



# THE SCOTSMAN

## Celtic Connections review: Dàimh | Les Poules à Colin

Daimh have worked with a variety of singers through the years. Picture: Contributed

SUE WILSON

**Opening one of a dozen concerts taking place on Celtic Connections' first Friday night – and one of at least five sell-outs – the young Québécois quintet Les Poules à Colin made their Glasgow debut in sparkling and beguiling style.**

**Celtic Connections | Dàimh/Les Poules à Colin | Strathclyde Suite, Glasgow Royal Concert Hall | Rating \*\*\*\*** Celtic Connections | Vair/Hanson & Fraser | Piping Centre, Glasgow | Rating \*\*\*\*\*

Natives of Lanaudière, renowned as Quebec's most musical region, all five are the offspring of celebrated tradition-bearers.

Their own sound brought freshly inventive vitality to these deeply planted roots, centred on bright yet sultry twin female vocals, with instrumentation including banjo and mandolin (unusual in Québécois line-ups), plus powerful, pulsing electric bass, alongside fiddle, piano, and subtly deployed foot-percussion.

Some numbers rang artful changes on traditional ballads or call-and-response songs, ingeniously spliced with Quebec's irresistibly rollicking dance music; others featured the band's own material, such as their current album's restively yearning title track, *Ste-Waves*, a mix further enlivened with dashes of bluegrass, jazz and pop.

Echoing their audience, West Highland headliners Dàimh warmly applauded Les Poules' performance – apparently both bands had chatted beforehand, “in the international language of, ‘How do you pronounce your name?’”.

Although renowned early on as a primarily instrumental act, Dàimh have worked with a variety of singers during their 18-year career, underlining Gaelic tradition's central importance in their music. As well as their vividly expressive current vocalist Ellen MacDonald, they were joined here by all six of her predecessors, amounting to a microcosmic who's-who of Gaelic song: Ann Martin, Margaret Stewart, Alasdair Codona, Kathleen MacInnes, Calum Alex MacMillan and Griogair Labhruidh.

Besides these justly celebrated voices, the songs' arrangements showcased Dàimh's consummate craft and sensitivity as accompanists, in a set that ranged from exquisite laments to Labhruidh's boldly incisive Gaelic rapping – which incited a surely one-off appearance by Martin and Stewart as backing dancers.

The following night, another adroitly aligned bill began with Canadian cellist Christine Hanson and Scottish fiddler Iain Fraser, a duo dedicated – in like-minded fashion to Fraser’s illustrious sibling Alasdair – to reinvigorating the once-traditional Scottish partnership between their instruments.

Their intricately patterned, mutually questing interplay expanded these horizons to embrace evocative original compositions – including a delectable waltz from Hanson’s 2005 New Voices composition, *The Cremation of Sam McGee* – and a set highlighting Ukrainian and First Nations contributions to the Canadian melting-pot. In the words of young Shetland quartet Väir, as they took the stage after: “That was pure class.”

Väir themselves – another act comprising the progeny of leading musicians back home – proved just as classy and enthralling, across a broad stylistic spectrum, from blissfully dreamy, delicate slow tunes to authentically rampaging Shetland jigs and reels. Mandolins, guitars and banjo, backed by punchy, agile cajon grooves, took turns in lead and harmony roles, displaying both prodigious individual prowess and sizzling collective synergy.

Thoughtful song selection – encompassing a traditional classic, a contemporary cover and self-penned dialect material – allied with potently soulful vocals, added icing to the cake.

Even within a set of this calibre, though, the standout was a heartrendingly beautiful tune composed for that late, legendary champion of Shetland’s music, Davie Henderson, who first suggested they form the band. With Väir, his legacy could hardly be in safer hands.

Read more: <http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/culture/music/celtic-connections-review-daimh-les-poules-a-colin-1-4003541#ixzz3yHIZcHAz>

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