

The tragedy that drove Mary O'Hara into convent at the height of her fame

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THE world-famous Irish harpist Mary O'Hara has spoken of why she swapped her glittering career for life as a nun at the height of her fame.

The elusive star, who was credited with reviving the popularity of the Irish harp, has said she entered a monastery at the age of 27 because she was so grief-stricken at the death of her American poet husband, Richard Selig.

Mary was just 21 when the couple tied the knot after a whirlwind romance but his shock death after just a year of marriage sent the grief-stricken artist into a convent in despair.

In the BBC series *The Music Makers*, the sister of the late Fair City actress Joan O'Hara said she didn't even tell some members of her family that she was about to closet herself away in an English Benedictine monastery, Stanbrook Abbey, for 12 years.

She said: 'It was the fruit of Richard's death without a doubt. I shared my plans with no one, even in my own family, except my father and a very few friends.'

One of Ireland's bestselling artists, she had spent four years playing sell-out concerts around the world after becoming a widow - but all the time she was searching for a suitable refuge in which to nurse her broken heart.

The soprano said: 'People didn't realise I was going to bow out altogether. The search was going on all the time. I hate fanfares, whether it's marriage or going into a monastery or coming out again. I don't want fanfare. I just want to slip into whatever I'm doing.'

Of Stanbrook Abbey, Mary said: 'You kept silence all day and obviously all night but you had recreation once a day for an hour. It was virtually obligatory that you spoke.

'You couldn't go into a corner. You spoke, if you really had to, of your work. I love silence anyway. I was in my element.'

The Music Makers will be shown on BBC One on Wednesday at 10.45pm.

VOWS: Music made her famous but she loved the silent life of a nun

VANISHED: Mary O'Hara turned her back on fame and hid in a monastery for 12 years