, no management, no albums or t-shirts to sell. We were completely not ready – we didn't know what we were doing!”

From such a drenching arrives insight, and before too long Screaming Orphans were slowly but surely becoming all too familiar with the vagaries of the music industry: signing to a publishing company, signing to a record label, and then – in what has to be the most typical and regular of music industry occurrences for a musician or group – being dropped. What at first seemed the end for the sisters, however, was actually the start of a new lease of life. “We decided to go to America,” says Joan. “We got on a plane and landed in New York.”

Although hardly knowing anyone in NYC, and with little money to their name, Screaming Orphans did what came naturally: they played music. “We went back to basics and started gigging as much as possible,” remembers Gráinne. “We bought a bass amp and a trolley, went on the subway, gigged in as many bars as possible, ate celery soup for months. Most importantly, we didn't buckle under.”

Years spent gigging across New York, hooking up with the Irish festivals circuit across the US, and releasing albums that alternated their ingrained love of Irish traditional music with vivid guitar-oriented pop/rock guaranteed the sisters a place at the table in terms of audience appeal. “The one thing you can be certain of is that if you put us in front of a crowd then we will entertain them,” says Gráinne.

Along with the entertainment factor (“we are the only all-female band who can headline these Irish festivals,” says Joan) is a canny creative streak that comes to the fore with their new album, *Life In A Carnival*. The new record follows 2017's critically acclaimed *Taproom* (No 1 in the *iTunes* World Music charts; Top 10 *Billboard* World Albums chart; voted Folk/Pop/Rock Album 2017 by *Folk'n'Rock Magazine*) and fully represents what the musicians and songwriters are, and where they're at: a group with an open mind, a group that prefers to use the word ‘hybrid’ (which strengthens) rather than ‘dilute’ (which weakens).

Produced by internationally distinguished producer John Reynolds (Sinead O'Connor, Damien Dempsey, Brian Eno, Robert Plant, David Byrne, and many more), the album blends breezy pop music (*Carnival*, *Ordinary Woman*, *My Heart*, *Somebody*, and *Happy Together*, a bubbly cover of The Turtles' hit song) and hazy ballads (*Guardian Angels*, *Loved And Lost*, *Shine*, *Sunday Morning*) with boisterous pop/rock tunes (*Raise Up Your Glass*, *Scream*).

The aim of the new album, says Gráinne, is to make fans aware of their creative reach. While the band still love playing in front of appreciative crowds at festivals, they want it known, Joan points out, that they're “not just a rowdy bar band having fun.”

“We are four women that have stuck it out,” adds Joan. “We make our living from music, and by that have made our dreams come true. The new album is a valid artistic statement, and there'll be more to come.”

After years of music industry turmoil and personal triumphs, after years of fusing the old with the new, Screaming Orphans have come of age. With *Life In A Carnival* the four sisters will find their tribe.

“We've been through all of the highs and lows, good and bad,” concludes Joan. “Nothing will break us.”