

Musical trio get top chance in BBC folk awards

By Katie Macleod

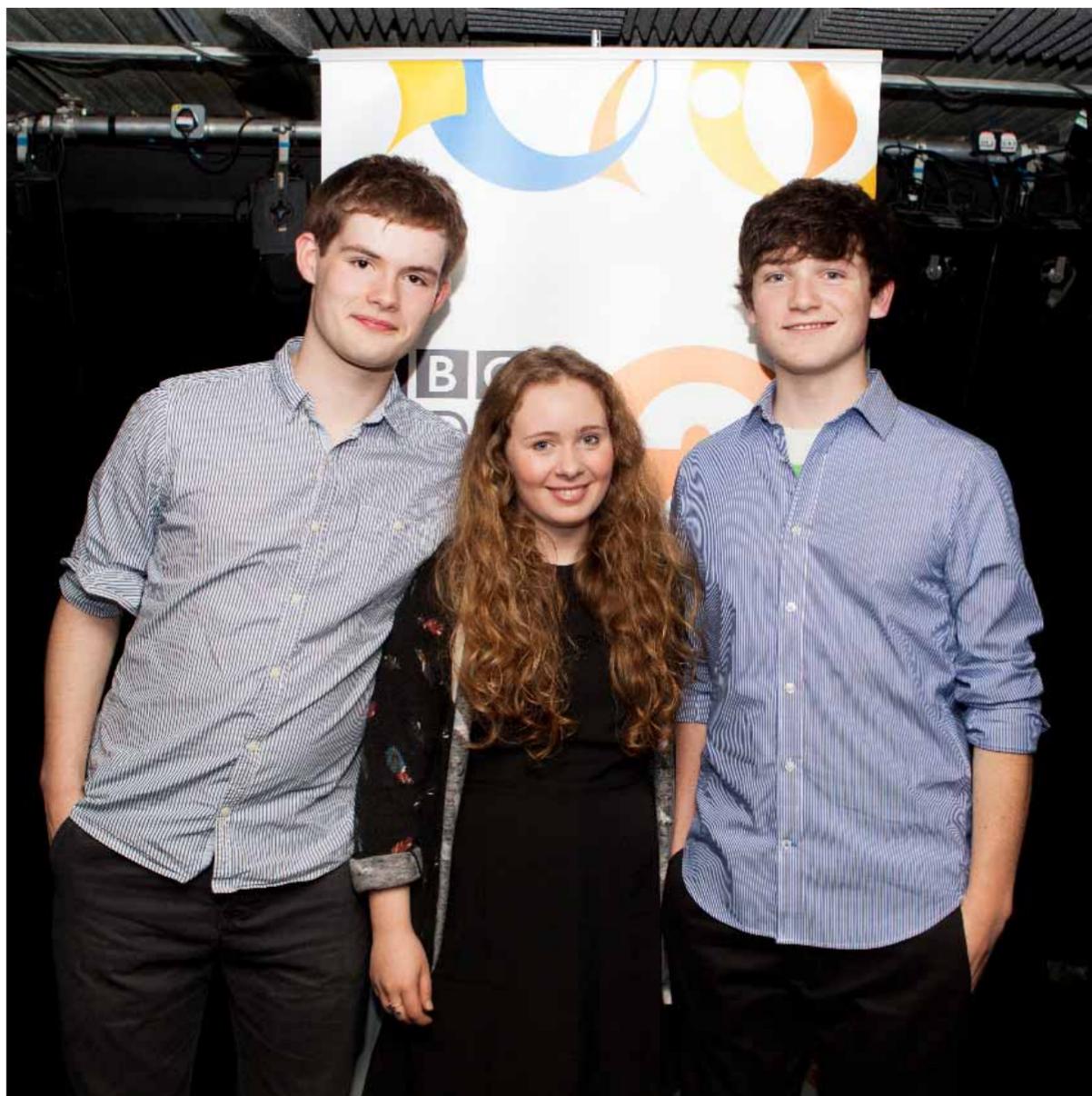
A talented trio of traditional musicians hailing from the Highlands and Islands is one of only four finalists in the BBC Radio 2 Young Folk Awards. The Mischa Macpherson Trio discovered last month that they are in the running for the BBC 2 top spot, and as nominees will be heading for the awards ceremony in London's Albert Hall in February.

