

Piping Today Issue 25

Sample feature 3

Celtic Connections'

piping moments

2007 CELTIC CONNECTIONS FESTIVAL

ON the evening of Wednesday, 17 January, the *Celtic Connections* festival will again light up Glasgow with a torchlight parade led by pipe bands from George Square to the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, and then launch into a packed 19-day programme of music, workshops and other events at a dozen venues around the city.

The 2007 festival, which runs until 4 February, opens with a *Hands Across the Water* concert at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall — the first and only live realisation of the *Hands Across the Water* Compass Records benefit album for children affected by the 2004 tsunami, and will include appearances by members of Altan, Capercaillie and Solas, with Muireann Nic Amhlaoibh (Danú), Alison Brown, Beth Nielsen Chapman, The Duhks, Flook, Jim Lauderdale, Maura O'Connell, Máirtín O'Connor, Jon Randall, Darrell Scott, Mindy Smith, Andrea Zonn and other special guests.

Other festival venues include the City Halls and Old Fruitmarket, ABC, The Tron, the National Piping Centre and Glasgow's newest live venue The Classic Grand.

With the support of a three-year, £210,000 sponsorship arrangement with the international energy company ScottishPower, Celtic Connections has a firm base of financial security in place. And, earlier in the year, the festival engaged a new artistic consultant: musician, record producer and composer Donald Shaw, a founding member of the band Capercaillie.

Headline acts for 2007 are diverse and include a strong core of American artists, many of them only loosely "Celtic" but, say festival organisers, "celebrating the connections that can be made through traditional music."

Piping is scattered through the extensive programme, and here and there, fully spotlit.



BREABACH —
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(guitar, pipes and vocals)
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CALUM MacCrimmon will be much to the fore.

As a 2007 BBC Radio Scotland *Young Traditional Musician* Award finalist, he will be playing in the *Grand Final* on Sunday, 28 January. Finalists each perform for 15 minutes in a concert setting, as a part of the *Celtic Connections* programme.

Calum MacCrimmon’s pipes and step-dance band, Breabach, currently in the running for the “Up and Coming Artist of the Year” title in this year’s BBC *Scots Trad* Music Awards, has a rising national and international profile and

will also feature at the festival.

With Donal Brown (pipes, whistles and stepdance), Ewan Robertson (guitar, pipes and vocals), Patsy Reid (fiddle, vocals), it takes the stage at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall’s Strathclyde Suite on Sunday evening, 28 January, in a programme with the Welsh ensemble, Fernhill, which incorporates elements of traditional, jazz, world music and rap into its music, and Shetland fiddler Jenna Reid, who was voted “Up-and-Coming Artist of the Year” in the 2005 *Scots Trad* Music Awards

Breabach’s *Celtic Connections* booking in

2007 follows on from its winning of the *Danny Kyle Open Stage* event in 2005.

“Breabach’s going well,” said Calum MacCrimmon. “Our album, *The Big Spree*, comes out in January.”

Since the band got together in 2002, Breabach has played at festivals and folk clubs across Scotland, Europe and Canada, with a sound that is defined by the Calum MacCrimmon’s flair on the Highland pipes, a presence that has a lot to do with Donal Brown’s stepdancing and a varied repertoire that embraces slow airs and songs as well as full-on dance music.

A week after Breabach’s show, on Sunday, 4 February, Calum MacCrimmon is back at the Strathclyde Suite to present his *New Voices* concert: a commissioned presentation of his own compositions and arrangements called *Outside the Circle*.

He is a prolific composer, and usually composes in public. “I get ideas, maybe walking down the street, and I start diddling to myself, then I record it on my cellphone,” he said. “I can’t seem to come up with tunes any other way. A couple of days later, I go back and listen to what I’ve recorded over the last little while and work it out from there. Sometimes I haven’t consciously realised at the time whether it’s a pipe tune I’ve come up with or a whistle tune.

