



What's the story behind...

...Noctambule?

Bruce: In 2011, I was running a house concert series and had to find some Irish-music-oriented youth performers to open for a well-known Irish musician. That led to a chat with Marla, who teaches Irish music on the mandolin. We shared a bottle of wine, dinner, then a few songs around Marla's kitchen table, discussing everything but the concert in question.

I asked her whether she wrote music, and she began to play some of her musical settings of poetry for me. I was astounded by the lyricism and musicality of her compositions and, for the first time ever, I felt this was music that I needed to be a part of. I asked her to record three tracks so I could layer in some guitar parts. An album followed about a year-and-a-half after that...and marriage one month after that.

...performing in a car park?

Marla: Some years back I made a video in a parking structure in Berkeley, of a beautiful tune called *The Parting*, written by Cyril O'Donoghue. The acoustics were so 'live', and the odd aesthetic appealed to me as well. When Bruce and I became a duo, we thought the acoustics there would suit our sound quite nicely, and plotted a trip back under cover of darkness. We recorded three videos that night – O'Carolan's *Eleanor Plunkett*, John Whelan's *Trip to Skye*, and our *A Sweetish Tune*, which ends in the glorious glow of taillights from the only car in the whole place blocked in by our little endeavor.

...the album *A Sweetish Tune*?

Marla: After making two albums together of largely original musical settings of poetry, *Travel In The Shadows* and *The Waking*, I was eager to make an Irish trad album. It had been more than five years since I'd done so, and I was eager to apply the Noctambule sound to Irish trad.

Bruce: We deliberated as to whether I was the appropriate person with whom to make this album, as I did not have the same depth of involvement in trad as Marla. Ultimately, we decided my background of Motown, British folk-baroque – combined with my overdeveloped sense of whimsy – could work for us.

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What's the story behind... (continued)

...visiting Ireland and UK?

Marla: Given the exigencies of the earlier adult years – child rearing, demanding jobs to support said children, and so on, I haven't spent nearly as much time in Ireland as I would have wished. I've been craving to go again and be immersed in the music. Playing gigs there would be an utter privilege, and not one I would take lightly.

Bruce: I was in Ireland only once but have always wanted to return. I was not only enchanted, but also felt a deep sense of heritage there, despite the actual absence of Irish ancestry. I will also confess that the commercials on Facebook offering a sane place to which Americans might flee have looked increasingly appealing.

...the bowler hat?

Bruce: In 2011, after a lifetime of luxuriant hair, I developed Alopecia Universalis. I wasn't exactly happy about this, as I never considered Bruce Willis or Yul Brynner to be tonsorial role models. Initially, the bowler was compensation. However, with our first album being about night journeys, we thought we should dress as quasi-elegant guides of the night. So when we stumbled upon a bowler in a Los Angeles hat emporium, this became the first purchase in the cultivation of our new collective persona.

...the instruments?

Marla: My mandolin came to me through my grandfather. I remember him playing it for me, my brother and sister and my cousins when we were children. It was after he died that I picked it up and began to learn to play it, learning to play music at the same time. It was at the same time that I first heard Irish music and became entranced with it, so that's what I played on it. I've only played this mandolin – its voice is part and parcel of my music – its sound is my sound.

Bruce: My 12-string, which I consider my principal instrument, was made in 2005 by Alan Perlman, a brilliant luthier in San Francisco. It has 16 frets to the body, which made it more suitable for low and alternate tunings. It's an extraordinary instrument that offers a panoply of tones and textures. Alan said at the time, 'You tend to be somewhat rough on instruments, so I'll make you this guitar on condition that you never take it out of the case and play it'.

I've had serial 'alpha six strings' during my last half-century as a guitar player. For our latest album, my principal six-string is a 70s Fylde Orsino – cedar top and mahogany back and sides. Mentor of my mentors and inventor of DADGAD tuning Davey Graham used this model as his main performance guitar from which I derive a wonderful sense of lineage.

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