

-PRESS RELEASE-

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

140 Islay musicians collaborate on Blàr – a unique performance of a community musical event celebrating Islay Bard William Livingstone

Blàr (Battle) is a community musical event taking place on Islay on 30 May which will see at least 140 island musicians staging a performance of new Gaelic music composed by the outstanding Gaelic traditional musician **CLARE JORDAN**.

The new music is based on a Gaelic poem by the long neglected Islay bard William Livingstone, which tells the story of the infamous Battle of Gruinart, which took place on Islay in 1598. Every musical group on the island will take part: the traditional instrumentalists from Feis Oigrìdh, the island brass band, all the primary school Gaelic choirs, the community youth Gaelic choir, the senior Gaelic choir, and the Islay Pipe Band. The musical performance will be accompanied by a dynamic digital art work which has been commissioned of a local artist and art writer **Raymond Lafferty**.

Clare Jordan said: *“Last year Còisir Ghàidhlig Ìle commissioned me to compose a suite of three songs with words from William Livingstone poem Blàr Thraigh Ghrunieard. I wasn’t aware of Livingstone’s poetry when I started on the project but I became fascinated by this forgotten masterpiece. The Battle of Gruinart was the last clan war fought on Scottish soil and behind the bloody and brutal depictions of 16th century Scottish warfare is the tragic story of two families the MacDonalds of Islay and the MacLean of Mull torn apart over ownership of Islay lands. Sir Lachlan Mòr MacLean was killed in the Battle and he was Sir James MacDonald’s uncle. There’s a further layer to the poem: the folklore and legends surrounding the battle and in particular the story of the evil Dubh Sith (Black Fairy) who in*

spiteful rage killed MacLean with an arrow. These are great stories, well-known on Islay, but we're now going to be sharing them with a wider audience."

Iseabail MacTaggart Còisir Gadhlig Ìle's conductor said: *"This is a thrilling event to have produced. The three songs Clare composed for the choir are wonderful and d by linking them together with new instrumental passages has produced a stunning new work. Bringing 140 performers together has been a considerable challenge but it has brought together people with different musical interests from all corners of Islay and united them in common cause. This is truly a community arts event and Islay has never before seen anything on this scale and of this ambition. We were delighted to have Dr Raymond Lafferty on board and he has worked with young people from Islay High School to produce a stunning digital film which dovetails with the music. Children from all the Islay and Jura primary schools have also produced their own artworks based on the stories in the poem and we are thrilled with the results.*

Although Gaelic poetry is at the heart of this project we have been determined that this will not be a barrier and that Blàr will be fully accessible to non-Gaelic speakers. The scale and ambition of the project means that we can only have only the one performance but that performance will be during Islay's exceptionally busy Fèis week and we already know that our audience that will not only be a local audience but an international one too."

A single performance of Blàr will take place at Bowmore Hall, Islay on 30 May at 7.30 pm. Tickets cost £10 and are available from

We are grateful to X Y and z for financial support.

For a press invitation to the performance or for photographs, interviews or further information please contact: Fergus Muir on 01496 810 307 or by email on fergus.muir@virgin.net

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Notes For Editors

Blàr Tràigh Ghruineart (the Battle of Gruinard Strand) was fought at Gruinard, Islay in 1598 as the result of a dispute between the MacDonalds of Islay and the MacLeans of Mull over ownership of Islay. Sir Lachlan Mòr MacLean Chief of the Clan MacLean was uncle to 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 by the Dubh Sith (Black Dwarf) according to folklore).

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 *Duth 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

Uilliam MacDhùnleibh (William Livingstone) 1808-1870 was born in Gartmain nr Bowmore, Islay. MacDhùnleibh 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 is supposed to have 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 MacDhùnleibh's death, Archibald Sinclair and An Comunn Ileach (The Islay Association) published **Duain agus Òrain** (a collection of MacDhùnleibh's poetry and writings).

Iseabail Mactaggart is a native Gaelic speaker, born and brought up on Islay, and who won the National Mod 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 Oigridh Ile is Dhiura and has been conductor of Còisir Ghàidhlig Ile since 2006.

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 on Islay.