

The Arts



Don't miss

THE PICTISH TRAIL, The Caves, Edinburgh, tomorrow 8pm
When Johnny Lynch, CEO of Fence Records, brought the sound of The Pictish Trail to Glasgow Art Club for Celtic Connections he insisted at the last moment that the seating be removed for the gig. So it is reasonable to assume that the club atmosphere of the Niddry Street vaults will better suit the atmosphere he wants for his Secret Sounds.

Retreat and advance

Mairi Campbell has won a Tutor of the Year award for the workshops she runs on Lismore. She talks to Rosenna East

It is on a wild and windy night that I turn up at singer and fiddler Mairi Campbell's door in Portobello, Edinburgh. She welcomes me into a room lit by warm colours and a glowing fire, we draw our chairs close to the stove and the gale howls outside. I wonder if the weather is even wilder tonight over on the west coast, where Campbell has family, on the isle of Lismore.

She says that the idea to start a music retreat in the family croft on the island came to her, some years ago, almost overnight. Since then, the horizon of the fiddle retreats has expanded, and different weekend programmes now include singing, dancing, photography, poetry and craft, as well as plenty of fiddle music. And all of it under one charming red cottage roof.

Chosen as Tutor of the Year in the 2012 Scots Trad Music Awards, Campbell is described by one Lismore weekend participant, Gordon Stevenson, as "a fantastic teacher, but almost more of a guide". Campbell says she is open to "just whoever turns up at the door – I want to bring more of their talents out. That's what I'm drawn to."

On a practical level this means that any level of ability and experience is welcomed. With a maximum of eight people on each weekend retreat, there's time for proper personal attention. Each participant brings one tune with them, so that they all go home with eight. And although there is about ten hours of teaching in total over the weekend, what those hours might involve is very flexible. Campbell describes the ethos of the retreats as "Where technique meets tradition. We use the tunes to get into different issues – if someone wants their bow arm unlocked, to be more physically relaxed, or wants to find ways to improvise, to harmonise – we can look at all those things."

There's a relaxed and communal feel to the whole weekend. Everyone sleeps under the same roof, and all lend a hand in the kitchen. There have been, reflects Campbell, "surprisingly few surprises over the years. The well [the only water source] has run dry a couple of times," she chuckles, "but I have never known there to be any angst. Everybody has made a commitment to their playing and to their music in being there, and making that journey across the water, so they come willing to share time in music."

Each night, there is a ceilidh at the fireside. Family members and friends from the island come over to join in the evening sessions. This "joining up with others" is an important part of the experience for Campbell, because her belief is that traditional music is "so much more than just a tune. Tunes have a backstory – there's a body behind the tune, a body of people. It's taken me a long time to understand that I want to bring people back to the music – it's a kind of healing. So when people come to Lismore, we create a community."

Stevenson, a former Commando officer and executive jet pilot from Oban, found himself on one of Mairi's fiddle weekends in October 2012, after hearing her sing at Glenkinchie Distillery. At that performance, he describes feeling powerfully "drawn to her – her 'sounding', as she calls some of her own singing, is absolutely primal". So he packed his fiddle and made the trip to Lismore. "It wasn't what I was expecting at all. It was as though I had been magicked away, removed from normal experience. You don't realise until you get there." Stevenson goes on to describe how at one point on the



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weekend, creating a winter soundscape with the group. "I was completely absorbed in the moment – I was absolutely there. I haven't felt like that since I was a kid."

Campbell's own musical path has led her from Edinburgh, through formal classical training at London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama, via Cape Breton in Nova Scotia, back to traditional Scottish music and the isle of Lismore. She describes meeting the man who is now her husband and duo partner, Dave Francis, many years previously, as an 18-year-old on Lismore. Back then he taught her a tune – the first tune she ever learnt by ear. Knowing at the time that it was significant, she took some years to realise why.

For Campbell, the hankering she felt for traditional music and the need to "come home" with her



MAIRI CAMPBELL: Chosen as Tutor of the Year in the 2012 Scots Trad Music Awards. Picture: Steve Cox

music, has always been very strong. She describes the fact that in her earlier years as a freelance classical player, she felt she couldn't fully relate to the classical music that she was playing as "almost painful. Because music and sound go so deep." She admits to "a lifelong

obsession with rhythm – the underbelly of life", and seeks, above all, honesty in her music, where there is "nothing to hide behind."

