



# a GLEN FOR ALL SEASONS

*Since winning an Oscar for **Once**, GLEN HANSARD's life has swerved like an out of control rollercoaster. There was a whirlwind romance with, and painful separation from, Markéta Irglová; the suicide of a fan which left him with brains on his shoes and a chasm in his soul and the strange guilt he felt at being successful. With his first solo album about to be released, he pulls up a stool and explains how he learned to stop worrying and love his new life in New York.*

WORDS Stuart Clark PHOTOS Conor Masterson

A certain Danish beer company doesn't do months, but if they did they'd be like the one Glen Hansard has just enjoyed in New York, where for reasons both professional and personal he's been living for the past year.

"May was one 'pinch me!' moment after another," he smiles on a rare day back in Dublin. "First, I played in this tiny club, The Living Room, on Ludlow St. where I got to do 'The Auld Triangle' with Bono! Usually these things leak out, but everyone was gobsmacked when I said, 'I've got this buddy who's going to sing with me' and he just ambled up on stage, gave a little bow and launched straight into it! I imagine you'll find it somewhere on YouTube."

Yup, there's a six-minute clip of this meeting of great musical minds, which fair sends a shiver down the spine. Glen does a fine 'I wish to Jaysus they'd raise me wages!' while Mr. Hewson downs what looks suspiciously like a large whiskey.

"That'd be about right! We were also involved in this other thing up in Harlem at the Apollo. There's this amazing charity called The Jazz Foundation, which pays the rent and medical bills of Little Jimmy Scott or a guy who played in Thelonius Monk's band or with Mingus. They had these great moments in the sun, but they weren't the lead guy so now they're fucking broke. Bono did 'Angel Of Harlem' – what else? – and I got to sing with Dr. John. It was an amazing night."

I'd give my first-born to share a bevy with Mac Rebennack. What sort of character is the good Doctor?

"He's a funny one. I chatted with him for a few minutes – musician to musician – and he couldn't have been friendlier. But then some full-on guy butted into the conversation, and he switched into Cajun *gris-gris*. It's his defence mechanism. Whoever it was couldn't understand a word and just went away. I saw Dr. John do it twice that night. Shane MacGowan's the same – if you approach him and he doesn't want to talk to you he just acts drunk. It's like sliding down a marble wall."

So Shane MacGowan *acts* drunk?

"Some of the time, yeah!" Glen laughs. "Shane's a lot smarter and aware of what's going on around him than people give him credit for."

You'd have thought that would've been enough celebrity hobnobbing for one month but, no, there's more!

"We did this benefit for St. Ann's, a performance space that's having to move. It was really emotional 'cos I knew Jeff Buckley, and his mum Mary Gilbert was part of the organising committee. They're doing a biopic and Reeve Carney from the *Spider-Man* musical is down to play Jeff. It was me, Sam Amidon, Karen O, Nick Zinner, Emmylou Harris and Lou also turned up."

The Lou in question being Mr. Reed, a downtown Manhattan neighbour of Glen's, who is currently ensconced in the studio with David Bowie.

"I was living on the corner of Bleaker and Bowery, and

you'd see Lou 'n' Laurie (*Anderson*) out all the time walking their dog. Bowie was within a block of me – there's a great Italian, Ballato's, on Houston he's a regular in. David Byrne's nearby too but New Yorkers by and large not being into the star-fucking thing, they get left alone.

"It was spooky," Glen continues. "I watched *The Great Escape* one night in my flat and then a few days later discovered that Steve McQueen had lived there years ago. What a crazy coincidence."

What made him say "goodbye" to his family and friends and move to a city where he only knew a handful of people?

"As someone who grew up on Dylan and reading William Burroughs, New York's always held a fascination for me. I'd stayed on people's couches before, but this was the first time I could afford to go over and get a year's lease on somewhere that isn't a shoebox. Dublin's a great place to live but not the best place in the world to be well-known. I sound like a dick saying that, but Irish people have no qualms about coming up and fucking telling you what they think of you. That's all very well and good but... there's definitely a comfort in anonymity. I was craving it, to be honest."

As success-filled as Glen's Swell Season years have been – an Oscar-winning film, two top 30 American albums, a *Simpsons* appearance and now a smash-hit Broadway musical – there have also been darker moments which by his own admission have left him battered and bruised. The one that nobody could have foreseen was 32-year-old Michael Pickels leaping to his death in August 2010, mid-way through an open air Swell Season gig in a Californian winery.

"That was so shocking and sad and dark that we weren't sure what to do after that night," he says gravely. "The guy landed next to me, his brains were all over the stage. A half-foot closer and he would've killed me. God bless him, I don't really want to speak about him 'cos it was his story. 4,000 people saw him die. He was making a very angry, public point. I guess that was his way of saying, 'I'm fucking here!' We got counselling. We spoke to a couple of people who are experts in this area. They made it very clear that it was nothing to do with us. This was his issue, so we decided to go ahead and do the gigs we had booked."

Along with the \$200 an hour professional counselling, Glen got support from a less likely but far more rock 'n' roll source.

"Out of the blue Eddie Vedder rang me," he says still looking incredulous. "He must have heard about it on the news. We spoke that first day for about an hour. He was in Seattle and I was walking around somewhere. Then I went to Brazil, and Eddie rang me the next day and the next day and the next day until he said, 'I think we've spoken enough. You seem to be in a better place, but you know, I'm here for you. Here's my number, call whenever you want'. He'd watched nine people being crushed to death at that Pearl Jam gig in Denmark. Eddie went into such a dark place afterwards, so he understood what was going