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For *New Voices*, Calum MacCrimmon has put together a strong line-up of seven other musicians: pipers Lorne MacDougall and Alastair Henderson; bass guitarist and double bassist Duncan Lyall; guitarist and fiddler Innes Watson; fiddler, tenor banjo picker and vocalist Celine Donaghue; pianist, flautist, whistle-player, vocalist and Scottish stepdancer Hamish Napier (nominated as a solo artist in the ‘Best up and Coming Artist’ category at the *Scots Trad* Music Awards in 2005); and percussionist Andrew MacPherson.

It is a gathering of friends and fellow musicians from Calum MacCrimmon’s student days at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow, where he completed a BA (Scottish Music) Honours degree.

“I wanted to get musicians with whom I’d played before and who are friends of mine outside of the scene,” he said. “I think that



that's important, to involve people you know, especially when you're doing something that's based on your own inspiration and musical emotion."

Donald Shaw invited Calum MacCrimmon to take up the challenge of a *New Voices* commission in September. "I'd been planning to look for funding myself to mount a concert — so, when he approached me for *Celtic Connections*, it was an absolute blessing," said Calum MacCrimmon. "I already had half of the show put together. Nevertheless, I've been very busy since September — it has to run 50 minutes on the night and that's quite a lot of tunes."

Alongside his performing, composing and arranging commitments, Calum MacCrimmon teaches for Feis Rois in Inverness, running traditional music workshops, teaching tin whistle and leading group work classes at primary schools in Ross-shire and Inverness-shire under Scotland's Youth Music Initiative and Traditional Music in Schools schemes.

He also gives a lot of time to the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland — as a tutor, producer and backing musician, playing guitar.

And, to fully fill out his time and absorb his creative impulses, has started a four-piece fusion band called Ladies From Hell — no," he said, "it's not a military nostalgia group — although the name originates in the Germans' perception of Scottish troops during the First World War — and I don't know that I'll get everyone into kilts: the 'Ladies' have a driving and contemporary sound, with a bit of funk and country thrown in to the mix; it's a lot of fun."

Outside the Circle's first rehearsals were held in early December. "I'd sent out a recording of the tunes to everyone, then the sheet music," said Calum MacCrimmon. "I hoped this would eliminate some of the early problems.

"It's a chance for me to put together what I've done and what I do. I'm not really going for a theme apart from the fact that I've been influenced by both piping and folk music over the years. This will not be a typical representation of the Highland bagpipe and its music. That's where the name comes from: *Outside the Circle*.

"It represents the influences that have come into piping over the past five to 10 years.

"A lot of the tunes are more rooted in rhythm, for example; there's a lot of internal rhythms in the melodies — that is something I'm into. I'm not sticking to what other pipers might call 'kitchen piping' but there are lots of reels and jigs in the repertoire. I'm intending to present something that stands up in its own right, utilising rhythm, harmony, even choreography.

The show consists of medleys of tunes, he

said, "not just on Highland pipes but on whistle as well... and there's a Gaelic song.

"I originally wrote it as a Gaelic air and, after several people told me it should be a song, it now has words to it, thanks to help from Darren MacLean. I wrote it for my sister Katie, so it'll be a praise song for her."

Something that probably will happen with *Outside the Circle* is that there'll be a commercial recording; "that's certainly what I hope to do with it," said Calum MacCrimmon.

And a book of tunes is a possibility, in collaboration with his father, Iain MacCrimmon, who is also a composer: "Dad has a lot of unpublished tunes that he's written and we've always talked about doing a book together so, once this is done, it might happen."

MEANWHILE, elsewhere on the *Celtic Connections* programme, the *Annual Piping Concert* starts at 12.30 p.m. in Glasgow Royal Concert Hall Auditorium on Saturday, 27 January, headlining the fifth-time world champion Field Marshal Montgomery Pipe Band, with pipe major Richard Parkes, MBE, and the Scottish Power Pipe Band led by Chris Armstrong. Compeering the show will be Radio Scotland's Iain Anderson

On Wednesday, 24 January, 8 p.m., Asturian piper José Manuel Tejedor, with his brother Javier, on accordion, bagpipes, flutes and percussion, and sister, Eva, on percussion and vocals, share the stage at ABC with Scotland's five-piece Finlay MacDonald Band — Finlay MacDonald, fiddler Chris Stout, guitarist Kevin Mackenzie, John Speirs on bass and Fergus Mackenzie on drums.

