

ad.”
eventually met up in person, Vedder invited
quest alongside Cat Power on his *Ukulele*
um.
id, ‘I’d like us to join voices on this because
lot of these songs after that incident and
ng with me it’ll help us both to get through
ng’. It was such a gift to me – out of even the
stuff friendship was born.”
endship is very much ongoing, with Glen
are of support next month when Eddie plays
ws in Holland and the UK. Incidentally, I
ing before Christmas to Lisa Hannigan who,
ukulele owner herself, was most aggrieved
n didn’t wangle her on to the record.
isa, I rang but you were out!” he laughs.
was more pain in early 2011 when he had to
h the very public break-up of his relationship
rkéta Irglová.
way it got out is that we were in Canada, I
oing an interview. Somebody asked a cheeky
e – ‘Is there any truth to these rumours etc.
– and Mar not wanting to lie said, ‘Yeah’.
nd of been on and off but that made it very
became such a big deal that I questioned
I wanted to continue with any kind of press.
e than happy to speak about what it is to
ngs, but this is my life – it’s no-one’s fucking
s but Mar’s and mine.
ot the media’s fault we broke up, but
it written about was kind of hard on our
ship. We were solidified into this *thing*, which
it well with either of us. It seemed like a
ntment to everyone when it was over.”
wanted them to be the alt. Will ‘n’ Kate.
s exactly,” he nods. “The media is funny like
e never been in a tabloid in my life for non-
or acting reasons and I’m very happy about
ere was a moment though when we veered
that area and I thought, ‘This isn’t good. It’s
signed up for.’”
Markéta who broke the silence about the
p first, telling *Hot Press* last year that: “If it’s
at every person you meet in your life is your
and your student, Glen and I have definitely
aching and learning from each other in how
unconditionally. We might have parted as
or our own reasons, but I’ll never stop loving
ll never stop wanting to be supportive and
aging to him.”
s a momentary pause in the conversation
paraphrase those lines to him.
e, being in America I must have missed that...
s seeing a guy in our crew and it was great for
ause I have a girlfriend. We continued to tour
r... we were all so close... it was like, ‘I think I
take a year away from this band and from this
on!’”
e he’s never gone the Thom Yorke, “Being
is so hard!” route, it’s obvious that stardom
always sat comfortably with Glen.
e won the Oscar I spoke with Bruce
steen and he said something really great to me
don’t mark your successes by opening a bottle
pagne, going on holiday or at least having
with your family, you mightn’t recognise that
e has just shifted into a new gear’. He was
ely right. After we won the award, we just
busier and a couple of years later I still wasn’t
y comfortable with it. It was an odd weight on
ulders. I wasn’t sure if I wanted to reject it or
ely accept it.
s incredibly overjoyed for (*Once* director) John
,” he continues. “I was incredibly overjoyed
and Mar and my family – but I was feeling
rt of sorrow. It’s like blood in the milk and I
t get rid of it. The Boss said, ‘For the past 20
ou’ve been a guy in a band, a guy on the street,
been working your way up, you against the
... That guy has just died! The guy you’ve always
he only guy you had to turn to, is now dead
u’re wearing a new suit. You’re mourning the
g of your old self. Don’t worry about it – take



some time to adjust. You know the story about Native Americans sitting at the airport for four or five hours after a long-haul flight ‘til their soul catches up with them? Just give yourself time to let your soul catch up with you and then you’ll be fine’. That really helped me to get my head around things.”

Another reason Glen Hansard has been residing in New York recently is the theatrical version of *Once*, which started off-Broadway, quickly moved on to it and last weekend picked up no fewer than eight Tony Awards – an astonishing achievement. Grossing \$707,000 a week, it’s the most successful Irish musical since *Riverdance* and come spring 2013 will be going on tour, with Glen desperate for an Irish stop-off. “It will happen, I just don’t know when,” he says.

Was he apprehensive about it being turned into a stage show?

“Apprehensive? No, I was horrified! When it first came up as an idea, it just made me shiver. I said to John Carney, ‘Please tell me we’re not agreeing to this? Is there anything I can do to stop it?’ John was more enthusiastic, yet at the same determined that if it was going to be done, it’d be done his way. My attitude changed when Enda Walsh, who’s done dark stuff like *Disco Pigs* and *Hunger*, signed up to it. It’s a bit like someone saying, ‘We’re going to get Ken Loach to direct *The Commitments 2*’. Then John Tiffany who did *Black Watch* came on board – another serious head who’d never touched musical theatre before. You’ve got an Irish guy from Kilbarack writing it and the boss of the National Theatre of Scotland directing. Suddenly it began to have a darker undertone. I met the lads and they said, ‘We promise you, we’re not going to turn it into a song and dance piece’. I was like, ‘Cool, I’ll hold you to that!’”

Has he worked out how the Broadway machine, which contributes \$11.2 billion every year to NYC’s economy, bolts together?

