

have all made use of the Ùlpan lessons. Lews Castle College has also been involved in delivering Gaelic classes to Modern Apprentices.

And these advantages of studying Gaelic at Lews Castle College aren't confined to the classroom. The recently launched student-led Gaelic Society is growing in popularity,

and the success rate of Gaelic graduates is continuously high, with students moving into fields such as teaching, media, development, and tourism.

"Our graduates have a very high employability rate; over 90 per cent of our graduates are in employment within the Gaelic field," explains Angela, noting the concentration of Gaelic

Medium units in island schools, as well as the presence of Gaelic media enterprises such as MG Alba and Mac TV. When you combine these strengths in education, community, and employability, "Lews Castle College would seem an obvious choice for someone who's interested in studying Gaelic."



# Musical tradition in a thoroughly modern way

by | Katie Macleod

When it comes to "doing something different" at university, as the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) prospectus advertises, you'd be hard-pressed to find somewhere more unique to study traditional music than at the Lews Castle College campus on the Isle of Benbecula.

The highly respected HNC Music course is based in Benbecula, and it's from here that the networked BA Applied Music degree –

which can be studied remotely from any UHI campus – is run.

Students can also enrol in the MA in Music and the Environment, which helps musicians learn how to work in creative, entrepreneurial, and environmentally responsible ways within their communities.

"The traditional music courses based in Uist are now in their 18th year," explains Programme Leader Anna-Wendy Stevenson. "We are very

proud of all the hundreds of students that have gone through our courses, and many of our students have gone on to pursue careers in traditional music, performance, teaching, recording, and writing."

To celebrate their ongoing success, 2018 sees the release of *Nead nan Ceòladair*, 'The Musician's Nest,' a double CD featuring performances from past and present traditional music students at Benbecula. The record was



launched with a sold-out show at Glasgow's Royal Concert Hall in January, as part of Celtic Connections. "It was great, many of the students who had been through the course all came together and contributed to the performance," says Ann-Wendy.

The recording was part of a larger project spearheaded by Anna-Wendy called 'Study Destination Uist,' which in addition to the CD featured a Gaelic song app, and a series of eight films promoting Uist as a destination of study. The app, which students produced the music for, was created with funding from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Bòrd na Gàidhlig to be used by Education Scotland for Early Years education across the country. "We had Linda Macleod, the Gaelic singer, working with us; young children from the community; our current students; and

an alumnus, Matthew Watson, who came to do the recording and engineering – so it was a really nice holistic project."

There's a world-renowned standard of music teaching in Uist, but there's also an entire community and network of musicians – both island-based and otherwise – to learn from. "There are a lot of grassroots things going on," says Anna-Wendy, referencing just a few of the events currently taking place outside the school itself. From performing at music nights at Taigh Chearsabhair and teaching at Ceòlas summer school, to organising monthly ceilidhs at Kildonan Museum, students become not just part of the college, which has a strong alumni network including members of bands like the Red Hot Chilli Pipers and Tide Lines, but part of the Uist community too.

The new video series, produced by Trixpix, and created with support from Stòras Uibhist, clearly illustrates this strong sense of community. Eight short films feature students from as near as Lewis and as far afield as Vermont talking about their student experiences, each set against a backdrop of cèilidhs and music lessons, not to mention vistas of beaches, machair, and mountains.

"It's something different, to be sure, coming out to Uist," says Anna-Wendy. "It's the inspiration of the place, and the inspiration of the people, and the community, and being in a Gaelic setting. There's a legacy here, our students get to know other students who have been on the course in the past, so it's really building that 'musician's nest.' It's something special, to feel connected to that."

