

Jazz and Gaelic singing combine at The Queen's Hall

Gaelic singer Kathleen MacInnes makes her second appearance in the Queen's Hall's 40th anniversary celebrations on Thursday 13th June and whereas the first concert she took part in featured the sort of line-up the award-winning performer from South Uist often features in, with Phil Cunningham among the guests, this time she is on less familiar ground.

For Celtic Connections 2018, the festival's artistic producer, Donald Shaw asked Kathleen if she might try a musical partnership that he had been thinking of for some time. Shaw was intrigued to hear what would happen if Scotland's leading jazz musicians, saxophonist Tommy Smith and pianist Brian Kellock ventured into Gaelic song.

Shaw's thinking was that Kellock's knowledge of harmony and Smith's improvisational ability would introduce a new sound into the Gaelic world, and Kathleen, with her distinctive smoky tone, was the singer that the two jazz musicians might respond to best.

The experiment worked and Smith was so taken with the results that when he was invited to present four concerts as part of the Queen's Hall's specially programmed series, he decided to recreate the Celtic Connections concert with Kathleen as one of them, right down to choosing the same opening act, pianist Fergus McCreadie's folk music-inspired trio.

Kathleen has sung with musicians from many different backgrounds before including Transatlantic Sessions stalwart, dobro master Jerry Douglas, bluegrass sweetheart Alison Krauss and banjo virtuoso Bela Fleck. She has also embraced music technology, appearing on Gaelic electro-experimenters Niteworks' Maraiche, and music from wider cultures, singing with Malian singer Oumou Sangare and kora player Toumani Diabate. For Celtic Connections this year she worked with Icelandic strings and electronica ensemble amiina, who had previously accompanied Reykjavík avant-rockers Sigur Ros.

All of these were a walk in the park compared to working with a jazz duo, she says, even a jazz duo who were as amenable and encouraging as Smith and Kellock proved to be.

"It was terrifying and yet at the same time, exhilarating," says Kathleen who, despite emailing them links to the songs she thought might work best, only met Smith and Kellock late in the afternoon of the day of the concert. "We spent about fifteen minutes going over some things at the sound check and then did an improvised fifteen minutes together during their set."

This was nothing new for a musician such as Kellock who, over the past thirty years, has routinely met singers and musicians he's accompanied for the first time just before the gig and gone on to give every impression that they've been working together for years.

For Kathleen, who won the Gaelic Singer of the Year title at the Scots Trad Music Awards in 2006 and counts film director Ridley Scott among her admirers (she sang on the soundtrack to Scott's Robin Hood), the experience clearly hasn't put her off working with Smith and Kellock Again.

"We're planning on doing a few more songs this time," she says. "And we'll have more time together beforehand. I'm looking forward to exploring this musical relationship and

seeing where it might lead.”

[Tickets here](#)



Kathleen MacInnes