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For the attention of:

7 August 2009

Monday 12th October 2009 at Chequer Mead, East Grinstead

UISCEDWR Support: Luke Sital Singh

The phenomenal Uiscedwr (pronounced "ish-ka-dooer") is one of Britain's most exciting contemporary folk bands.

The band first came to public attention when they won the BBC Young Folk Awards in 2002. However, during 2005, band founder Anna Esslemont was diagnosed with aplastic anaemia. Her illness meant the group had to reduce its touring commitments and delay work on the second album. Esslemont had a successful bone marrow transplant in December 2006 and Uiscedwr resumed touring June 2007. Subsequently, Anna has been active in fundraising for the Aplastic Anaemia Trust charity (see biography for full story).

The band's new album, *Fish Cat Door* (a play on words) was recently described by Mike Harding as the "best thing they've ever done".

The current line-up features Anna on fiddle and vocals and co-founder Cormac Byrne (of Seth Lakeman band fame), on bodhran and percussion. Joined for this tour by James Hickman on guitar, the result is the most thrilling modern folk music you're ever likely to hear and promises a night you won't forget.

Tickets are £14 (£12 conc) Box Office 01342 302000.
More information can be found on the Acoustic Sussex website.

Full biography and Anna Esslemont's story overleaf

Quotes - what others say:

Folk has hopefully matured into a broad enough church to accommodate Uiscedwr's divine eccentricity". **Daily Telegraph**

"Technically brilliant, musically versatile, highly enjoyable" **Songlines**

What is Acoustic Sussex?

Acoustic Sussex is a non-profit making organisation that promotes quality singer/ songwriters and other acoustic musicians in the mid-Sussex area, using different venues. We encourage new and local talent by providing support slots for the main act and other opportunities such as 'open mic' evenings. Any profit we make from events is used for charitable purposes.



Uiscedwr – Biography – Anna Esselemont’s story



Ground-breaking folk band Uiscedwr release long awaited third album ‘Fish Cat Door’ (Yukka Records) on May 18 and will tour in the summer. This is the band’s first release since Anna Esselemont’s successful bone marrow transplant in 2006.

If music genuinely reflects the inner soul, it’s little wonder Uiscedwr are such an amazing band. Passionate, irrepressible, vital, imaginative, sincere, sorrowful, joyous and supremely skilled, the exciting Welsh/Irish/Anglo box of tricks that is Uiscedwr have been to hell and back over the last four years. Nothing if not survivors, they’ve reeled from the knocks, nursed their bruises – literally in the case of their extraordinary fiddle player/singer Anna Esselemont – and shrugged off a cruel catalogue of traumas to channel both good experiences and bad into the fireball of creativity that has seen them storm back with a rip-roaring third album Fish Cat Door (which, apart from anything else, is a title considerably designed to help pronunciation of their name – just delete the first letter of the first word, and the last letter of the second word and you’re there!)

“There have been times when I felt we were cursed,” says Anna, “but whenever things looked at their bleakest, we always seemed to turn a corner. It’s incredible. There’s something about this band – we create this big fat sound and audiences respond. I think of us as this small package with massive power...”

Uiscedwr are a folk band of sorts – with various award nominations and numerous headlining festival appearances to prove it – but this is folk in its widest possible sense and their explosive stage show and the mesmerising assortment of influences they draw on to throw into the mix will astound anyone still labouring under long-antiquated clichés and misapprehensions about folk’s relevance to the modern world. Exhaustingly energetic and thrillingly open-minded, they draw on classical, rock, world, jazz and any other damn musical force that takes their fancy to assume their proud position at the vanguard of young artists tearing apart hoary old folk images. Leading that charge while retaining the respect, admiration and affection of folk’s traditional base is an achievement few ever successfully deliver, itself a measure of Uiscedwr’s unique strength and status.

