

Maura O'Connell – Bio

Maura O'Connell was born on 16th September 1958 in Ennis, County Clare, Ireland, and is the third of four female siblings. Her mother loved to sing – light opera and opera - and Maura was raised in an environment where music was a vital ingredient in daily life. A choir member through her school years, O'Connell still credits her mother as her principle influence in terms of singing style. In 1977 Maura began her professional singing career when she joined Mike Hanrahan, also born and raised in Ennis, in the duo Tumbleweed. They toured the Irish folk circuit and also appeared at the first Lisdoonvarna Music Festival. As well as performing some of Hanrahan's compositions, the pair covered country songs penned by Gram Parsons and Willie Nelson, as well as folk based material by *crossover writers* Richard and Linda Thomson and Neil Young. Hanrahan later joined the band, Stockton's Wing. During her late teens O'Connell was also involved in the local community theatre, although in a 1992 interview for Dirty Linen she recalled that period with *"I saw myself working in the shop."* Her mother's family owned a fish shop in Ennis.

In 1981 Maura was invited to join the traditional Irish folk group De Dannan by founder Frankie Gavin. At the time Maura had little or no knowledge of traditional Irish music. That year she was involved in her first recording sessions, and the resulting band album **"The Star Spangled Molly"** was co-produced by the group and Nicky Ryan. O'Connell stayed with the band for two years, and was replaced by Mary Black. 1983 saw the release of O'Connell's first solo album, a self-titled affair released by Third Floor Music and produced by P. J. Curtis. Through Curtis, Maura met American dobro player Jerry Douglas, and while touring met the group New Grass Revival. Fascinated by their experimental sound, and becoming friends with the foregoing musicians, in Nashville they helped her cut the album **"Just In Time."** Released in Ireland to great success, the album finally appeared Stateside in 1988 on Philo. The recording was produced by Bela Fleck, as was **"Western Highway"** which was later released Stateside by Warner Bros. as **"Helpless Heart."** It was nominated for a Contemporary Folk Grammy. The album **"Always,"** on Third Floor Music, was a compilation recording that drew on tracks produced by Ryan, Fleck, Curtis and Rod McVey.

In 1986 O'Connell made the decision to pursue her musical career in the States, and relocated to Nashville. The 1991 Warner Bros. album **"A Real Life Story,"** recorded in L.A., featured a pop music approach, was produced by Greg Penny. With the appearance of **"Blue Is The Colour Of Hope,"** the following year, O'Connell scored her second Grammy nomination, and began a production partnership with Jerry Douglas that lasted three albums. Hannibal Records released the titles **"Stories"** and **"Wandering Home,"** while Maura's Sugar Hill debut **"Walls And Windows"** was produced by Steve Earle's Twangtrust partner Ray Kennedy. Her sophomore Sugar Hill release, **"Don't I Know"** [2004], saw Douglas return to the producer's seat.

Aside for her own recordings, O'Connell has sung on albums by Nanci Griffith, Dana Cooper, Vince Bell, Robert Earl Keen, Mark O'Connor and Jerry Douglas. In 1988 she worked with Van Morrison and The Chieftains, on their collaborative project **"Irish Heartbeat."** In 1991 she appeared in the BBC tv's Irish/American musical roots series **"Bring It All Back Home"** performing "Western Highway." Later that decade she contributed "Blue Train" and "Trouble In The Fields" to BBC Scotland/RTE musical series **"Transatlantic Sessions."** In the early nineties when Ireland's Dara Records released the mega selling compilations, **"A Woman's Heart"** Maura was featured singing "Living In These Troubled Times" and "Summerfly." Two years later, on **"A Woman's Heart 2,"** she contributed "Trouble In The Fields" and "Western Highway." Martin Scorsese cast O'Connell as an Irish émigré street singer in the movie **"The Gangs of New York"** [2002].

Discography :

with De Dannan : **"The Star Spangled Molly"** [1981] :

Solo : **"Maura O'Connell"** [1983] ; **"Western Highway"** [1987] ; **"Just In Time"** [1988] ; **"Always"** [1989] ; **"Helpless Heart"** Warner Bros. reissue of "Western Highway" [1989] ; **"A Real Life Story"** [1991] ; **"Blue Is The Colour Of Hope"** [1992] ; **"Stories"** [1995] ; **"Wandering Home"** [1997] ; **"Walls And Windows"** [2001] ; **"Don't I Know"** [2004] :

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