



Media release

Thursday 15 January 2026

World Party: Celtic Connections lights up winter as global festival begins

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Glasgow bursts into life today welcoming the world to the biggest traditional winter music festival on the planet - as **Celtic Connections** kicks off 18 days of music, culture and celebration.

Delivered by Glasgow Life, in partnership with **Innis & Gunn**, the 33rd edition of the festival brings together a huge international programme spanning global roots, contemporary folk and orchestral collaboration.

It comes as figures reveal that Celtic Connections was worth an estimated £6million to the Scottish economy last year, supporting 207 jobs. It means for every £1 spent on hosting the event, it generated £2.26 in return.

Glasgow enjoyed the lion's share to the tune of £4.9m of generated income, according to economic impact figures, with 169 of those jobs kept in the city for the duration of the event - in spite of additional challenges posed by last January's Storm Éowyn.

Today also sees a stellar cast unveiled for a special event - **True & Bold: A Night for Dick Gaughan** - celebrating and honouring the life, work and impact of one of Scotland's most influential folk singer-songwriters.

Sunday night's tribute, hosted by **Stewart Lee** and **Mike Harding**, will see **Karine Polwart, Ricky Ross and Lorraine MacIntosh, Billy Bragg, Kris Drever, Paul McKenna, Siobhan Miller, Karen Matheson, Martin and Eliza Carthy, Michael McGoldrick, Martin Simpson, Tommy Sands, Karan Casey, Brian McNeil, Seamie O'Dowd and Lisa O'Neil** take part in the-one off event at Glasgow's Royal Concert Hall.

Tonight, **World Connections** - the festival's showpiece opening concert at Glasgow Royal Concert Hall - will bring together Scottish and international artists from across the programme to perform new and reimagined work for the event's curtain raiser.

It includes Palestinian singer-songwriter **Amal Kaawash**, Mali's **Rokia Koné**, Canadian multi-award winner **Rose Cousins**, Gambian multi-instrumentalist **Sona Jobarteh** and Scots folk favourites **RURA**. Also featuring are UK guitarist **Justin Williams** with Moroccan Gnawa gimbri player **Mohamed Erebbaa**, Rajasthan's **SAZ** trio and the Aga Khan Award recipient, **Asin Khan**.

The performances usher in an important year of international events in the city, including the Commonwealth Games and its sport and culture festival, to ensure the gaze of the globe falling on Scotland.

Legendary **Buena Vista All Stars** mark three decades since the formation of the Buena Vista Social Club, alongside performances from **Lucinda Williams**, **Dylan LeBlanc** and Mexican drummer **Antonio Sánchez**. Americana and roots music feature strongly too, with artists including **Watchhouse** and **Grant-Lee Phillips** appearing at close quarters, in intimate shows.

Other highlights include a show by country and Americana royalty **Emmylou Harris** as part of her farewell tour, Scots trad rockers **Skerryvore**, and the record-breaking adventurers **The Maclean Brothers**, whose Pacific Ocean crossing is reimagined through story and live music.

Orchestral gems include the world premiere of Arabic Symphony by the **BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra** and Glasgow born **The Ayoub Sisters**, while Scots poet **Len Pennie** collaborates with composer **Paul Leonard-Morgan** on a new work blending spoken word, strings and electronics.

Julie Fowlis also joins forces with the **Scottish Chamber Orchestra** in a performance exploring the relationship between Gaelic song, poetry and orchestral writing, after it was rescheduled because of Storm Éowyn last year.

Roaming Roots Revue: Icons Vol. 2, features curated artists including **Guy Garvey**, **C Duncan** and **Amythyst Kiah**, led by **Roddy Hart & The Lonesome Fire** with a 60-piece orchestra from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Late-night Festival Club performances promise unique, one-off shows, including a return to the Glasgow Art School, while Gaelic song and music are represented across multiple events.

The **Danny Kyle Open Stage** returns as one of the UK's most important platforms for emerging artists, alongside workshops, sessions and participatory events that place community and discovery at the heart of the festival. **Transatlantic Sessions** also returns, continuing its role as one of the festival's most recognisable collaborative formats.

Celtic Connections 2026 kicked-off this morning with an opening photocall at the Old Fruitmarket when the festival's **Creative Director Donald Shaw** joined Scottish smallpipes player **Fionnlagh Mac A'Phiocair**, harp and fiddle duo **Rebecca Hill and Charlie Stewart** and award-winning young trad outfit **Dàna**.

Celtic Connections Creative Director Donald Shaw said: "Celtic Connections is about much more than the joy of putting concerts on stages and lighting up winter in Glasgow. It is about creating moments that can only happen here."

“Bringing people together in the middle of January, sharing music from different cultures and traditions alongside Scotland’s own, is what makes the festival so special, whether that involves emerging talent or established names.

“That sense of warmth, discovery and connection comes from the artists, audiences, supporters and partners who believe in it year after year, and we are incredibly thankful to everyone who helps make it possible.”

Hailing the festival a “joyous celebration”, **Bailie Annette Christie, Chair of Glasgow Life, said:** “Excitement and anticipation for the start of Celtic Connections 2026 has really been palpable in the run-up to the festival, not only here in Glasgow but throughout the international music community. We can’t wait to welcome musicians and audiences from near and far for this year’s joyous celebration of music from across the globe, and the cultural connections the festival inspires and enables.