The heartbeat of the band remains, as ever, the intuitive partnership between Anna, who first started playing violin in Newtown, Powys at the age of six, and Cormac Byrne, one of Ireland’s greatest bodhran virtuosos, who provides such a range of rhythmic textures, that the term ‘percussionist’ somehow seems hopelessly inadequate. They met when both were music students at Manchester in 2002 and knew instantly they’d build a band together. Frustrated by the constraints of classical music and inspired by the creative torrent that enveloped them whenever she and Cormac sat down to play tunes, Anna quit her classical music studies to mastermind their meteoric rise as one of the most exciting young bands in the country. They called themselves Uiscedwr (it means ‘water’ in both Welsh and Irish) and almost the first thing they did was win the 2002 BBC Young Folk Award. With guitarist Ben Hellings also on board, they followed it with an acclaimed debut album called Everywhere, formed their own label Yukka, starred on an fRoots magazine cover feature, headlined various festivals and built up an avid live following. What could possibly go wrong? As it happens, plenty...



In 2005, Anna was diagnosed with the rare auto-immune disease Aplastic Anaemia, triggering an horrific period of constant blood transfusions, specialist consultations and endless indignities, none of which made her better and there were times, she admits quietly, when she all but abandoned hope of ever recovering.

It resulted, at the end of 2006, in her agonising decision to undergo – against her consultant’s advice - a dangerous bone marrow transplant. It was successful, but there were still mountains to climb and many more unpleasant and debilitating treatments to counter the after-effects, but with remarkable resilience and

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fortified by the unswerving support of Cormac – who left Seth Lakeman’s band to be by her side and pledge his commitment to Uiscedwr - Anna gradually hauled herself back to full health. “I’m actually only two and a half years old because I’ve swapped my DNA,” she laughs, “I’m still a baby.”

Incredibly, even in the darkest days they’d kept Uiscedwr alive, releasing a second album Circle and playing gigs whenever Anna was strong enough, with Kevin Dempsey replacing Ben Hellings on guitar. When Dempsey also left they recruited James Hickman – specialist subject: bluegrass - to play guitar and experimented further with their sound, forming the fiery Uiscedwr Big Band to play at Celtic Connections festival, adding bass, trumpet and accordion to expand the Uiscedwr experience.

The accordion was provided by folk legend Karen Tweed who was also prevailed on to stay and add her dazzling skills to Fish Cat Door, bringing a new dimension to uplifting Esslemont/Byrne tunes like Sunshine and The Dirty Nine Steps. Co-produced in Derbyshire by the experienced Andy Bell, whose CV includes stints with Seasick Steve, K.T.Tunstall and The Darkness, Fish Cat Door is a joyous record which has a palpable sense of release after all the stresses and frustrations (even if a deranged landlady did chase them out of the rented holiday barn they’d converted into a makeshift recording studio to make it). “It was great to get Karen as a guest on the album, to have another tune player, especially one as good as her. It was a lot of fun playing with her.”

For the first time the album also features Anna and Cormac playing a duo track E.S.P. “*Cormac and I are so instinctive and know each other so well we push one another and we like being challenged and seeing how far we can take it.*”

One track inevitably attracting interest is Prescription Junkie, a song which Anna describes as “*me having a whinge*” about her illness and the daily trials of having to pop pills all day to stay alive. It did make her mother cry, but despite its dark and heavy subject matter, the track itself is bouncy and fun. “*It is a bit bizarre,*” says Anna. “*We have some heavy topics on the album but the music is light.*”

Another comic bitter song Tip Tap Baby is Anna’s revenge on an egotistical Irish dancer. They also play a beautiful version of Jim Malcolm’s provocative ecology anthem Neptune, one of Anna’s favourite songs she first heard played by one of Karen Tweed’s old bands The Poozies.

Anna, who recorded the string parts on New Model Army’s last album, still undergoes regular hospital checks but, with the benefit of some pioneering photopheresis treatment, she feels reborn, both medically and musically. Let there be no mistake – Uiscedwr are back and in their classic trio format they mean business.

“*Now I’m better, I’m like a loony on stage,*” says Anna. “*Over the last year I’ve come to terms with what has happened, it’s only recently I went whoooo I was REALLY sick. Day to day life is a big deal when you’ve been living on a knife edge for so long. It’s just so great to be able to get on stage with Uiscedwr and play our music again.*”

Oh and in case you’re wondering, that IS Anna playing on a TV commercial for John West tuna...



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