"We were really, really shocked," says Mischa Macpherson, the Sandwick singer and harpist who is also the namesake of the group, which includes Innes White from Dingwall on guitar, and Conal McDonagh from Poolewe playing the pipes and whistle.

Their shock was as much due to winning while up against ten other "really amazing acts", as to the fact that the whole thing was rather unplanned. "Myself and the boys just thought it would be nice to record a couple of tracks before I came to Finland," explains Mischa over Skype.

Currently studying at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki on a year-long exchange from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the 20-year-old had heard of the competition, and it piqued her interest. It wasn't until she had settled in Scandinavia, however, that Mischa realised the BBC competition deadline had snuck up on them: "I think I got our entry in just before midnight!"

That last-minute moment of panic landed them a place at the semi-finals weekend in Kendal, which included workshops with well-known folk stars, and a gig at the Brewery Arts Centre, from which the four nominees were



Innes White, Mischa Macpherson and Conal McDonagh

selected. "You have to remind yourself how young they are," BBC Radio 2 presenter Mark Radcliffe pointed out as he announced the nominees live on 'The Folk Show' in November, playing snippets of each finalist's set.

The Trio's Gaelic music sounds magical, ethereal – and decidedly different to the speedy Irish-jigs and bluesy ballads of their fellow nominees. Mischa describes it as "folk music with a lot of influences from the Gaelic tradition. We sing a lot of American songs, and Irish songs, but the influences are from the music and culture that we grew up with."

She suggests with a laugh that Finnish folk sounds may soon feature in their repertoire. "The folk music is really cool. Scandinavian folk tunes are like Scottish tunes turned upside down! They're a bit more edgy." In

her department at Sibelius there has already been some swapping of tunes between the two cultures. "People here are a bit quieter at first, but everyone is really lovely."

It's an observation that could equally apply to Mischa herself: smiling and unassuming, Mischa is certainly not your stereotypical young wannabe. "There is more to Mischa than you might originally think, as she is modest, but she has a good spark about her and is a very good musician," says international singing sensation Alyth McCormack.

The Irish-based artist is from the same street in Sandwick as Mischa, but didn't get to know her younger neighbour until much later, when Mischa took part in a project Alyth was teaching in Shetland a few years ago. "I saw there that she is more outgoing than she initially lets on, and that she has a lovely personality, and gets on well and easily with people," recalls Alyth.

Despite her obvious talent, involvement in the Mod and the Fèis since the age of five, and her 5th school year spent at the National Centre of Excellence for Traditional Music in Plockton, Mischa never saw music in her future, except as part of her extra-curricular interests.

"I wanted to do Biology!" she confesses, telling the tale of how she returned to the Nicolson in 6th year to sit her Advanced Highers. It was two weeks before she was due to depart for Glasgow - and four years of Biology and Psychology lectures - that Mischa thought she should maybe consider a career in music after all.

Luckily for listeners near and far, Mischa took a gap year
Continued on page B11

What's in Section Two

A panful of fish: Different Christmases	B2	Environmental Health - Advice and Alerts	B13
Lewis Car Club.....	B2	Naidheachdan Gàidhlig	B14 - B15
Viewpoint.....	B3	Rotary Round-up	B16
Climate change warning.....	B3	Horse riders gain from pilates and yoga.....	B16
RNLI News.....	B4	Bridge Community Centre.....	B17
Harbour Highlights.....	B4	Terri gives her fragrant recipe for a Perfect Christmas!.....	B18
Marie Curie nurse backs charity will campaign	B5	Lewis & Harris Youth Clubs Association	B19
Stornoway Primary Newsdesk	B6	Winter livestock feeding - don't make a meal of it.....	B20
Scottish Fire and Rescue Service	B7		
The Linda Norgrove foundation	B7		
Include-us	B8 - B9		
New books at Western Isles Libraries	B10		
Kirsteen and Mairi back from Kilimanjaro	B11		
Lewis & Harris Riding Club	B12		



