



Celtic Connections
presents

HALLAIG

A Musical Celebration of the Poetry of Sorley MacLean

City Hall, Glasgow
18th January 2009



Sorley MacLean

Somhairle MacGill-Eain (Sorley Maclean) was born on the island of Raasay in 1911. He died in 1996. Unusually for a poet in the 20th century, he grew up in a strong oral tradition of poetry and music and was educated in a wide range of European literature, Classical and modern. His earlier poetry in the 1930s into the 40s is passionate with an intense struggle between his sexual, if idealised, love and his sense of political commitment against Fascism. While serving in the Second World War he wrote fierce poems of the destruction, sacrifice and heroism of the war. His later poems widen his concerns to engage with themes of cultural loss, the vulnerability of humane values, and the endless but not futile wrestling for justice. He is a poet of international standing, the force of whose poetry has given readers across the world a new awareness of a Gaelic dimension in our heritage.

With the exception of 'Hallaig', which was specially commissioned for Celtic Connections, all the items in tonight's programme were commissioned by the Trust for the Year of Highland Culture and performed at six venues throughout the Highlands in June 2007. The Trust gratefully acknowledges financial assistance from the PRS Foundation in respect of the Stuart MacRae and Mary Ann Kennedy commissions. The Trust is also grateful to An Lòchran for its financial contribution and to Celtic Connections for enabling the compositions to be heard by a Glasgow audience.

Composers

Stuart MacRae

Stuart MacRae was born in Inverness, Scotland, in 1976. After reading Music at Durham University with Philip Cashain, Sohrab Uduman and Micahel Zev Gordon, he studied composition at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Simon Bainbridge and Robert Saxton.

Stuart came to public attention as a finalist in the 1996 Lloyd's Bank Young Composer's Workshop when the BBC Philharmonic gave the first professional performance of Borerraig, his piece inspired by a visit to a deserted village on the Isle of Skye. From 1999 to 2003, he was a Composer in Association with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

The premiere of his Violin Concerto in 2001 brought Stuart yet wider recognition. Following its premier by Tasmin Little at the BBC Proms, it was performed at the Edinburgh Festival and at the Festival Musica in Strasbourg, and it has subsequently been recorded by Christian Tetzlaff on NMC Records.

Stuart was Edinburgh Festival Creative Fellow during 2005/6 and held a residency at Villa Concordia in Bamberg from 2006 to 2007. He has written two previous works for Gaelic choirs: Salm 42, and Alasdair a Gleanna Garaidh, which was given its premiere performance at the 2005 Royal National Mod in Stornoway. His short opera Remembrance Day, written in collaboration with librettist Louise Welsh, will receive its premiere in February 2009 as part of Scottish Opera's Five:15 project.

Mary Ann Kennedy

Mary Ann Kennedy is a Glasgow Gael, now living in Lochaber where she and her husband, Nick Turner, run Watercolour Music Studios in the idyllic West Highlands. A trad music background and a classical training coupled with fifteen year's experience working with the BBC has established her as a major figure in the Scottish music scene, equally respected as a performer and as an authoritative commentator on world, classical, traditional and folk music. She has won several major awards, including the Concours Internationale de l'Harpe Celtique and both National Mod Gold Medals. Her band, Cliar, won the all-time Best Album accolade at the inaugural Scots Trad Music Awards, and earned her a Saltire Award for the Highland Festival commission, 'Lasair Dhè'. Her radio work was most recently recognised with the 'Radio Presenter of the Year' Award at the international Celtic Media Festival 2007, for her ability to communicate her and others' passion for music to the listener.

Eilidh Mackenzie

Brought up in Lewis, Eilidh, along with her sisters, learned Gaelic songs from her father throughout her childhood. This interest continues and as part of the vocal group Mackenzie, she still performs and records. However, her real passion lies in song-writing and she contributes many new Gaelic songs to the band's repertoire as well as writing for others. In May 2005, the first-ever Gaelic musical – Taigh Màiri Anndra – was staged and performed at Eden Court to a full house and the original concept, production and music writing done by Eilidh. Other commissions include Lasair Dhè, music writing for children's television programmes, the Brahan Seer Festival and a forthcoming collaboration with a New York Theatre Company, Parallel Lines. Living on the Black Isle, she is the Music Instructor at Bunscoil Ghàidhlig Inbhirnis.