Twenty years ago, while still in London, Campbell was seized by a feeling that traditional music was about to undergo a revival in

Scotland. "I just had this sense that things were about to hot up there. I knew that I needed to get back to Scotland, because I felt I had a role to play in it." And she wasn't wrong.

More information available at www.lismoremusicretreats.com

Miles apart with his double take

Rob Adams talks to jazz trumpeter Paolo Fresu

PAOLO Fresu tours Scotland with two very different orchestras over the coming weeks. This weekend the Sardinian trumpeter guests with the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra on its latest project, interpreting two of Miles Davis's collaborations with arranger Gil Evans, *Miles Ahead* and *Birth of the Cool*. Then in late April, Fresu returns with Cuban pianist Omar Sosa and Indian percussionist Trilok Gurtu for the new *J-Word* initiative.

The second grouping is a trio but for Fresu it's a bigger sound, texturally if not necessarily in terms of volume, than would normally be expected of three musicians.

"Trilok is an orchestra by himself," he says with a laugh down the line from a snowy Bologna. "He plays percussion but there's so much more to his music. He's a vocalist, a tabla master, a sound sculptor and he can really kick the music along with his drum kit. So if you add Omar, with his amazing piano playing and electronic samples and me on top, we can have many different orchestrations and colours."

The very 21st century sound of the trio is something that Fresu, one of the most distinctive-sounding musicians in European jazz, enjoys immensely. He also, however, feels it's important to go back to the great landmark recordings of jazz, such as *Birth of the Cool* and *Miles Ahead*, from the 1940s and 1950s, and understand the music that played such a major part in jazz's development.

As a young trumpeter growing up on Sardinia he had few opportunities to play with jazz musicians of any kind, let alone an orchestra such as the one Evans placed behind Davis on *Miles Ahead*, although Fresu did run a band in his teens that played weddings and would regale bride, groom and guests with numbers from the jazz fusion repertoire of trumpeter Ian Carr's *Nucleus*.

"Listening to records was really my school as far as learning to play jazz was concerned, and Miles Davis and Chet Baker were my first masters," he says. "They taught me so much. I liked the way they left silences in their solos. They chose their notes with such care and it never felt like they were just playing



CAPAULO FRESU: Playing with the Scottish National Jazz orchestra this week.

fast licks to impress. It was from the heart."

Davis's albums with Gil Evans were particular favourites and in 2002 Fresu paid homage to one of them, *Porgy and Bess*, with a recording that reimagined Edwin Dubose Heyward's original storyline far away from its South Carolina origins by pitching French-Vietnamese guitarist Nguyễn Lê alongside Tunisian sufi singer Dhafer Youssef and a Mediterranean rhythm section.

There'll be no such exotic diversions in the SNJO's interpretations of *Birth of the Cool* and *Miles Ahead*. "No, and I'm fine with that because Gil Evans' arrangements were so imaginative," he says. "The combination of instruments and the way they were voiced was very special. He really drew jazz and the

great classical composers of the 20th century, like Ravel, together. "It's a terrible admission, I know, but I'm not a big fan of the big band repertoire generally," he says. "A lot of it can be a bit too busy. That's why I like the music I'm going to be playing with the SNJO. It leaves the soloist space to think, to be expressive, like a singer. The way I hear it, there are two different approaches involved: on *Miles Ahead* I'll play quite close to what Miles played on the original and on *Birth of the Cool*, I can be freer, be more like myself."

Fresu has appeared in Scotland before when he toured his *Porgy & Bess* sextet for the late visionary promoter Billy Kelly and more recently when he and classical and 12-string guitar specialist Ralph Towner performed music from their

Chosen as Tutor of the Year in the 2012 Scots Trad Music Awards, ECM Records album, *Chiaroscuro*, at the Queen's Hall in Edinburgh.

His relationship with Omar Sosa, which has produced the duo CD *Alma* as well as the imminent trio tour with Trilok Gurtu, is typical of an international approach to making music that has seen Fresu create working partnerships with flamenco, African, Macedonian, Scandinavian, French, British, and American musicians as well as the Corsican choir *La Filetta*, with whom he's recorded one album for ECM Records, *Mistico Mediterraneo*, and is about to record another.

