

Nuala Kennedy — Biography

www.nualakennedy.com

Performance Formats: Trio, Quartet and Festival Big Bands

Currently working on an album entitled "Noble Stranger", her third solo release on Nashville's Compass Records Label, Nuala Kennedy is an Irish singer and flute player with hauntingly beautiful vocals, adventurous instrumentation, and an imaginative mix of influences.

Kennedy doesn't so much imbibe or inhale as swallow, whole and unadulterated, melodic and rhythmic influences from beyond her kith and kin. A delicious mix of influences abound, without ever sacrificing musical identity. "The Irish Times 2010

Nuala Kennedy's singing and flute playing springs from the traditional music of Ireland and Scotland, and from the fathomless realms of her own imagination. A consummate performer with a buoyant personality, her music has been described as unique, evocative, and soul-satisfying.

"Fresh, zesty and magical with underlayer's of mystery and otherworldliness" ~ Padraigin Ni Uallachain (2010)

Nuala grew up in Dundalk, Co. Louth, on the East coast of Ireland; a musical area which is steeped in mythology and has long historical links with Scotland. She started to play traditional music at the age of seven when her father introduced her to her first whistle teacher. Nuala instantly fell in love with the music and started learning traditional tunes as quickly as she could. By the age of twelve she graduated to wooden flute and became a member of a local ceilidh band 'Ceoltoiri Oga Oghrialla'. The band, comprising several now highly respected traditional musicians, won the all Ireland Gradam award for the under twenty-one age group when Nuala was just thirteen. "I never dreamed when I started playing in that very social and visceral way, that something that was such an organic part of my childhood would lead to a career in music. All I knew was that I loved the music and I wanted to play all the time. She also began lessons in classical piano, and at fifteen was accepted to study with the renowned professor John O'Connor at the Royal Academy of Music in Dublin.

At the age of eighteen, Nuala moved to Scotland to study at Edinburgh College Of Art. She was immediately captivated by the vital traditional music session scene, and there made many friends, including fellow Irish expatriate Cathal McConnell, whose music has had a huge influence on her, and who has become something of a mentor to her over the years. It was in Edinburgh that Nuala's passion for traditional music was further strengthened and where she honed her instrumental skills. The result was a comprehensive repertoire of Scottish tunes, as well as Irish, and led to the formation of her first real band, the trio Fine Friday, alongside guitarist Kris Drever and fiddler Anna-

Wendy Stevenson. The trio toured widely in Europe, Canada and Australia, before disbanding in 2006, and released two critically acclaimed albums; ~Gone Dancing and ~Mowing the Machair.

"A startlingly varied and imaginative album of instrumental music and song. Nuala Kennedy's masterly skill on wooden flute and whistle reflects her Irish traditional roots. Scotland on Sunday.

At the same time Nuala's on-going interest in Scottish Gaelic song was beginning to come to the fore, adding to her already large repertoire of Irish songs. In 2007 she decided to deepen her knowledge of Scots Gaelic and moved to Inverness in the Highlands to undertake a year of intensive study. The combination of the best influences of the two cultures, Scotland and Ireland, is what has made Nuala the artist she is today.

In 2007 Nuala decided that her vision and interpretation of traditional music deserved her own band and she released a solo CD ~The New Shoes. Again the reviewers were captivated:

*"A dazzling debut. Unhurried yet freewheeling, loose-limbed yet disciplined, her voice is a natural, earthy instrument entirely in concert with her woody flute lines. She is not only an exceptional interpreter of the tradition: her own tunes glisten with freshness. Spellbinding. **** THE IRISH TIMES.*

'The New Shoes' was voted traditional album of the week by The Irish Times, featured in BBC Scotland's top albums of 2008 and traditional highlight of the year by Hotpress Music Magazine. That began an intense cycle of touring, and Nuala began taking her music abroad to audiences all over Europe and the USA. It also stimulated her creative powers and a lot of her own compositional work began at this point.

At this time she was invited to write a piece for Glasgow's Celtic Connections International festival, a piece she will revisit in January 2012. She put together an hour long show featuring nine players from around the world. It received a rapturous response from the audience and press:

"a great big gorgeous musical event, one seamless segue of breathtaking music and tight vocal harmonies" ~ THE HERALD

This experience whetted her appetite for both composition and collaboration, and led to her participation in Burnsong 2007 and ArtOmi in New York, both important artistic residencies where her talents for both organization and creativity were brought to the fore. Several of the musicians with whom she worked at this stage are featured on her sophomore solo album 'Tune In' inspired by a vintage radio dial and released in 2010.

"Singers such as Teenage Fanclub's Norman Blake and Bonnie Prince Billy share frequencies with great jazz pianist Brian Kellock, and driving ex-Shooglenifty mandolin master Iain MacLeod joins with most of Mr McFall's Chamber in the densely crowded

*variety of musicianly style. Quietly expressive, cheerfully brash, complex or simple, Radio Kennedy is never static." **** THE SCOTSMAN 2010*

Amongst others she has performed and recorded with American hipster and indie-poet Will Oldham, an album which received 5 stars from MOJO magazine, and cutting-edge Canadian composer Oliver Schroer, with whom she recorded ~Enthralled a duo album of entirely original compositions to be released in January 2012 on Borealis Records. She occasionally performs with ECMA award winners Troy MacGillivray, Kimberley Fraser and Andrea Beaton. Nuala is also part of the traditional Irish group OIRIALLA: performing the music and song of her native South-East Ulster, which features Irish traditional music legends Gerry ~fiddle OConnor, accordionist Martin Quinn and the acclaimed Breton guitarist Gilles le Bigot.

Nuala decided to continue her interest in education and further her knowledge of the tradition by undertaking a Masters Degree in Music Performance and Composition, which she completed with distinction from Newcastle University in 2011. The result of this was an even deeper understanding of, and commitment to traditional music, which is evident in the powerful and passionate performances she currently gives, wherever she is on tour.

"bright and rhythmic, percussively accented flute playing and a voice of luminous clarity" THE HERALD

"Riveting on stage - a mix of sweetness, earthiness and sheer musical virtuosity. The traditions in great hands here. This is an artist who gives it respect while using it as a launch pad for her own musical vision" ~ Brian McNeill

For more biographical information, please visit:

www.nualakennedy.com and www.myspace.com/nualakennedy