

# Strumming (and drumming) to a Hebridean Beat

**P**erhaps it is the island-er in Colin MacIntyre that motivates him to pursue such varied creative directions.

Having first experienced musical success in the 2000s, as Mull Historical Society, he received critical acclaim for his first novel in 2015. Now he is embarking on what may be the busiest summer of his life, with a new album, a memoir, and his first children's picture book - all out within a few weeks.

"I've had one of my most creative periods, and probably the biggest workload I've ever had," he says. "You never really know when your projects are going to reach completion - when you're going to let them go and reach an audience, but I am happy that it's coming together."

While success in one creative industry is a dream for many, Colin has leap-frogged effectively between two - his writing career is as serious as his music, which resulted in two top 40 albums. His first novel, *The Letters of Ivor Punch*,

## A children's picture book is the latest venture for Mull Historical Society's Colin MacIntyre

won the Edinburgh Festival first book award in 2015.

The adaptability might seem remarkable, until you consider that Colin comes from the Hebrides, where dual occupations are a fact of life,



and it's normal, and often necessary, to be crofter, coffin-maker, and postman (like one of his Ivor Punch characters) or even (like Colin's own grandfather Angus MacIntyre) a bank manager and a poet.

"Being an islander from the Hebrides means a lot to me,

and my creative work definitely taps into the landscape I come from," he says. "I've worked side-by-side on the album (*Wakelines*) and memoir (*the Boy in the Bubble*), and there is a thread that runs through both - about having dreams and hopefully making some of them become real."

Colin calls himself a 'creative', and when he explains his process - whether making music or literature - that umbrella term seems about right. "I'm always thinking 'how can I use this, how can I make a story out of it'" he says.

"I've never been a sculptor, but when you craft things, you start with an idea of what the shape's

going to be, and you chisel away a little each day. The outcome isn't always what you thought it would be, but somehow you bring it all together."

As father to two primary-aged children, children's songs and stories must have featured

prominently in Colin's recent cultural landscape, and - in a home where there are 'guitars lying around' - almost inevitably sparked a new vein of creativity.

His first children's picture book, *The HumDrum Drum* (illustrated by Catherine Thomann) was published by Oban-based Little Door Books in June. It's the story of an orchestra drum who isn't too sure about being bashed - until he learns the importance of togetherness, and keeping the beat.

"I remember waking up with the idea, and just grabbing a big piece of white cardboard that was headed for recycling, drawing a picture of a drum, and starting to story-board the idea. Things came together so clearly," says Colin.

"Then, I was en route to the Borders Book Festival for an event for my novel, and I happened to sit at a table with the team from Little Door Books and told them the idea. Now, a couple of years later, we're all heading back to the Borders Book Festival to launch the book that came out of that."

"I love the fact that this book



has an Oban connection, with Little Door Books being based so close to where I come from. You can reach out to the world from anywhere, but a strong regional identity is still precious."

Though he lives in London now, Colin has plans to head homewards soon for album and book-related events, with *From Stage to Page*, a words and music show at the first Tobermory Book Festival in October, set to be a highlight - and a first chance for locals to hear him play the new music, and read from his memoir. "It feels like a really good fit," he says. "Where I

come from means everything to me.

"There are days when I'm on the Tube, and a voice comes on to say that the Piccadilly Line is down again, and a part of me still expects it to be the Oban ferry announcer - I'm just waiting for him to repeat it all in Gaelic!"

- **Colin's books *The Humdrum Drum* (Little Door Books) and *Hometown Tales: Highland and Hebrides* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson) are out now. His new album *Wakelines* (Extra Mile Recordings), produced by Bernard Butler, is out in September.**