Once in a Lifetime

Talking about working with Hothouse Flowers, Martin Brunsden describes it as 'amazing plank walking.' The reason the band has endured for over forty years, he says, is because there is never a set list. The band don't even know what they will play until they play it. 'We've no idea what we're going to do when we step onto the stage really. We get on the musical train and off we go, and anything can happen.'

Those coming to see Martin and Hothouse Flowers frontman Liam Ó Maonlaí do an acoustic set at Bridport Arts Centre on Thursday 19 November are in for a similar musical adventure. Taking time out from an extensive full-band UK tour in November, the pair will put on an intimate, stripped-back evening of songs and improvisation. Traditional music, soul, jazz and silence combine to create something both ancient and new.

Born in Dublin in 1964, Liam Ó Maonlaí often credits his parents with instilling in him a love of the traditional songs of his native country. He shares a passion for music as a healing force. Speaking on Irish television, he said he likened the drive to make music to the need to eat. 'It's a compulsion. It's a healing thing. It's physical. It's my medicine. Making music is what makes me feel better.'

Formed in the mid-80s, Hothouse Flowers released the most successful debut album in Irish history, *People*, which reached number 1 in Ireland and number 2 in the UK. Fellow Dubliner and U2 frontman Bono's comment in a Rolling Stone interview that they were "The best unsigned band in the world" was a real boost.

Martin Brunsden's entry into a career in music came with its fair share of bumps in the road. When a teacher at school put all the available instruments on stage, Martin made a beeline for the double bass. That was the instrument he wanted to learn. Knowing it was expensive, his mother suggested he sign up for six lessons and then decide. Despite falling in love with the double bass and forming a real connection with the teacher, the first lesson was traumatic. She had an epileptic fit during the lesson and never returned to school afterwards. 'I was 11, and I was just really sad.' When he heard she wouldn't be coming back, he thought that was the end of it. 'I'd sort of glimpsed over the parapet, and then it was gone.'

The next stage of his musical adventure came when he met with a group of Aboriginal people in Australia and took up the didgeridoo. Captivated by a local Tjapukai tribesman playing the instrument, Martin went out the next day and cut down a bamboo tree to fashion his own didgeridoo. It took a while, but he was soon spellbound and learned to play. Although he now plays double bass with Hothouse Flowers, it was the didgeridoo that brought them together. While working to make a TV set for the late comedian and broadcaster Bill Oddie at Glastonbury, he noticed a bunch of musicians sitting around a campfire singing and playing, and asked if he could join them. They turned out to be Hothouse Flowers, and, as he put it, he was 'swept' onto the main stage the next day to play with them. He never looked back.

Liam and Martin's set at the Bridport Arts Centre will be unique, not only because they are distinctive musicians with a passion for their craft, but also because it's a rare, spontaneous performance where every piece is composed in the room and exists only for the audience there on the night.

Liam Ó Maonlaí and Martin Brunsden's acoustic set at Bridport Arts Centre is on Thursday 19 November at 7:30pm. For tickets, telephone 01308 424204 or visit: https://www.bridport-arts.com.