A *Gordon Duncan Tribute* concert on Friday, 26 January 2007, 8 p.m. in the Strathclyde Suite at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall Strathclyde Suite bills Ireland's Paddy Keenan (accompanied by Tommy O'Sullivan), Scotland's Allan MacDonald, Ross Ainslie with Jarlath Henderson and José Manuel Tejedor.

There is also a *Gordon Duncan Solo Piping Competition* for the Gordon Duncan Trophy presented by McCallum Bagpipes of Kilmarnock. It will be held at the Holiday Inn, City West, on Sunday, 28 January, starting at 2 p.m.

Players include Roddy MacLeod, Simon McKerrell, Stuart Cassells, Ian Duncan, Herve Le Floch, Sylvain Hamon, Charles Noim, Jacky Pincet, Pierre Gallais, Ryan Canning, Alen Tully, Harry Stevenson, Kenny Stewart, John Wilson and Jock Duncan.

Fred Morrison, whose orchestral composition *Paracas*, opened the 2005 festival, plays with guitarist Innes Watson, percussionist Paul Jennings, bassist Duncan Lyall and Douglas Miller on piano and keyboards, on Saturday,

27 January, 10 p.m. at the City Halls Old Fruitmarket venue.

This is a double billing with Scotland's popular Salsa Celtica band, which has spent much of the past year on the road, including an official showcase slot at WOMEX in Seville.

Rory Campbell, with Jonny Hardie on guitar and Donald Hay on percussion — the line-up for his *Intrepid* album — shares a billing with Martin Green and his nine-piece jazz-folk band, the Green Machine, on Sunday, 28 January, 8 p.m., at the Classic Grand.

And there is more...

Something rather different is a *Burns Mela* at the City Halls Old Fruitmarket on Sunday, 28 January starting at 8 p.m. Piper Iain MacInnes will be taking his place a multicultural night of music, dance, food and poetry that combines a celebration of Robert Burns with the energy, colour and spectacle of an Asian mela.

Put together by the Asian-underground artist Sushil K Dade (Future Pilot AKA), the line-up here includes the percussion of Johnny Kalsi and the Dhol Foundation, DJ Tigerstyle, Realworld vocalist Sheila Chandra, Dundee's Michael Marra, the early music group Concerto Caledonia, piper Michael McGoldrick on flute and whistle with tabla virtuoso Parvinder Bharat. The master of the Indian bansuri flute, Hariprasad Chaurasia, will appear with his quartet, and Future Pilot AKA will perform as 'The Burns Unit'. A specially convened ensemble and mystery guests will be performing dub versions of Burns' songs. And there will also be a Burns reading by Scots novelist and illustrator Alasdair Gray. The ticket price includes a Burns-inspired buffet, supplied by Harlequin Indian Restaurants.

The festival's *Ceolraidh*, ("inspiration" in Gaelic) concerts derive from a series of concerts created by Feis Rois to encourage the sharing of knowledge and artistry between a seasoned expert and a gifted youngster. So, in a *Ceolraidh* presentation on Monday, 29 January, at the National Piping Centre, uilleann piper Jarlath Henderson, winner of the 2003 BBC Young Folk Award, and Paddy Keenan of Bothy Band fame, share a billing with harpers Rachel Newton and Unusual Suspects co-founder Corrina Hewat.

Rory Campbell is the featured piper for a celebration of Barra's Gaelic musical traditions, hosted by Maggie MacInnes with Cathy-Ann MacPhee, Rory Campbell's sister Mairi-Ann on fiddle and their father, singer Ruairidh Campbell.

This presentation will be held on Friday, 19 January, 8 p.m., at St Andrew's in the Square. ●