Marie-Louise Napier

Marie-Louise is a singer and harper from Grantown-on-Spey in the Scottish Highlands. She graduated B.Mus from Glasgow University before joining Scottish Opera. She performs at a wide variety of venues throughout the Highlands playing for weddings and private functions. She teaches at Feisean and at the Edinburgh Harp Festival and is a regular performer on the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in the duo 'No Spring Chickens' with her sister Kirsty! She graduated B.A. in Language and Culture from the Gaelic College on Skye in 2005 and has returned there to teach Theory of Music on their new music course. Her compositions have won prizes at the Rencontres des Harpes Celtiques at Dinan in France. She has written music for the Highland Festival Millennium project, and has composed on numerous occasions for the Clarsach Society.

Allan Macdonald

Allan, raised in the Gaelic speaking community of Glenuig, Moidart, became immersed in piping at a very early age and has won premier awards over the years. He published some of his own compositions in 1990 in 'The Moidart Collection.' He was musical director of a number of Television series' including co-direction of the most recent 2006 award winning 'Highland Sessions' series between Ireland and Scotland. Recent commissions include 'The Wallace', a celebration of the life of William Wallace. He won the Angel Award at Edinburgh Festival in 2004 for the original concert series on Scotland's musical history in song and pibroch.

Blair Douglas

Blair Douglas is recognised as being one of the few island musicians who still retains his creative roots whilst travelling extensively throughout the world performing and absorbing music from many cultures. He has made numerous public performances, broadcast frequently on radio and television and toured as a member of Macmeanmna with their award-winning show 'Skye – The Island'. A founder member of Runrig, Blair is now acknowledged as one of the foremost composers working in the Scottish tradition today, and his solo albums showcase this beautifully.

Donald Shaw

Brought up in Taynuilt, Argyll, a part of the world steeped in Gaelic song and traditional music, Donald Shaw was involved in all styles of music from an early age.

In 2002, he was rewarded with two Royal Television Society awards for Best Soundtrack and Best Theme in UK television.

In January 2004, he composed 'Harvest', a commission for the opening night of Celtic Connections Festival involving 100 musicians from all Celtic regions of Europe. Also involved were some of the finest young traditional musicians from throughout Scotland from the ages of 13 to 18. 'Harvest' was also performed at the 2006 Celtic Connections Festival.

In 2006, Donald was appointed Artistic Director of Celtic Connections 2007, he also won the Scots Trad Music Composer of the Year Award in December 2006.

Allan Henderson

Allan Henderson is from Mallaig, and learned to play the fiddle under the tutelage of the 'left handed fiddler', Aonghas Grant. He is also a piper, a piano player and dabbles on the whistle. A founder member of the Blazin' Fiddles, he combines a busy touring schedule with his work as a musician in residence at Sahhal Mòr Ostaig, and is much in demand as a performer, composer and producer. As another string to his bow, Allan 'ghost wrote' the autobiography of Highland musical legend, Fergie MacDonald, and is involved in a similar project at the moment.

Kenneth Thomson

Kenneth has been conductor of the Glasgow Gaelic Musical Association for 25 years and won the National Mod Gold Medal in 1979. He released his long-awaited album 'Seòladh Dhachaigh' in 2004.

After a career in Health Service management, Kenneth took up the post of Project Director with An Lòchran, the Gaelic arts and culture organisation in Glasgow where he served for five years developing Gaelic arts in the city – including the hugely successful Flower of the West concert.

Kenneth has arranged many songs for choral singing and has composed a number of songs and tunes in recent years, including waltzes for his children's weddings. To celebrate his silver anniversary as conductor of the GG, Kenneth published 'Slighe an Airgid' - a collection of 20 years of his arrangement for Gaelic choirs.

Singers

Kirsteen MacDonald

Kirsteen MacDonald, 25, is from the Highland capital Inverness but has a strong affinity with Morar and Lochailort through her Mother's links with the area. Kirsteen was greatly influenced by her Grandfather, the late Lachlan MacPherson, a native Gaelic speaker from Lochailort and credits him with fuelling her interest in the language. Having attended Central Primary school Gaelic unit and Millburn Academy, Kirsteen was immersed in the Gaelic language and culture, receiving her education primarily through the medium of Gaelic.

Kirsteen's singing career started at a young age, regularly attending Mods and winning prizes for singing and recitation. However, she claimed her first significant award for singing when she won the An Comunn Gàidhealach Silver Medal at the Royal National Mod in Inverness in 1997.

Kirsteen has gone on to win the two highest accolades for solo singing at the Royal National Mod as a senior, winning the An Comunn Gàidhealach Gold Medal in Dunoon in 2006 and more recently, the Traditional Gold Medal in Falkirk in 2008. She also won the traditional singing competition at the 'Seo Seinn' competition on the Isle of Lewis in 2004.

