

CÒISIR GHÀIDHLIG ÌLE

-PRESS RELEASE-

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CÒISIR GHÀIDHLIG ÌLE TO PERFORM NEWLY COMMISSIONED SONGS AT SITE OF HISTORIC ISLAY BATTLE

Còisir Ghàidhlig Ìle has recently commissioned talented young traditional musician Clare Jordan to compose choral arrangements for texts from Islay poet Uilleam MacDhùnlàibhe's "Blàr Thraigh Ghruineart" (William Livingstone's 'Battle of Gruinart Strand'). The songs were commissioned for the choir's own choice pieces, to be sung in competitions at the 2012 National Mòd in Dunoon this October. All three songs will be given their first public performance in Islay by Còisir Ghàidhlig Ìle at a special event on 11th October, to be held at Gruinart in a venue near the scene of the 1598 battle between the MacDonalDs of Islay and the MacLeans of Mull, the subject of MacDhùnlàibhe's epic masterpiece.

Còisir Ghàidhlig Ìle's conductor, Iseabail Mactaggart, said:

"The seeds of this project were sown almost two years ago. We wanted to inspire the young people of Islay through the folklore and the stories from the island's history that had inspired the great Gaelic Bards of Islay. This led to a project with Clare Jordan in the summer of 2011, which focused on the work of four Islay Bards; William Livingstone, Duncan and Charles MacNiven of Kilchoman, and Duncan Johnstone. Poems were chosen which had never previously been set to music, and new music was written for them by Clare Jordan. Islay children learned and performed these pieces at a public concert, and it was a huge success.

"Blàr Thraigh Ghruineart" is a masterpiece, but because MacDhùnlàibhe's work was not set to music it has not been passed down through the generations to audiences at ceilidhs and concerts. "Blàr Thraigh Ghruineart" is a rich and emotional epic that deals with a very important event in Islay's history. The poem is full of Islay folklore and vivid imagery. We have selected three segments from the poem which capture the raw power and the drama of the story. Clare's melodies and arrangements are superb, and we are very much looking forward to performing these pieces at the National Mòd and for Islay audiences."

Clare Jordan said: "This was a brave and an ambitious project, as neither the choir nor I myself could have had any idea of what these pieces would be like until they were completed. The choir's commitment to the project and their supporting me has been wonderful.

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"I was not familiar with Uilleam MacDhùnlàibhe's work until I worked with Iseabail, but "Blàr Thraigh Ghruineart" provided rich pickings for a musician. Our main difficulty was in narrowing down the options. I know that Còisir Ghàidhlig Ìle will perform the songs beautifully and I know they feel proud that MacDhùnlàibhe, as a son of Islay, wrote such wonderful Gaelic words that can still inspire us a century and a half after they were written."

Còisir Ghàidhlig Ìle will perform the new songs at the RSPB Visitor Centre at Gruinart, Islay on Thursday 11th October at 7.30 pm. The choir would like to thank RSPB Loch Gruinart for their support of this community venture.

For a press invitation to the performance or for photographs, interviews or further information please contact: Alison Gray on 01496 301 546 or by email on alisongrayislay@aol.com

-ENDS-

Notes For Editors

Blàr Thràigh Ghruineart (the Battle of Gruinard Strand) was fought at Gruinart, Islay in 1598 as the result of a dispute between the MacDonalDs of Islay and the MacLeans of Mull over ownership of the Rhinns of Islay. Sir Lachlan Mòr MacLean Chief of the Clan MacLean was the uncle of Sir James MacDonald, Chief of the Clan MacDonald (Sir Lachlan was the brother of Sir James' mother). Despite being heavily outnumbered, the MacDonalDs won the day. There were heavy losses on the MacLean side and Sir Lachlan was killed by an arrow shot through his eye fired, according to folklore, by the Dubh Sith (Black Dwarf).

The suite of three pieces covers key elements of the poem: *Caomhnaibh Bràthair Mo Mhàthair* reflects on the consequences of losing the battle and the repeated refrain urges mercy for Sir James MacDonald's uncle Lachlan Mòr MacLean. *O Albainn Caoidh* laments the loss of young Highlanders' lives through the battle. The song vividly conveys the brutality of the battle and tells the story of the killing of Sir Lachlan Mor by the *Dubh Sith*. *Cumha Mhic 'Ill'Leathain* is a haunting lament for Sir Lachlan MacLean. All words by William Livingstone, melodies and arrangements by Clare Jordan.

Biographies

Uilleam MacDhùnlàibhe (William Livingstone) 1808-1870 was born in Gartmain near Bowmore, Islay. MacDhùnlàibhe eventually settled in Glasgow and wrote poetry in his native Gaelic. His work focused on 'big themes' such as history, war, the depopulation of the Highlands and the clearances. He was largely self-educated (he reputedly taught himself to read Greek, Latin, French and Hebrew in order to read original texts) but wrote using a wide vocabulary in elegant Gaelic. In 1882, twelve years after MacDhùnlàibhe's death, Archibald Sinclair and An Comunn Ileach (The Islay Association) published *Duain agus Òrain*, a collection of MacDhùnlàibhe's poetry and writings.

Iseabail Mactaggart is a native Gaelic speaker, born and brought up in Islay, and who won the National Mòd Gold Medal in 2004. Iseabail has lived and worked in Shanghai, Glasgow and London and returned to Islay in 2005. She is Chair of Fèis Òigridh Ìle is Dhiùra and has been conductor of Còisir Ghàidhlig Ìle since 2007.

Clare Jordan was born and brought up in Connel. She has been closely involved with the Fèisean Nan Gaidheal movement over a number of years and was awarded a degree in Traditional Music from Sàbhal Mòr Ostaig in 2011. Clare is a professional musician and composer who is currently living and working in Islay.