



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## *News Release*

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### **Lost song of hero's demise finds a voice after centuries unsung**

An ancient Gaelic ballad about the tragic death of a legendary hero is to be sung for the first time in two hundred years.

The tale of the mighty Connlaoch – the son of Scottish warrior princess Aoife and Irish hero Cú Chulainn – will be reprised at a festival event in Edinburgh on Saturday (20 October).

The ballad's lyrics, which chronicle his fate at the hands of his father, had been preserved by folklore collectors from the 18th and 19th centuries, but the music had been lost.

Experts from the University of Edinburgh and the University of the Highlands and Islands worked with a renowned Gaelic singer and a storyteller to create a performance in keeping with how it was originally heard.

The lost tune for the ballad was recreated by singer Margaret Stewart, based on her deep knowledge of Gaelic song, and the spoken word story was pieced together from Gaelic tales from as early as the ninth century.

*Singing the Story: The Death of Connlaoch*, which uses spoken word and song to recount the tale, will make its premiere at the Scottish International Storytelling Festival.

It will be performed in Gaelic by Ms Stewart and musician and storyteller Pàdruig Morrison, with a live English translation during the storytelling and English subtitles during the ballad.

Ms Stewart, from Upper Coll in the Isle of Lewis, is one of Scotland's foremost traditional Gaelic singers and an authority on traditional Gaelic song.

Mr Morrison, from the island of Grimsay, North Uist, is a musician and composer from a long line of Gaelic storytellers and tradition bearers.

The pair worked with Abigail Burnyeat from Celtic and Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh and Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart from Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, University of the Highlands and Islands. Together, they found a way to honour both the medieval narratives and the living tradition of oral Gaelic storytelling.

Ms Burnyeat said: "These tales are to Scotland and Ireland what King Arthur is to England. From chiefs' halls to ceilidh houses, heroic ballads and their stories have been at the heart of Gaelic culture for centuries. They form one of the cultural and artistic high points of Gaelic

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tradition. It has been a hugely satisfying challenge to bring this tale and ballad back to life for a modern audience.”

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