Since graduating from Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Kirsteen has carved out a successful career in Gaelic broadcasting and media with the BBC. Having initially worked on the BBC children's television programme, 'Dè a-nis?', Kirsteen has since worked as a radio broadcast journalist and is now employed as a weather reporter/presenter for the news service on the new Gaelic television channel, BBC ALBA.

Jenna Cumming

Jenna hails from the city of Inverness and has won both gold medals at the Royal National Mod. Her debut album, 'Kintulavig', was issued on the Macmeanmna label last year to great

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Programme

- 1** **Camhanaich (Dawn) – Blair Douglas**
Instrumental performed by the House Band
A deeply romantic poem in which the loved one is associated with aspects of a glorious summer's dawn over Skye. The final lines counteract the rapturous beauty with a chilling and shocking image of suffering.
- 2** **Tha thusa 'g ràdh ruimsa, thasgaidh – Suzanne Houston, Coralea MacKay, Emma MacInnes and Lauren Weir**
This is a response to Sorley's 'Gaoir na h-Eorpa' (Dàin do Eimhir IV) composed by students at the Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music, Plockton High School
- 3** **Am Mùr Gorm (The Blue Rampart) – Marie-Louise Napier**
Performed by Alasdair Whyte and Mary Ann Kennedy (Clàrsach)
If Eimhir, the loved one, did not exist, the glories of the natural world would be impersonal and abstract. Her existence gives human order to the world and he and she are brought together in the Tree of Strings, an image of music or poetry.
- 4** **Chan e àilleachd (It is not the beauty) – Kenneth Thomson**
Performed by the Glasgow Gaelic Musical Association
It is not the physical loveliness of his beloved but her spiritual radiance which has pierced him to the core.
- 5** **An Roghainn (The Choice) – Donald Shaw**
Performed by Kirsteen MacDonald and the House Band
An internal debate between his feelings and his reason is prompted by news that the woman he loves is going to marry someone else. He concedes that he had not suffered enough to entitle him to her love. If he could choose his direction again he would risk everything for that prize.
- 6** **Screapadal – Kenneth Thomson**
Performed by the Glasgow Islay Junior Gaelic Choir and Mary McCarthy (Piano)
The first few verses of a longer poem written in the 1970s where the poet looks across from the uninhabited township of Screapadal on Raasay to Applecross – called in Gaelic 'Sanctuary' – established by the early Celtic saint Maol Rubha.
- 7** **A Chiall 's a Ghràidh (Reason and Love) – Allan Macdonald**
Performed by James Graham and Mary Ann Kennedy (Clàrsach)
In love, passion and intellect seem irreconcilable but, at the end of the poem, there is some sort of a mingling of the two.

INTERVAL

- 8** **Camhanaich (Dawn) – Eilidh Mackenzie**
Another setting of this poem performed by Jenna Cumming, James Graham and the Glasgow Gaelic Musical Association.
- 9** **An Cuilithionn (The Cuillin) – extract – Kenneth Thomson**
Performed by Jenna Cumming and Brian McAlpine (Piano)
Who is this walking on the moorland? Footsteps on the mountain.
- 10** **Hallaig - Stuart MacRae**
Performed by Kirsteen MacDonald, Alasdair Whyte, the Glasgow Gaelic Musical Association, Mary Ann Kennedy (Clàrsach), Gordon Gunn (Fiddle) and Christine Hanson (Cello)
'Hallaig', written in the early 1950s, is Sorley MacLean's most famous and discussed poem. It is celebratory and has been described as 'elegiac, luminous and mirky, set in a past but very much in the present'. The places named in the poem are on the island of Raasay where MacLean was born, and Hallaig itself was a small community on the east coast, the last of whose inhabitants were cleared from the area 150 years ago. The poet imagines the people of that community but, although they and their identification with the place have been doomed to extinction, some vital element survives and defies the ravages of time as long as the poet's imagination can still revivify that vital element in the language of the people.
- 11** **Traighean (Shores) – Mary Ann Kennedy**
Performed by James Graham, Mary McCarthy (Piano) and Gordon Gunn (Fiddle)
He juxtaposes himself and his loved one with hugely impressive beaches in the West and he commandeers every drop of water and every grain of sand in a 'synthesis of love'.
- 12** **Gaoir na h-Eorpa (The Cry of Europe) – Allan Henderson**
Instrumental work performed by the House Band
Written in 1938, the poem puts the beauty of his loved one (represented in a very traditional way) and his love for her against the political atrocities and suffering of Europe in the 1930s, particularly the situation in Spain and the growing oppression of fascism. A series of questions weigh the two sides in his conscience but there is no conclusive answer.

acclaim and in December 2006, Jenna was named 'Up & Coming Artist of the Year' at the Scots Trad Music Awards. Jenna won the Seo Seinn traditional singing competition in 2007. Having completed her degree at the University of Glasgow, Jenna now works for Fèisean nan Gàidheal as Development Officer for Lewis and Harris

James Graham

James is from Lochinver in the Parish of Assynt in the far north-west corner of Sutherland. He started competing at the Mods from as early as nine years of age under the guidance of his Primary School head-teacher, Kenny Mackenzie.

