

Reviews for Mairi Campbell: Auld Lang Syne

<https://www.scottishfield.co.uk/culture/performing-arts/musician-mairi-is-breathing-new-life-into-auld-lang-syne/>

“Delivered with her trademark wit, gentle charm and unparalleled musical ability the sequel to five star show Pulse is an unforgettable hour in the company of one of Scotland’s leading artists.”

<https://theweereview.com/review/mairi-campbell-auld-lang-syne/>

Mairi Campbell: Auld Lang Syne is an hour of soothing calm amidst the chaotic bustle of the Fringe and a plea to make time for the things and the people that matter to you the most.

Under the auspices of exploring the enduring popularity of the traditional folk song, musician and performer [Mairi Campbell](#) reflects on her own times past and the people that matter to her. We hear about Dave, her musical collaborator and eventually partner in life. We also hear about Catriona, her childhood friend and co-conspirator in her early more and less musical efforts. Mairi also talks about her brilliantly down-to-earth community choir.

These recollections allow her to weave a tale of her burgeoning musical career, rooted in folk music, based around her viola and singing, but skipping across musical boundaries. The musician takes in jazz, Celtic music and contemporary songs written by partner Dave. She tells a spectacular, very funny anecdote about being invited to sing Auld Lang Syne at a reception at the [Kennedy Centre](#) in Washington DC to honour Sean Connery and midway through the song, forgetting the words.

But strewn throughout these recollections is a beautiful mix of song, traditional fiddle and intricate animations from [Claire Lamond](#). Campbell has a beautiful, wistful voice that seems to drip with longing for these times now past. This voice feels equally at home within the jaunty jazzy serenade to the relationship to her partner, penned by Dave Gray in the early days of their romance. She’s an accomplished musician with excellent vocal control and a voice full of warmth.

This carefully constructed show is a brush with times past and a handy translation of the Burns’ words you’ve never quite understood. It is also a tribute to the serendipitous circumstance that turned this traditional folk song into an internationally recognised symbol of the end of one year and the start of the next and a reflection on the importance of “takking a cup o’ kindness

yet". And in this disconnected world amidst occasional attempts to foster community spirit, you can't help thinking that's a pretty powerful message.
Claire Wood

<http://www.alledinburghtheatre.com/mairi-campbell-auld-lang-syne/>

Scottish Storytelling Centre (Venue30): *Sat 4– Mon 27 Aug 2018*

Review by Hugh Simpson

Tuneful and beautifully open-hearted, *Mairi Campbell: Auld Lang Syne* deserves the widest possible audience.

This is a follow-up to singer and violist Campbell's first solo theatre show, the acclaimed *Pulse*.

Campbell has a long connection to the song that Burns may have borrowed, tweaked or just pretended to have appropriated. Her version with The Cast helped to popularise the earlier tune that Burns's publishers apparently did not like, popping up most incongruously in the movie version of *Sex And The City*. The choice of title is a clever one, as **it will have currency far beyond the folk world and far outwith Scotland**. There is some information about the song's history and meaning (notably useful if you have ever wondered what 'a right gude willie waught' can possibly be) but, much in the style of the earlier show, this is a much more personal exploration.

It takes up the story of Campbell's musical journey where *Pulse* left off, as well as including musings on her earlier and later life, on music, friendship and love. You certainly do not need to have seen that other production to appreciate this, however.

Campbell and co-creator and director Kath Burlinson have once again created a **wonderfully crafted show, with** Dave Gray's atmospheric music and Claire Lamond's delicate animation adding greatly to the effect. There is even an opportunity to join in (in a thoroughly non-threatening, gently inclusive way). *Auld Lang Syne* does not quite match up to *Pulse* in terms of that production's tremendous coherence. This time round, it seems to be more of a collection of elements grouped around a central theme, rather than a story that demands to be told in exactly this way.

hard-won emotional moments

However, **this is compensated for by Campbell having grown even more in stature as a performer**. Her command of the stage and rapport with the audience are first rate, and there are hard-won emotional moments.

The late Ornette Coleman was supposedly wont to differentiate between those performers who just had an instrument and those who had a Music. **Music simply flows out of Campbell** here, whether in a more traditional setting, performing newer material (*Green So Gentle* is a song that demands a much

wider hearing), veering towards free-form viola with an electronic backing or – bizarrely – covering 10cc.

This is an **affecting and involving production** that enhances Campbell's growing reputation as a maker of music theatre shows and deserves to be every bit as long-running and garlanded as *Pulse* was.

<http://musicaltheatrereview.com/mairi-campbell-auld-lang-syne-edinburgh-festival-fringe-scottish-storytelling-centre/>

Edinburgh Fringe 2018

Music Theatre Review – Fiona Orr

Star rating: **four stars** ★ ★ ★ ★ ☆

The award-winning Scottish Storytelling Centre on the Royal Mile is the perfect venue to showcase such an inherently Scottish piece of work.

Auld Lang Syne, of course, known the world over – or is it? Mairi Campbell calls upon her impersonation skills to replay the scene from **When Harry Met Sally** (no – not *that* one!) where they try and interpret the words to 'Auld Lang Syne', concluding that it's about old friends. Brecht aspired to making the familiar seem unfamiliar: "Verfremdungseffekt."

