

DALRIADA: INTERVIEW

Strathan Music interviewed Clark Sorley, the founder member of Dalriada, in April 2001.

Date and place of birth

Kilmarnock, Scotland. 31 July 1956.

What are your musical influences?

Vast, but mainly popular music from the early 60's till present. Beatles to Stevie Wonder to Radiohead. Very few are Celtic - but Dick Gaughan is certainly an inspiration.

Are you a trained musician?

Self-taught - piano and bass guitar.

Is Dalriada your band and concept and do you decide who plays on the album/s?

Dalriada is primarily a recording project and was originally my concept. Vocalist and co-writer, Colin Kennedy, is the other fixed entity. Session players provide an extra musicianship and yes I would probably decide who they are depending on availability, suitability etc.

What is the division of composition between Colin and yourself?

Pretty much a joint effort. We both write music and we both write lyrics.

How do you approach writing the music/lyrics. Is it an easy process?

It's easy to a point in that the initial spark is easy and can come with little effort. Development is more difficult requiring you to dig deeper to get something that sounds accomplished and original.

How long did it take you to record *Sophistry and Illusion*?

It was recorded over a 9 month period in a variety of ad-hoc locations.

Please tell us a bit about the musicians on the album:

Rab Handleigh: Multi-talented, multi-instrumentalist. In my opinion just about as good a musician as you'll find anywhere.

Andy McGlasson: Is now a well established session drummer currently working in London's West End. Gained his first professional engagements working with me in the mid-1980's.

Billy Bryan: One of Ayrshire's most gifted rock singers. Virtually unknown elsewhere.

Joe Cowan: A pop singer and songwriter colleague of mine.

John Sampson: A whistle and recorder player recommended by Rab Handleigh.

Dougie Pincock: Probably one of a few pipers in Scotland who makes a living from playing his instrument. He is also able to adapt the pipes to suit diverse situations, unusual in my experience.

Eilidh Shaw: Sister of Capercaillie's Donald Shaw. Has her own solo albums.

Harry Lawson: Don't know much about Harry other than he is one of a very few Uilleann pipers in Scotland.

Liz Brice: Ayrshire based rock singer.

Lorraine Jordan: Multi-talented musician, singer and songwriter. Works as a solo artist and has her own albums.

Mike Lawrence: Ayrshire based bass player and an old colleague from my days as a studio owner in Kilmarnock. Works as a duo with his wife, Liz Brice.

Alistair McDonald: Al is best known as a performer and TV personality. He is also a fine session musician and played a number of string and percussion instruments on the album.

Robbie Dale: Robbie is an old friend and colleague and a fantastic session musician. He's not a permanent feature (of Dalriada) as such but is likely to appear on virtually all my music projects. Robbie cut his teeth as a session musician in my old studio.

Sandy Brechin: Much admired accordionist - Edinburgh based. Makes his own records.

Simon Thoumire: I produced one of Simon's early albums - a folk/dance fusion. He now runs his own Edinburgh based label.

Zoe Ebsworth: Zoe was appearing at the Playhouse in 'Saturday Night Fever' at the time (of making the album). She is the partner of drummer Andy McGlasson.

Your assistant producer was Craig Steven - can you tell us a bit about him.

Local lad. Accomplished music engineer who also has his own rock band.

In the original photos you had long hair - when did you decide to get it cut short?

The long hair was something of a late rebellion during my time at Edinburgh University. It also pointed to latter day hippydom which I can well remember. Having my hair cut was a nod to conformity again.

Who is the young lady on the *In The Blood* and *Lying's Rampant* pages in the album booklet?



Amy Rewcastle, a friend. This was her first 'assignment'. She is now in demand as a fashion model appearing regularly in numerous publications.

Please tell us a bit about Ian Roy, the designer of the albums graphics.

I met Ian soon after moving to Edinburgh from Ayrshire in 1989. We have collaborated on various projects throughout the years. As well as a graphic designer he is also gifted as a writer and director of film and video. He moved to London in 1996 and now runs his own consultancy based in Soho.

Please tell us a bit about the ideas, significance etc behind each song on the album?

(1) *Innocent*

A reference to the arrested development of the Celts in general - their naiveté and/or innocence. Not always a bad thing.

(2) *The Sleeping Child (Scottish independence?)*

Any kind of independence. The idea of something dormant rising to realise its full potential - whether an individual or a community.

(3) *In The Blood (Scottish identity?)*

Could be, yes. But it's broadly about the value of belief in general. It suggests that the believing itself is more important than the thing believed.

(4) *Break The Chain (personal?)*

Personal certainly, but also 'archetypal' to use the Jungian term. Suggests that sequences of bad fortune

can be meaningful i.e. they contain a redemptive power; that they can reverse themselves and you are able to recognise the signs. The song says you should go for it, take risks - 'break the chain' and 'cast the die'.