He was greatly inspired also by his great Aunt Seordag Murray, a native Gaelic speaker from the nearby village of Achilitbuie, with whom he spent hour upon hour learning songs and listening to her fascinating stories and life experiences.

James graduated from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in 2003 with an Honours degree in Scottish Music. There he studied bagpipes and Gaelic song under the respected Gaelic singer and scholar Kenna Campbell. In 2004 he won the BBC Scotland Young Traditional Musician of the Year Award - the first male and first Gaelic singer to do so. He has since appeared in several successful and award winning television and radio music series and has released two acclaimed solo albums. James completed two years at the Gaelic college, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, gaining an HND in Gaelic language and culture and, in 2007, won the coveted Mod Gold Medal at the Royal National Mod in Lochaber. He is also a member of the acclaimed all male group, 'Na Seòid'.

Alasdair Whyte

Alasdair C Whyte, 22, is from Salen on the Isle of Mull. He has been singing since the age of four at both local and national levels, winning many junior competitions at the Royal National Mod. In 2006, he became the Men's Gold Medallist in Dunoon. He completed a year at the Gaelic college, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, before continuing his studies at Glasgow University. He is currently in his 4th year of M.A. in Gaelic and Celtic Civilisation. In 2007, Alasdair sang in the pan-European St. Kilda opera, 'Hiort'. Alasdair is also a member of the Glasgow Gaelic Choir, Ceòlraidh Gàidhlig Ghlaschu, who won the premier choral award, the Lovat and Tullibardine Sheild at the National Mod in Fort William 2007.

The Choirs

Glasgow Gaelic Musical Association - was founded in 1893 and is one of the most successful Gaelic choirs in existence. Its conductor, for the past 25 years, has been Kenneth Thomson, himself a Mod Gold Medalist.

The choir has brought out three CDs – most recently in 2008 when it released 'Slighe an Airdid' – a collection of Kenneth's arrangements sung by the choir.

The Glasgow Islay Junior Gaelic Choir has been at the forefront of Gaelic culture in the city

for many years and has had year after year of National Mod success.

Under its conductor Jane McQueen, the choir has performed at many major events in the city and beyond, including the prestigious launch event for BBC ALBA – the new Gaelic television channel. A CD 'Cho Priseil na h-Oige' was released in 2005.

The House Band

Mary Ann Kennedy (Piano and Clàrsach) – see page two

Gordon Gunn (Fiddle)

Gordon has been described as 'one of the most exciting and innovative fiddle players of the times'.

Born and raised in Wick, Caithness, Gordon was taught by the highly respected violin teacher Margaret Henderson who taught many pupils in the north including Addie Harper snr & jnr.

Whilst working with the highland band Session A9, Gordon also tours with his own band that includes Session A9's Brain McAlpine on keyboards and Orkney's Phil Anderson on Guitar and vocals. The guys are currently in the studio working on a follow up recording to their highly successful first album. 'Shoreside'.

Gordon is also a respected fiddle tutor, composer and session musician. His compositions have been recorded by many artists including Session A9, Phil Cunningham and Aly Bain, Ingrid Henderson and American fiddler Rodney Miller to name but a few.

As a fiddle and group work tutor Gordon regularly teaches for Feis Rois. He has also taught workshops for the Glasgow Fiddle Workshop, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Edinburgh Youth Gaitherin, Edinburgh Fiddle Festival, National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music, Fèisean Nan Gàidheal, Newcastle Folk Works and the Orkney Trad Music Project. He has also taught in the USA and west coast of Canada and with many other organisations.

Gordon is also in demand as a session musician and recent projects include Aidan O'Rourke's 'Sirius', Bruce Macgregor's 'Lochness' album. He was also a soloist in Simon Thumire's fiddle concerto, touring with Christine Hanson's 'Cremation of Sam McGee' and has recently completed session work on the new album by well known Skye musician Blair Douglas.