“No,” he admits. “I’ve seen enough Broadway to last me a lifetime – and I’ve seen two plays. Actually, that’s not true, I’ve seen *three*. That’s an uneducated bias. It’s all very common dominator – y’know, a gag a minute. That said, I’ve enjoyed the shows I’ve been to in the same way I quite enjoyed *Marley & Me*. Leave your cynical/critical head at home and it’s an okay way to spend an evening.”

There’s good shite and bad shite, isn’t there?

“Exactly,” he concurs. “I went to see a couple of things and they were really entertaining but the idea of *Once* being presented in the same way just horrified me. Thankfully, John and Enda were good to their word. They did a run-through in a bar in Boston and I have to say what transpired before my eyes was just

really fucking good. I was like, ‘Oh, thank god, they didn’t blow it!’”

Once winning eight Tony Awards is all the more remarkable given that it was up in virtually every category against *Newsies The Musical*, a big-budget staging of the hit Disney movie.

“Once was a risk because it doesn’t have the song and dance element and, yeah, the budget that other Broadway musicals have,” Glen reflects. “In the beginning they were depending on whatever goodwill the movie had. They did an off-Broadway run and people who were interested in the film went along. The big thing then was the reviews, which were really positive and drove people who’d never heard of *Once* prior to that to the theatre.”

While borrowing major elements from it, *Once: The Musical* is by no means a facsimile of the film, which incidentally has now grossed \$20 million – an over 6,000% return on the \$150,000 it took to make.

“Enda has taken the opportunity to have a good go at some of the developers and bankers,” Glen reveals. “There are moments where, y’know, he gets the shovel into the soil. It’s set in Dublin but they haven’t put too much emphasis on things like accents. The major difference is the girlfriend of the guy has gone to live in New York, which works the city in. The Polish flatmates have a much larger role than they do in the movie – they become part of the band who are all on stage playing in front of you. It’s like a big jam session with them swapping instruments and generally having the *craic*. The guy who owns the piano shop, Walton’s, also has a really big role and when you have a drink before the show or during the break it’s served to you on stage rather than in the foyer. You’re part of it, which is great”

It sounds like a whole load of fun.

“It’s a single set with no technicians,” he continues. “The actors push on the piano and then begin a scene. It couldn’t be any more *un-Broadway*!”

While instantly dismissive of being in the show itself, Glen and one of his celebrity pals tutored Steve Kazee in how to be a Dublin street musician.

“I advised him to go busking, so he took a road-trip across the States with his guitar and sang for his supper. Most people who sing into microphones know nothing about belting it, but he learned to project. We talked about the pushing and pulling of lines ‘cause the problem with Broadway singers is they tend to sing on the line, so it’s flat. I told him, ‘Sing it like you’re hungover or go get drunk. Dirty it up a bit’. Damien Rice, who was staying in my flat, also helped Steve. Just by singing, he was able to communicate to the cast the difference between singing something ‘on’ and something ‘off’. Damien’s

Glen with ukulele rival Lisa Hannigan & (below) singing ‘The Auld Triangle’ last month in NYC with Bono.



a master of that stuff. We left him alone for a while, then went back on opening night and, wow, the difference! He’d really made the songs his own. I was able to hand on heart walk up to Steve and say, ‘Brilliant! Whatever ownership we had on this, it’s yours now.’”

Another of the three Broadway shows Glen has seen is *Spider-Man: Turn Off The Dark*, the rock musical scored by Bono and The Edge which has been beset with technical difficulties and a high-profile litigation case involving its original artistic director and multiple Tony Award-winner herself, Julie Taymor.

“I don’t want to get myself into trouble here,” he laughs a tad nervously, “but the thing with *Spider-Man* is that it had a story but the story was so ambitious and expecting of you to join the dots that it was hard work to watch. It’s Broadway, man, people want to sit there and be entertained. If you lose the affection for your lead character at any point, during any story, it kind of fails. I noticed when I saw the first *Spider-Man* draft that there was no empathy with any of the characters. But what I admire about those guys is they’re tenacious – they’ve kept tweaking to the point where the show is both spectacular and has a story that you can easily buy into. It lost them a fortune at first, but it’s doing well now.”

Away as he was for most of 2011, was Glen shocked when he returned to Ireland at Christmas and saw just how despondent the national mood was?

“I was shocked at the rise in violence and robberies. My ma’s house got broken into. She lives in a housing

“WHEN IT COMES TO WATCHING STUFF GOING DOWN IN OUR OWN BACKYARDS AND COMMENTING ON IT, WE’RE FUCKING USELESS.”

estate on the northside, and the only thing that wasn’t taken was the Oscar I gave her. They probably thought it was a fake! She wasn’t in at the time, thank god, but it really shook her up. Not feeling safe in your own home is a headwrecker.