- (5) ***Oh To Be Innocent***
As above.
- (6) ***This Land (being satisfied with what you have?)***
Accepting your lot, yes, and learning to be pleased with it. Also respecting your cultural history and inheritance.
- (7) ***Good Enough (not achieving your goals but happy anyway if you tried your best; being at ease with yourself?)***
Yes, even having achieved your goals allowing yourself to be satisfied. Enough never being enough is a profound flaw in the human character, Buddhism would attest. Some would disagree and argue striving is the very essence, but you do have to take stock at some point, give yourself a break.
- (8) ***The Walls (sectarianism and bigotry?)***
Down with bigotry, yes. It's been contained in Scotland compared to Ireland but its remains are lurking in the shadows which can be dangerous. The song is a reminder.
- (9) ***The Trickster***
See reference in *Break The Chain* lyrics. In mythology, the Trickster is a nuisance and facilitates things going wrong. He can also be a saviour though - mercurial. This piece is a celebration of such a character.
- (10) ***Let Life Begin (search for truth?)***
The search for truth and/or God. Believers versus sceptics. The song says 'I'll believe it when I see it' but also casts doubt on that way of looking at life. Whichever, the subject (i.e. the person in the song) wants truth and will be ready for it if the day comes.
- (11) ***Everlasting (dreams to get you through the harsh reality?)***
Yes, it's a celebration of everlasting and transcendent values but is sceptical too. It may be that such values reside only in the imagination and are there to help you get by.
- (12) ***The Ploughman's Loop***
Just a tune wi' a title!!
- (13) ***Lying's Rampant (the almost inevitable pull and attractions of the rest of the world and the intense emotions that eventually bring you back home again?)***
I think too it's a put-down of Scottish nationalism and the idea that the poor old Scots were ripped off by the English. It advocates a wider, more cosmopolitan outlook. But even for those who manage that, there can still be a pulling back to the roots.
- (14) ***Greenlands (your homeland?)***
Your homeland but also something to do with the inner landscape of the mind and imagination.
- (15) ***Bonnie Doon***
Burns's song tells of someone who can't see the beauty of the landscape because of the inner turmoil caused by love gone wrong. A timeless sentiment.

(16) ***Free At Last* (what is being said in the sample on this track?)**

"Soon I will be free from the troubles of the world". Like *Free at Last* this is the title of an old African/American spiritual. The only real conceivable freedom from a life in the plantations was to be in the next world.

Why did you decide to include *Bonnie Doon*?

My interest in trad songs has been a fairly recent development along with a passion for Robert Burns, his life and works. Doing *Bonnie Doon* was really a token of respect to the man I hold as the greatest ever Scot.

Is the album structured in any particular way e.g. pop songs followed by more traditional songs?

Kind of structured, yes. But more from the point of the emotions and musical textures. I like an album to have a beginning, middle and end as opposed to just a bunch of 'items'.

There are several short instrumental tracks - are these being used as connecting devices?

Before The Corrs became commercial they made a wonderful little album produced by David Foster which segued pop songs with short instrumentals. I liked that idea.



Where do you get the inspiration for your songs?

From the ether I guess. And from thinking. You can write a song about absolutely anything - a mouse, a louse! Ideas are fairly cheap and subject matter is everywhere. The craft is the thing, I suppose, along with seeing the world in a certain way.

Some of the songs seem to be quite philosophical - do you have a philosophy background or is this something that is simply part of you?

Someone once spoke of "having philosophical problems" like that was some kind of condition - some have it, some don't. I probably have it. It seemed natural then to make Philosophy my central subject at university.

Which are your favourite tracks on the album and why?

Hard to say. Maybe *In The Blood* for its atmosphere and sentiment. Also *Break The Chain*, again for its sentiment, but also because it probably represents the best of Colin and I writing together - face to face with instruments like Lennon and McCartney did in their early days.

As a record producer what projects have you been involved in over the years?

Thousands - CV available on request! (includes Aztec Camera, Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark, Del Amitri, Runrig, Simple Minds, Spandau Ballet, to name just a few).

Do you foresee doing another Dalriada album and if so what direction would you like to take it in?

I'd love to do another album - possibly introducing a female vocalist and employing some of the styles that have emerged from dance music - such as 'chill-out' and ambient.

Do you subscribe to any particular type of religion?

No. But I'm sympathetic to the main tenets of Buddhism.

Describe your personality in a few sentences.

I'm basically a believer in the world and the people in it, with a tendency to high expectation. Experience has come to bear on that over the years with a more tempered perspective on reality. In other words, I'm now a fully paid up cynic like most of my generation. Add to that some passion and intensity with at times an over-sensitivity and the resulting alchemy can be potent. In other words, I'm sometimes not much fun to be around!

What do you most like/dislike about recording?

For anyone who loves music, recording when things are really cooking must be one of the greatest highs imaginable - like listening to your favourite album in a near perfect acoustic setting as it's actually being created. The downside is the endless fine tuning that's often required for the final product. Knowing when to call a halt is a valuable skill to learn.

Do Dalriada ever perform live?

Dalriada is essentially a recording project. We don't generally perform live but certainly would if the situation merited the time and effort required.

Have you always lived in Scotland?

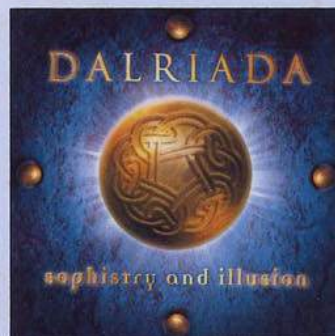
Mostly, yes but I do intend to rectify that one day!

Do you have any hobbies?

Reading and writing.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years time e.g. wildly successful artist; successful producer and recording studio owner; living in London etc?

Wah!! A major album success would be nice to take the pressure off a bit, whether as artist or producer. Travel would be nice too - I'd like to work in any of the music capitals - London, New York, L.A. As for running a studio I've paid my dues on that one.



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