Jack Evans (Guitar)

Jack is best known for his adventurous guitar work with the likes of The Easy Club and The Cauld Blast Orchestra (plus his own highly-rated album on Greentrax, Once Upon a Time in the North, featuring Mairi Campbell and Jenny Gardner). Now resident in Pitlochry, he's the principal guitar tutor at Sgoil Chiùil na Gàidhealtachd in Plockton, and on the Scottish Music course at the RSAMD in Glasgow, while also finding time to produce albums for Greentrax, Bodega and The Cast.

Christine Hanson (Cello)

Edmonton, Alberta, born Christine Hanson has extensive experience in traditional music, theatre and television. As well as touring in North America and Europe, she has toured the High Arctic as part of a Canadian Government programme to bring music to remote communities.

Presented with CBC's Galaxie Award for Best New Artist at Canada's Juno Fest 2004, Christine has worked with Martin Carthy, Eddi Reader, Justin Currie, Colin MacIntyre and Karen Matheson of Capercaillie. She was the first non-Scot to receive a New Voices commission from Glasgow's prestigious Celtic Connections festival, resulting in 'The Cremation of Sam McGee's' premier in January 2005. Christine was commissioned to write and perform her piece 'Dochas na Sithe' at the Loch Sheil Festival 2007 in Glenfinnan. Most recently she composed the sound track for Pellicula Films' 'Beasties', which was shown last November on BBC2.

Dougie Pincock (Whistle, Flutes and Saxophone)

Dougie started piping at primary school in Barrhead, where his head teacher was Iain MacFadyen's brother John. After a successful career in junior competition, he became involved in the traditional music scene in 1979 when he joined the Glasgow band Kentigern. This led to a seven year stretch with leading traditional group Battlefield Band, during which the band toured extensively throughout the world as well as fulfilling extensive recording, radio and TV commitments. Dougie left the band in 1990 after the birth of his daughter and spent the 90s teaching and playing on other people's albums, also finding the time to release a solo album and a book of pipe tunes. He worked at various times for the National Piping Centre, the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, and the Easterhouse Arts Project as a freelance tutor on the Feis circuit and on other projects throughout Scotland. He was appointed the first director of the National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music at Plockton High School in May 2000.

Brian McAlpine (Accordion)

Brian McAlpine is well known for his work with Session A9, Maggie MacInnes, The Gordon Gunn Band and The Unusual Suspects. Whether producing or arranging, playing piano or accordion, Brian has earned the highest reputation among his peers for his professionalism and creative style. Musical Director of highly acclaimed 'Flower of the West', Brian was Musical Director of the Gordon Duncan Memorial Concert in Perth Concert Hall on in 2007.

Mary McCarthy (Piano)

Mary McCarthy's approach to piano playing is rooted in her Irish background in traditional music and her ongoing involvement with musicians in this field in Scotland and Ireland. Mary's friendship with Ronald Stevenson, Eddie McGuire and the late Margaret Fay Shaw

has helped her develop her own piano style, retaining the qualities of sound appropriate to the beauty of the melodies in the Gaelic tradition. Mary gives concerts in numerous countries around the world, often linking folk music from other sources with suitable classical music. Her CD 'Molaidh Uist' is often played on radio and was dedicated to Margaret Fay Shaw on her 100th birthday.

Mary has been a piano tutor on the Scottish Music Degree Course in the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama since its inception. Her first student was James Ross – they now perform Scottish and Irish music on two pianos, most recently on the BBC Radio 3 'Pianothon', in November 2008.

Urras Shomhairle

The Sorley MacLean Trust

The Trust exists to perpetuate the memory of Sorley MacLean, who is widely recognised as one of Scotland's most influential literary figures and a poet of world stature, his work and the Gaelic language.

Its aims are:

- 1 To promote all aspects of Gaelic culture
- 2 To promote the study, appreciation and use of the Gaelic language
- 3 To commission and make available through information technology, oral and written Gaelic material of the highest quality
- 4 To encourage young poets and writers to continue the Gaelic renaissance which Sorley MacLean inspired
- 5 To do such other things, charitable in law, as the trustees may think appropriate to perpetuate the memory of Sorley MacLean

If you have enjoyed this showcase concert and would like to support the on-going work of the Trust you are invited to send a donation to: The Secretary, Urras Shomhairle/ The Sorley MacLean Trust, c/o Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Sleat, Isle of Skye, IV44 8RQ.

All donations will be gratefully acknowledged.

For further information about Sorley MacLean and/or The Sorley MacLean Trust visit our bilingual website at www.somhairlemacgilleain.org or www.sorleymaclean.org