He says: "Mistico Mediterraneo was quite a challenge but I like a challenge. We had the choir and Daniele di Bonaventura on bandoneon and myself and although I loved the choral arrangements it was difficult to know where to play. Then Daniele and I realised that we just had to think of ourselves as two more voices. It's a long way from Miles Davis and yet, maybe it's not so far after all because it's all music and I enjoy playing it all."

The Scottish National Jazz Orchestra with Paolo Fresu play Caird Hall, Dundee, tonight; Queen's Hall, Edinburgh, tomorrow; Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Saturday; MacRobert Arts Centre, Stirling, Sunday. Fresu-Sosa-Gurtu tours Scotland from April 29-May 4.

ARTS NEWS

● **STORYTELLER** and author Ewan McVicar has written a show to celebrate the 200th anniversary of David Livingstone's birth. The *Light of the World* commemorates not only one of Scotland's greatest explorers but also the friendship between Livingstone and the chemist James "Paraffin" Young, who made West Lothian the capital of Scotland's shale oil industry, and the dedication of Livingstone's companions Susi and Chuma, who carried the explorer's body to the African coast and sent it home without one vital organ. "You can have his body," the accompanying note said, "but his heart belongs to Africa." McVicar tells the story, with accompanying magic lantern slides and songs from folk singer Christine Kydd. The show, whose title comes from an advertising slogan for Addiewell No. 1 Oil, plays St Mungo's Museum, Glasgow on February 28 and a special birthday performance in Livingstone's birthplace, Blantyre, on March 19. www.ewanmcvicar.webs.com

● **CAITLIN** Rose releases the follow-up to her much-praised debut album *Own Side Now* on Monday. The *Stand-In* was recorded with a posse of musicians and producers in her native Nashville and features songs from her own pen as well as collaborations with others, including Gary Louris of The Jayhawks. The album combines its country roots with nods towards the golden age of Hollywood and the Broadway musical stage. She visits the UK for a short run of dates from the date of the album's release, ending with a show at Glasgow's CCA on March 2. www.thecaitlinrose.com

● **FORMER** Rolling Stones guitarist Mick Taylor has had to cancel his concert at Backstage at the Green Hotel, Kinross, this Saturday due to illness. Other dates in England and an Australian tour have also been cancelled. Refunds for Saturday's gig are available through the ticket suppliers and David Mundell, the promoter, is hoping he will be able to arrange a rescheduled date in the not too distant future. www.mundellmusic.com

Dance

BALLETBOYZ: THE TALENT 2013, FESTIVAL THEATRE, EDINBURGH
MARY BRENNAN
★★★★

THERE are mighty six-packs to the power of 10 onstage – clearly the 2013 *BalletBoyz* have got muscle. But, as Liam Scarlett's new piece, *Serpent*, soon reveals, there is sensitivity as well as strength in the all-male company brought together by original *BalletBoyz* Michael Nunn and William Trevitt. Perhaps the opening sequence, where bare-torso'd bodies lie curled on the floor and lone arms rise up, like swan necks in the lavender wash of light, is a passing nod to Scarlett's own background with the Royal Ballet, and to the ballerinas he acknowledges (in the preceding film footage that introduces the work) are an inspiration.

But even as he is stepping outside his usual comfort zone, Scarlett is finding a grace and even a tenderness in the masculinity that makes duets into power-plays, verging on the combative before a sudden pause, a fleeting touch or gesture alters the dynamic into camaraderie or something more. At times, as the lighting (by Michael Hulls) laps sinuous limbs with glowing warmth and the music (from Max Richter's *Memoryhouse*) swirls through the air the stage looks like a training camp for young gods.

Russell Maliphant's *Fallen* feels, perhaps, more like a prison (or an army) camp. Dressed in fatigues, the ten men inhabit a lighting plot that corrals them in tight spots, locates them on-stage or searches them out as they move. There's menace in this, and in Armand Amar's music. But there's also an unexpected playfulness in the diving, cart-wheeling and capoeira-feints that Maliphant laps into the rituals of his urgent choreography. The talented *Boyz* take every challenge in their stride: more please, and soon.

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