This is wonderfully achieved in this show – making such a familiar song an object viewed through many different cultures, sending out ripples of Scottish identity across the world and encouraging the audience to see, hear and feel 'Auld Lang Syne' differently.

Campbell is an assured performer: she inhabits the space with confidence and charm, effortlessly engaging her audience. The timeline jumps around between her earliest childhood memories to the present and all points in between.

Her relationship with her slightly older sister, Catriona, is paralleled with her relationship with 'Auld Lang Syne'. Part of life since memory began, every Scot knows the strains of 'Auld Lang Syne' from Hogmanay to the end of practically every social gathering. It's part of the soundscape of life.

Just as the sisters grew apart, Campbell manifests emotions bordering on anger with 'Auld Lang Syne' and its 'shortbread tin' Scottishness. Finding the older tune for the song awakens something different in her emotional response to the work. Exploring the very essence of connection between the artist and the material, **Campbell's honesty and clarity offers a true glimpse of how her perception of the song alters, matures and becomes ultimately satisfying.**

The show is laced with wonderful soundscapes of song, blending recorded and live performances to articulate what it means to carry the weight of tradition alongside the lighter touch of innovative creativity. Special mention to

Dave Gray and David Francis in contributing to the **spine-tingling score** and to Kath Burlinson's light directorial touch allowing the piece to soar.

As her relationship with her sister is resolved, so too is her relationship to 'Auld Lang Syne'. She's performed for presidents and even brought her rendition of 'Auld Lang Syne' into the film version of **Sex and the City**. For the finale, we as the audience join Campbell and each other in a rendition of 'Auld Lang Syne' and leave knowing something so familiar just that little bit better. **Exquisitely satisfying.**

The National

<http://www.thenational.scot/culture/16598604.fringe-review-mairi-campbell-auld-lang-syne/>

Nadine McBay

AN extraordinary noise is coming from Mairi Campbell's mouth. Beautifully lilting, the tones glisten like water, a startling re-enactment of how the musician's aunties would sing psalms at the dining table when she was growing up. At Hogmanay the family home would host parties: teenagers up in the attic, sleeping infants in the bedrooms, grown-ups and dancing on the ground floor.

Music was everywhere, including, of course, Auld Lang Syne, Burns's classic long enjoyed around the world from Japan – where it signals the end of a day's trade in department stores, to the Netherlands where it's a popular football chant, to the US where it's brought in the new year for almost 90 years. It was in New York after the Wall Street crash that Italian-Canadian bandleader Guy Lombardo brought the song to a wider audience through radio and TV broadcasts – a tradition carried to this day, when the version by his band The Royal Canadians still plays as the first song of the new year in Times Square.

But as Campbell, pictured, recounts Billy Crystal relating in NYC-set romcom classic *When Harry Met Sally*, the world's most weel-kent songs is also the least understood. Many – even many Scots – are unsure how to sing it properly and remain understandably flummoxed as to what on earth a "right gude-willie-waught" is.

All is revealed in this **enriching, heart-warming show**, the follow-up to *Pulse*, Campbell's acclaimed theatrical debut from 2016.

Co-devised and directed by Kath Burlinson, the show uses the Burns song as the pivot around which Campbell weaves stories from her personal and professional life. **Blending live music, animation and movement, the viola-player is an elegant storyteller with natural audience rapport, and there's a delightful honesty which works well with Burns's story of friendship and shared humanity.**

The Edinburgh Reporter

<https://www.theedinburghreporter.co.uk/2018/08/edinburgh-festival-fringe-2018-review-mairi-campbell-auld-lang-syne/>

At the Scottish Storytelling Centre, Mairi Campbell riffs wildly on a wry conceit – deconstruct the iconic Rabbin Burns ballad ravidly ‘sung’ but once a year across the Western Hemisphere (more pan-contextually, inter-continental as we later learn) – albeit with a deliciously disarming, confessional tweak.
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Given the majority of its New Year’s Eve participants are barely coherent in their own language or idiom having gargled gratuitously amongst the scented vats of inebriation, let alone 18th century Scots, it could be big ask. Interestingly, a Google search has her version of the genre listed as *New Age*. She goes more for the Transition vibe – and she shares it well.

Campbell’s irresistible heart-harped love-letter to a song and her life is both melodic and a tribally primal skein of disparate threads – it rocks with the ages past and present, salves with cathartic balm.

Daisy-chain and buttercup golden kissed chins, the plaintive buzzard’s lonely mew recall her dizzy times with lover/partner David as they rediscover the haunting origins of the elusive caterpillar to butterfly folk melody. There is a canny, teasing progression with the synthesis of both ochre-beat sounds and cryptic, possibly Pictic cypher back-screen projections.

The elemental insistence is naughtily juxtaposed with a certain pig-audio rectal dynamism where Mairi and her wayward sprite-sister, Katrina, tape-recorded farts before being summoned to psalms and worship downstairs before their Great Aunts brought on down from Skye. As with all trump-base comic vignettes, it’s the way you smell’em.