“The exceptional entertainment on offer across its 18 day-run, and fabulous line-up of established and emerging talent spanning a diverse range of genres, makes Celtic Connections truly unmissable. We are immensely proud this renowned annual cultural highlight is once again shining the spotlight on our vibrant UNESCO City of Music and Glasgow’s rich cultural scene.”

Culture Secretary Angus Robertson said: “Celtic Connections is a firm fixture on the events calendar and is a great way to celebrate musical and cultural collaboration – especially in the dark winter months.

“Supported by increases in multi-year funding from Creative Scotland and through our Festival EXPO Fund, the Scottish Government is proud to support an outstanding national and international cultural event. I am certain this year’s programme will be a great success.”

Alan Morrison, Head of Music at Creative Scotland, added: “In 2026, Celtic Connections makes its strongest statement yet about how music can open eyes, ears and minds to the wonders of other cultures. Scotland’s traditional music will forever be the beating heart of this festival but, in the same year that Glasgow hosts the Commonwealth Games, a spirit of internationalism shines ever more clearly through this stellar programme.”

While Innis & Gunn Master Brewer and Founder, Dougal Sharp, said: “Supporting Celtic Connections marks the start of Innis & Gunn’s year of cultural celebrations, and it’s hard to think of a better way to begin. The festival sits at the backbone of Scottish cultural life, and continuing our support for a second year reflects its importance to communities, venues and artists alike. Like Innis & Gunn, it is rooted in Scotland but shared with the world, and proudly Brewed by Scotland.

“At a time when the hospitality industry is struggling in Scotland and beyond, Celtic Connections provides a vital space to celebrate culture and bring people together. Each year, it plays an important role during the darkest, coldest months, supporting venues and offering a much-needed boost to the hospitality economy at a point of real pressure. So get out of the house, support live music, and spend time in venues that make nights like this possible.”

The festival's footprint expands across the city, with the recently reopened Citizens Theatre hosting events for the first time, the Emirates Arena returning following a sold-out debut year, and City Halls, Old Fruitmarket, Barrowland Ballroom, King Tut's Wah Wah Hut, Pavilion Theatre, Òran Mòr, Saint Luke's, Tramway and SWG3 all playing host.

Emmylou Harris' all-seated arena show at the Emirates Arena is on course for an early 3500 sell-out and will be one of the largest concerts in the festival's history, while **Skerryvore** will raise the roof at the same venue to crowds of more than 6,500.

Stories of endurance and imagination take centre stage at the Old Fruitmarket, where **Jamie, Ewan and Lachlan Maclean**, the first trio to row the Pacific Ocean unsupported, combine tales from their record-breaking journey with their love of live traditional music.

A new partnership with the Edinburgh International Book Festival launches with the world premiere of *The Golden Road*, inspired by **William Dalrymple**'s award-winning book, debuting in Glasgow before evolving for a landmark performance in Edinburgh in summer 2026.

Other artists include **HEISK, TRIP, Laura Jane Wilkie, The Tumbling Souls, Scottish Fish, Tessa Rose Jackson, Ciaran Ryan, Pumpegris, Mon Rovâ** and more.

An estimated 110,000 people are expected to attend more than 300 events across 25 venues, featuring over 1,200 performers from Europe, the Americas and Africa.

Young people can also join the Under 26 Community via the festival website, with new registrations entered into the Golden Ticket draw.

Celtic Connections runs until Sunday 1 February 2026. View the full programme and purchase tickets at celticconnections.com.

Ends

For further information, images, or to request an interview:

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Media accreditation is open now and [you can apply here](#).

Follow the conversation at @ccfest.

Notes to Editors

Celtic Connections began in 1994, when it offered 66 events at one venue. It has since grown more diverse, adventurous and experimental each year, offering hundreds of events in locations across Glasgow.

Renowned internationally, and Europe's biggest winter music festival, it has an unwavering ambition to showcase the very best traditional folk, roots, Americana, jazz, soul, indie and world music and nurture unique local, national and international cultural partnerships.

Celtic Connections is delivered with funding from Glasgow City Council through Glasgow Life. Creative Scotland and The Scottish Government Festivals Expo Fund continue to provide invaluable support to Celtic Connections.

Glasgow Life is a charity working for the benefit of the people of Glasgow. We believe everyone deserves a great Glasgow life and we find innovative ways to make this happen across the city's diverse communities.

Our programmes, experiences and events range from grassroots community activities to large-scale cultural, artistic and sporting events which present Glasgow on an international stage.

Our work is designed to promote inclusion, happiness and health, as well as support the city's visitor economy, in order to enhance Glasgow's mental, physical and economic wellbeing.

For more information, see www.glasgowlife.org.uk.

Creative Scotland is the public body that supports culture and creativity across all parts of Scotland, distributing funding provided by the Scottish Government and The National Lottery. Further information at creativescotland.com. Follow Creative Scotland on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#).

Innis & Gunn, since its establishment in 2003, has been determined to do things differently in the world of brewing. Starting with innovative oak cask maturation for award-winning flagship beer 'The Original', Innis & Gunn has gone on to create a whole line up of boundary-pushing beers, including distinctive, limited edition and rare beers, and the Innis & Gunn Lager Beer which recently won gold at the World Beer Awards for the second year running.

Innis & Gunn is now one of the UK's most successful beer brewers. Still pioneering, still innovating and still doing things differently, to excite and intrigue beer lovers all over the world. Innis & Gunn is the official beer sponsor of many iconic events including The Edinburgh Fringe, Royal Highland Show, Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, Celtic Connections and Belladrum Music Festival.

Follow Innis & Gunn on Instagram: @innisandgunn and www.innisandgunn.com