

The Scottish Pride of Cumming and Masson

The duo form one of Scotland's best loved comedy double acts, whose Glasgow Kelvinside luvvies Victor and Barry have been celebrated for more than 40 years.

Now Alan Cumming and Forbes Masson have explained how they were encouraged at drama school to lose their Scottish accents and "become English" if they wanted to succeed as actors.

Aberfeldy-born Cumming and Masson, who is from Falkirk, met in 1982 while studying at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (RSAMD) (now the Royal Conservatoire) and developed their musical comedy act as part of an end of term cabaret show for older students.

Speaking at The Edinburgh International Book Festival, and discussing their book, Victor and Barry's Kelvinside Compendium, they said they owed their success to sticking to their "authentic voice".

Cumming, 59, said: "Our Scottishness then at drama school – and not just at drama school, in the world as well – was sort of seen as a problem we would have to overcome rather than an attribute."

He added: "In the course of doing this book we were reminded that it's when other people try to tell us who we are or what they want to do with us that it goes wrong. It's actually us, our authentic sort of magic that we have together as a combo

is what has made this and why 40 years on we are here.

“We realised that wherever we went in the world people could understand us because they could relate to us. I think that a great thing about us looking back at Victor and Barry is realising that our Scottishness and our difference is not a negative.

“Now I feel like my Scottishness is the best thing about me.”

Masson, 60, said: “At drama school we were encouraged to lose our voice, lose our accent, and we were one of the first years to go ‘no, we want to be able to just be ourselves and not have to become English to become an actor and learn an English accent’.

“And there was no-one around apart from Billy Connolly at the time we were starting out. There was no real Scottish voice, and that thing of just being able to stand up and be yourself and be confident in that, that journey is important.”

Cumming and Masson created their Victor and Barry act during their first year at drama school to perform for final year students.

The pair revealed they had spent their time in the capital together working on a stage musical of *The High Life*, the BBC sitcom they dubbed “Victor and Barry on a plane”.

The sitcom, which ran on BBC Two for just one series in 1994, starred Cumming and Masson as junior air stewards Sebastian Flight and Steve McCracken, on the fictional Air Scotia. Episodes ranged from Sebastian trying to enter the Eurovision Song Contest to a small business espionage plot involving biscuits.

Cumming said: “For a long time the National Theatre of Scotland asked us, would we like to do a musical of *The High Life* and we said ‘yes, great’, and we’ve done nothing about it

for like a decade.

“Then, in the course of writing this book I was doing this solo dance thing about Robert Burns and Forbes came to see it and so did Johnny McKnight, this great writer, performer, director from Scotland.

“Johnny and I and Forbes had such a laugh and the next day Johnny said ‘it was so great to see you, have you ever thought about doing The High Life as a musical’. And I went ‘wait’.

“So now we’ve brought Johnny in and he’s been the catalyst. He gets those surreal cultural references that are just hilarious.

“Now we’re writing, we’re just doing workshops for the last couple of days and we’ve got another one in October.

“So we’re working on a theatre musical of The High Life, which we’re going to do with the National Theatre of Scotland. Coming to a theatre near you soon.”



Alan Cumming, Forbes Masson PHOTO Tommy Ga-Ken Wan