There is a sing-along listen to your body-parts choral seminar – it is all about eschewing the consonants and allowing the essential viscera to resonate – and it works: that gut-feeling, to me – to you – sort of thing. The Led Zeppelin album cypher motif projections reach symmetry, the hour-glass we worry might be the time passing swiftly for the absent Katrina, might become an ouroboros, the eternal self-consuming, regenerative snake (the Garden Of Eden serpent riff being partisan fake-news if ever there was.)

From Mari Campbell’s love’s entangle roots of lyricism and amorphous melodies a tapestry of fragile and adamantine humanity blossoms. ‘They are not just words upon a page/But sounds that move in mysterious ways.’ Sean Connery and Sex In The City get a name-check as well. It is all earth-shatteringly down to a broch-solid ancestral peat-beat.

John Kennedy

Fringe Review;
<http://fringereview.co.uk/review/edinburgh-fringe/2018/mairi-campbell-auld-lang-syne/>

Tim Wilcock

Recommended

The sign at the entrance of the Scottish Storytelling Centre's sumptuous Netherbow Theatre invites you to switch off from the outside world (as well as switching off your outside world devices) and enter instead a world where stories stand tall. Very appropriate for this solo piece from Mairi Campbell based around the Burns song *Auld Lang Syne*.

Music has the capacity to break down barriers between people. And *Auld Lang Syne* is a song that everybody thinks they know, yet very few really do. What it actually means remains the subject of much academic (and pub) debate. How to sing it inspires even more passion – and not just from Scots. The version most commonly regaled (or wailed, depending on the singer's intake of alcohol) is to the words Burns penned but it is thought that he nicked a lot of the lyrics from other poets, including Allan Ramsay and Matthew Fitt. And these days we use a quite different tune to that which originally prevailed, with many arguing that the latter is actually more reflective of the context in which the song is normally sung – the closing of a social gathering.

Campbell weaves a gently amusing tale of how *Auld Lang Syne* has been almost ever-present in her life as a writer, composer, singer, viola player and dancer. Childhood reminiscences tumble forth, interspersed with musical sidebars and some interesting background on why we sing the eponymous song the way we do.

There is the (almost obligatory) chance for the audience to test their lungs and singing capabilities mid-way through as Campbell explores how just getting uniformity of pronunciation can be a challenge for anyone attempting to get a choir to deliver this. And there is amusement at her embarrassing memory lapse when delivering the song as part of a ceremony to honour the late Sean Connery. In front of the then US President, Bill Clinton. But that happens sometimes to singers, especially when singing a song you've sung hundreds of times. The mind goes blank, the lyrics vanish and you either look like a goldfish or make something up. She, wisely, chose the latter course. It's a gentle, entertaining and surprisingly informative hour that left me knowing a lot more about a song I thought I already knew quite a bit about. And go anywhere in the world and you'll find someone who can sing this along with you, be it at a football match in the Netherlands or a shop at closing time in Japan. I last heard it sung a few weeks ago in the depths of the Dordogne, in a wee village called Miers. Pausing for breath whilst on cycling on a steamingly hot day, I heard the tune floating out of a church where a wedding was coming to its exciting conclusion and, yes, I joined in with the singing.

Judging by the generous and sustained applause from the appreciative audience, this is a show to be recommended for anyone with an interest in Scots' music and for lovers of tales well told.

Published August 6, 2018 by [Tim Wilcock](#)

The Edinburgh Guide.

Eric Roche

"It actually translates from Scots to 'old times past,'" says Mairi Campbell on *Auld Lang Syne*, the beloved song that conjures images of fireworks and hand-holding at the close of a ceilidh. The Scottish musician, with direction and co-devising by Kath Burlinson, has created a stirring production here at the Scottish Storytelling Centre, one that tells the journey of this song played on New Years Eves around the world and the personal and cultural connections it has to Mairi and to Scotland.

There are, certainly, many skilled musicians here in August, but virtuosic Mairi Campbell transcends the role of performer and encompasses music itself; it just pours out of her like a love letter to the mysticism of traditional music via a quick vibrato and strong intonation. Her voice is like no other. To audience delight, she performs her magical rendition of *Auld Lang Syne*, featured in a memorable scene in the movie *Sex and the City*, and it brings more than a few tears to the eye.

Mairi is an incredible storyteller. With the way she paints a picture of the Scottish countryside or describes a childhood memory of a cosy family party on the night of Hogmanay you can just imagine the settings all around her. Her own music, collaborations with David Gray and David Francis, mixed with the Burns favourite, are woven throughout the piece, and they are beautiful. There's even a gentle moment where Mairi becomes choir director to the audience; it's charming and it brings the performance even closer to your heart. So likeable, Mairi is unexpectedly quite funny and has a command of the energy in the room.

Auld Lang Syne is an enthralling tribute to old friends and old tunes, to "time, distance and traditions," as dynamic Campbell would say. Through stories, voice and viola, this is a chance to see and hear two Scottish treasures: the steadfast, globally-beloved *Auld Lang Syne* and Mairi Campbell herself. Even in the clamour of a thousand flyers and thousands of productions, this is one Fringe show that I have to see again before the 2018 Festival closes.