

Professorial Address: Margaret Bennett

‘From the Heart of Tradition to Centre Stage’

Thank you for coming to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland to share this honour with me. Having spent my career as a folklorist, this is an opportunity for me to pay tribute to my teachers, mentors, colleagues, students (past and present), family, friends, and to all the folk who have shared traditions with me that stretch across oceans and centuries. From all walks of life, and from several countries, they have all added to my understanding and interpretation of traditional songs and music, and especially to my understanding of Scotland in the context of world culture.

For this evening’s event, my sincere thanks go to colleagues at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, to former students (now teachers) Alistair Paterson and Ainsley Hamill, and to all students taking part. Many thanks to friends from the Aberfeldy and District Gaelic Choir who have taken part in student projects in the past and are supporting us this evening.

It has been, and is, a huge honour to share so much with so many. Heart-felt thanks to you all!

Professor Margaret Bennett

Arron Alderson
Iona Grace Fyfe
Lucie Caroline Hendry
Mischa MacPherson
Calum McIlroy
Cameron Nixon
Eilidh Young

Ainsley Hamill*
Alastair Iain Paterson*

Friends from the Aberfeldy and District Gaelic Choir

**RCS graduate*

Monday 24 April 2017
Ledger Recital Room
6.00pm

Professor Margaret Bennett

Margaret Bennett was brought up in a family of tradition bearers, Gaelic on her mother's side (from the Isle of Skye) and Lowland Scots on her father's. School years were spent in Skye, Lewis and the Shetland Isles. As a student in Glasgow in the mid-sixties, she met the now legendary Hamish Henderson, singer, poet, folklorist and political activist whose work influenced her career choice. In 1968, she enrolled in The Folklore Department of Memorial University of Newfoundland, studying with Professor Herbert Halpert whose work in folksong and theatre broke new ground in the 1930s. She returned to Scotland in 1976, with her son, Martyn, and later gained a PhD in Ethnology from The University of Edinburgh, where she lectured for fourteen years. Though widely regarded as 'Scotland's foremost folklorist', she is said to 'wear her scholarship lightly', attributing her knowledge of Scottish folklore, music and song to family and community as well as great teachers.

As a folklorist, Margaret has recorded and archived hundreds of songs and tunes, not only in Scotland but also in Canada, the USA, Australia, Ireland and Bulgaria. The recordings are important for their range and uniqueness, such as the last Gaelic psalm singers in Quebec, the voice of a St Kildan, and traditional singers and musicians whose repertoire may otherwise have vanished. Recent recordings include industrial workers from Scotland's coal-mines, mills, factories, and other vanishing trades as well as crofters and fishermen in the Outer Hebrides.

From 1996 to 2015 she was part-time lecturer in Folklore at the RSAMD and currently teaches Scots Song Performance at RCS. Margaret is a patron of the Traditional Music and Song Association, and has widely performed and taught at festivals including Mariposa Festival in Toronto, Celtic Colours in Cape Breton, Celtic Connections in Glasgow, the Library of Congress's 'Burns 250'. Awards include the Master Music Maker Award (North Carolina) The Celtic Women International Award (Canada), The Michaelis Ratcliffe Award for Folklore (UK); The Clio Award (Quebec) and Le Prix du Quebec (Quebec Office, London). She is also a prize-winning author, with 15 books to her credit and contributions to over 50 others. Scottish Arts critic Judy Moir wrote it is "rare to witness such a charismatic and fascinating raconteur." Her work includes a wide range of media research, with features on radio and TV documentaries as well as film, including John Berger's *Play Me Something* (Europa Prize at Barcelona, 1989) and *Blackbird* (2013). In 2010 she was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Music at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, and in 2012 appointed Honorary Professor of Antiquities and Folklore at the RSA (Edinburgh).

As a singer, she worked on several musical collaborations with her son, Martyn Bennett (1971-2005), including the ground-breaking album *Glen Lyon* which is featured in the soundscape of the National Theatre of Scotland's production, *Black Watch*. Currently based in Perthshire, she is a Trustee of Grace Notes Scotland, a Scottish Charity dedicated to handing on tradition. As the late Hamish Henderson wrote, "Margaret embodies the spirit of Scotland."