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Introductory Members Scheme at Stornoway Golf Club Extended

Following the success of the introductory membership scheme launched by Stornoway Golf Club in December 2011, the Club has decided to continue with the scheme into the 2014/15 season. The "less than half price offer" will be available from now, and for a fee of £100 new members will be able to attain membership right through to March 2015.

The introductory membership scheme will cover up to 15 months and new members will be able to play for leisure and may progress to competitive play as they become ready. They will get access to the golf course and to the Club's facilities, and a limited number of lockers are available for safe storage of golf clubs.

Commenting on the scheme, Club Member, Kenny Macleod said "I had never given the game of golf much thought until I read about the £100 Introductory Membership Scheme. I gave it a go and enjoyed the game so much that I have since become a full member.

Initially I was a bit unsure about how a beginner like myself would adapt to playing alongside golfers that had been playing golf for many years. I worried I would embarrass myself with my game. However, this was not the case. I was given tips and lots of encouragement by the golfers on the course. This really helped me relax and become more confident which improved my game.

I would encourage anyone with an interest in golf to take advantage of this scheme as I did."

Murdo O'Brien, Club Captain, commented on the Introductory Membership Scheme

"It has been another positive year for the club by including this scheme. We have welcomed new faces of various ages and seen a busier course. It is great to see folk that are new to the game gain confidence through progression.

The scheme also includes free coaching from club coaches throughout the winter at the Back Driving Range.

In today's economic climate I see the £100 Introductory Membership Scheme as a way of encouraging folk to take up golf with the prospect of providing a financial stepping stone to full membership.

Anyone interested in this introductory £100 offer for membership should contact Stornoway Golf Club in person, or by email at: admin@stornowaygolfclub.co.uk or telephone 01851 70 2240. Monday-Friday after 5pm and Saturdays after 12noon.

Stornoway Golf Club Shop

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Sale deals for December include:

Full Starter sets from	£139.99
Waterproof Golf shoes (Nike, Adidas, Footjoy)	from £39.99
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Club crested Lyle and Scott Green Eagle 1/4 zip sweaters	£59.99
Dozen packs of golf balls	from £15.00
Base layers and Winter mitts	from £14.99
Windproof tops	from £29.99
Waterproof suits	from £99.00

GIFT VOUCHERS AVAILABLE

Seeking a Christmas Present for a golfer in your family? Please feel free to phone 01851 70 2240 for advice and recommendations in your price range.

THE SHOP IS OPEN LATE EVERY NIGHT IN THE RUN UP TO CHRISTMAS

Gift Vouchers are available

DECEMBER

Saturday 7/12/13
The Broken Ravens
debut single release

Saturday 14/12/13
BIG Xmas party (band is The Links)
- remaining space limited

Saturday 21/12/13
BIG Xmas party (band is Rock Island Line) - remaining space very limited

Friday 27/12/13
Uncle Ethan - tickets £3 from club

Saturday 28/12/13
Bad Touch

Musical trio get top chance in BBC folk awards

Continued from page B1

(including a five-month volunteer stint in Ghana) before enrolling at the Conservatoire. While Mischa, Conal, and Innes have been developing their own careers, the Trio has been building momentum alongside them.

Thrown together on the Fèis Rois International Ceilidh Trail in the summer of 2011, the three quickly formed a connection. "We had one week to make all our sets, then we went off, and we had such a good time playing together," Mischa remembers. Since then their traditional tunes have seen them on stage at Celtic Connections, the Edinburgh Fringe, and at concerts in Ireland, Romania and even Australia.

