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A Cape Breton musical touch to Scottish story

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Colin Grant

'An Drochaid/The Bridge Rising' set for Sunday screening at the Glasgow Film Theatre

SYDNEY — Two Cape Breton musicians will hear themselves on the big screen in Scotland this weekend when the documentary film "An Drochaid/The Bridge Rising" premieres at the Celtic Connections festival.

Leading Nova Scotia composer and guitarist Scott Macmillan, who divides his time between Brook Village, Inverness County, and Halifax, and Sydney fiddler Colin Grant feature prominently in the film's score, as do Scotland's Angus MacDonald, Arthur Cormack, and harpist/Gaelic singer Mary-Ann Kennedy. Cape Breton native Ian McKinnon also contributes to the score on bagpipes.

The screening of "An Drochaid/ The Bridge Rising" is set for Sunday at the Glasgow Film Theatre, where Macmillan, Grant, and Kennedy will also perform and participate in a Q&A session. It's a collaborative presentation between Celtic Connections and the Glasgow Film Festival and will also serve as the release of the film's soundtrack album, which will be widely available the following day through Watercolour Music.

"I'm just looking forward to hearing it. I'm looking forward to hearing the final mix of the CD. There's a lot of music that you don't really hear it that well on the movie because there's people talking but the tracks turned out really nice and the CD is going to be nice to have," said MacMillan.

The film — a Scottish/Canadian co-production of Skye Lark Films of River John, N.S., and Media Co-op, Glasgow, Scotland — was previously broadcast in shorter form on BBC Alba, while the full cinematic version was supported by Creative Scotland. It documents the 10-year battle against the Skye Bridge tolls, an ultimately successful public campaign.

Helping to craft the musical backdrop for the film was an enjoyable experience for Macmillan.

"It was pretty easygoing for me because there was a lot of talking (in the film) so the music is an underbed so it wasn't like really dramatic music at all. It was just a matter of coming up with some tunes, so I came up with a strathspey and a reel and some source material," he said.

MacMillan said he's also looking forward to catching up and performing with Kennedy, noting the two will also be brainstorming about another collaborative project they have in the works — "Aisaeg-The Ferryboat." Kennedy has been commissioned to do the piece as part of the 2014 UK Wide New Music Biennial Competition, and she enlisted Macmillan to be a part of it. The 15-minute piece will be composed for performance by a choir, a string orchestra, MacMillan, Kennedy and Grant and will have its premiere July 4 at Southbank Centre, London, England. It will be performed again in August as part of the Commonwealth Cultural Games in Glasgow, which will be broadcast by BBC3 and recorded for digital release by NMC Records.

"That collaboration is just about to really start. We haven't really started anything yet. There's a contemporary Gaelic poet, Angus MacNeil, and he's put together a text and he's gotten together with Mary Ann and when we're over there we're going to have a meeting about that," said Macmillan.

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