“One good thing’s come out of the adversity,” he adds, “which is we’ve started to regain the sense of humility we lost during the Celtic Tiger. I remember talking to Roisin Ingle from the *Irish Times* and perhaps going too far, but I really felt, ‘Where has the grace gone in our country? What happened to us? When did we turn into such a bunch of pigs? What’s happened to our core qualities of being resourceful, energetic, creative?’ People were far too heady and self-centred during the boom. I was happy to get out? In New York you get neighbourhoods. I grew up in Ballymun, which is a neighbourhood too. You know everyone; it’s like, ‘How are ya?’ They’re all sitting out on the steps during the summer and doors are left open because everyone knows each other. This might sound trivial, but something I really mourned was the little greasy spoons closing and being replaced by these cafés with super-high seats where you get a skinny decaf latte in a super-high glass and instead of egg and chips you have breakfast paninis and ‘golden fried potatoes’ or whatever. I think en masse, Ireland was putting on a huge amount of weight and moving closer than ever to the side of England I’ve never liked. No offence now!”

None taken, although when Her Majesty’s forces roll triumphantly into Dublin again I’ll make sure that Mr. Hansard is first up against the wall!

Bressie caused a bit of a stir last year in *Hot Press* when he suggested that those in the corridors of power might be quicker to pull their fingers out if we rioted a bit.

“I’m not sure about rioting, but when it comes to watching stuff going down in our own backyards and commenting on it, we’re fucking useless. I often wonder, ‘What would Ireland be like now if the poets who gave their lives in 1916 had got into power?’ The thinkers who actually caused the uprising, which was about civil rights not overthrowing England, got shot – leaving the military-minded ones to take control. That’s why I’m so happy to see Michael D. Higgins as President. I look at him and think, ‘Something tangibly good’s come out of all this nonsense we’ve been through these last ten years’. It felt a bit like when we got to Italia ’90 – a reason for everybody to rejoice and regain self-respect.

“The Irish have always been better as the charming underdog,” he proffers. “There’s a kind of quietude to us – we don’t need to brag. I’ve always felt: ‘Don’t blow your own trumpet. Just do your work; do it better each time and that’s how you’ll leave your mark.’”

Ireland and its post-Tiger woes are addressed on ‘The Storm, It’s Coming’, one of the standouts from Glen’s debut solo album, *Rhythm & Repose*, which was recorded during a whirlwind 18 days in Manhattan and, showing there are absolutely no hard feelings, includes a guest appearance by Markéta.

“Breaking from the feast/ From the decade of the beast/ On a new road, with no true north I see/ There’s doubt in every face/

And there’s a liar on the stage/ What good is it, if he don’t himself believe in it?” Glen intones over the solemnest of piano backings.

“A handful of people, whose names we all know, have put this country into a fucking jocker,” he spits venomously. “It baffles me how as a nation we accept having to bail the banks out. We’re like, ‘Okay, that’s a lot of tax, but we’ll pay it’. The Icelandic just said, ‘No way, fuck off!’ The Greeks have taken to the streets. How do you get rid of that lethargy? Is it a hangover from being occupied? Do we have that mindset because we were a colony for so long? I know we’re a young country but can we not have the confidence to say, ‘What the fuck are we doing?’ We’ve got to grow balls.”

While not a concept album *per se*, *Rhythm & Repose* does carry a message for not just us Irish, but everybody whose lives have become a bit too digital.

“Things like Twitter and Facebook have made us so docile,” he ventures. “Our imaginations are being crushed. We need to leave our iPhones at home and just take in what’s around us. That’s what the title *Rhythm & Repose* means – stop living your life virtually and get out there.”

Talking of social media, did Glen follow Sinéad O’Connor’s recent adventures on Twitter?

“I didn’t, no. I’m not interested. That’s just voyeurism. I don’t want to engage in looking at someone having a breakdown, whether it be online or in public. I just don’t get it.”

Does he agree with Sinéad that music is a tough business for vulnerable people to be in?

“Absolutely,” he nods. “The idea of going on stage every night and singing about stuff that’s going on in your life – that can’t sustain you. I sing in the vernacular of relationships. I’m always speaking about, ‘Me and my self, me and my god, me and my people, me and my girlfriend, me and my family’. Maybe one day I’ll move out of that and into something else, but for the time being however coded it is, it’s my life I’m dissecting.”

Has the industry ever ground Glen down to the point when he’s thought, “I can’t fucking do this any more, I’m going to work in the local Spar”?

“Not the Spar part, but fucking Jesus, yeah! I was 21 when Island Records dropped me. I remember one of their guys, Nick Angel, throwing a tape of the first Frames album at me. Chris Blackwell signed me and then left the company. No-one that was left gave a shit. It was like, ‘Fuck, I shouldn’t have signed!’ I went and made a record (*Another Love Song*) that was ridiculous. It had way too many influences – it was a flawed attempt at a debut, which had a couple of good songs and a lot of stuff that really didn’t work. We were dropped and to rub salt into the wound, Island said, ‘Tell you what, we’ll send you to New York for a month to work with some songwriters and if we like what we hear we might pick ya up again’. In other words, ‘You might actually come out with a few decent tunes if you bring other people in’. I walked the streets every day; didn’t meet anyone; got really down for a while and then thought, ‘Fuck it, I’ll fucking take their money and have a fucking good time’. I wrote ‘Revelate’, ‘Fitzcarraldo’, ‘Angel At