"This competition is the first one we did together," says Mischa of the BBC Young Folk Award. "We want to take a stab at being our own band. Everything is going really nicely just now, and we're going to try and get some gigs next year as a trio. The two boys are like my best friends, so it's nice to practice and put sets together."

Asked if she has any advice for her fellow Sandwick singer, Alyth is realistic, but encouraging. "To maintain a career as a musician is tricky - if you want to do it though you'll find a way. Mischa has got off to a great start with the other boys in the trio and I wish them all well."



Mischa Macpherson

"I hope they will always try to make music they are proud of no matter what others think. They may be playing in a village hall one day but keeping true to yourself you could be in a Festival Hall soon enough."

From science in Stornoway to singing and studying in Scandinavia: it's not the typical route to becoming a finalist in one of Britain's biggest folk competitions, but Mischa's story is surely one of the most interesting. With Innes and Conal by her side, The Mischa Macpherson Trio is definitely one to watch out for in February.

Kirsteen and Mairi back from Kilimanjaro

By Taylor Edgar

It was the experience of a lifetime but definitely not one they would ever wish to do again.

This is the verdict of two Lewis women who conquered Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest peak in Africa at a lung-bursting 19,341 feet above sea level.

But the sheer effort and exertion of dealing with altitude sickness to reach the summit has paid off with Kirsteen Stewart and Mairi Maciver now able to present their chosen charity, the Western Isles Kidney Patients Association, with a bumper cheque almost twice the size of their original target.

Monies are still coming in but, at the time of going to press, it was expected the final total being presented at the December meeting of the association would be around £13,000.

Agreeing that climbing Kilimanjaro was the toughest thing they have ever done - and ever will do - the pair are now taking a well-earned rest and recovering from the fine ash they inhaled on the way up the extinct volcano.

Joked Kirsteen: "I would rather run a marathon every day than go through that again."

Though they were physically fit after months of intensive training, what they couldn't prepare for in advance were the effects of the lack of oxygen.

It was at the end of day three on the mountain, camping above the clouds, that the thin air started to take its toll.

Said Kirsteen: "The walking was okay, it was at the end of the day that you started to feel it. Small things like taking off your boots and getting into your sleeping bag suddenly became major obstacles. The constant lack of oxygen and the breathlessness were hardest things to handle. You were just so exhausted the whole time."

Added Mairi: "Everything just turned into a chore. Even taking your boots off became a struggle. I'd be sitting there taking off my boots

and having to stop every so often just to catch my breath."

The next two days to the summit became a feat of endurance and mental toughness to make it to the top. With nausea kicking in on top of the exhaustion, each step became a superhuman effort.

Some of their group had to turn back, but Kirsteen and Mairi pushed through what felt like "a force field" to get to the top.

Because they ended up in separate groups of climbers who were climbing at different paces, Kirsteen and Mairi did not reach the summit together. And because Mairi began suffering with vision problems, her time at the top was limited and she was quickly taken back down to camp.

The final push to the summit began at 1 am after a full day's walking the day before. By setting off then it meant climbers would get to the top of Africa in time for sunrise.

But the spectacle was one that felt strange as both Kirsteen and Mairi by this time were suffering symptoms of confusion and fatigue.

The actual sense of achievement did not happen until much later on. "To be honest, I still can't believe we did it," said Kirsteen, with Mairi adding: "For me, it wasn't until we were off the mountain and on the bus looking back towards Kilimanjaro that I finally realised the scale of what we had done."

Despite the physical and mental hardship involved both are glad they were able to successfully complete their fund raising expedition, which was two years in the planning.

Highlights of the trip apart from the summit were The Barranco Wall, a major scree climb on the way to the top and the camp's cook amazing everyone by baking and icing a cake to celebrate Kirsteen's birthday.

After being to the highest point in Africa and surpassing the tall heights in Europe, it is now difficult to see how the pair can ever hope to top that achievement.