

INSIDE THE COBHERS WITH LUKE DANIELS

Luke Daniels talks to Seán Laffey about The Cobhers, a band that mixes traditional music with classic hits. Intrigued? Read on.



Luke is a BBC award-winning folk musician, a former Riverdance band member, and he has also performed with Cara Dillon and Dé Dannan. He has worked as a folk musician at the Scottish National Museum of Rural Life and as a tutor on the traditional music course at Royal Conservatoire Scotland in Glasgow. He has also tutored on the Meitheal residential course in Limerick.

The Cobhers are Luke Daniels (melodeon, guitar, cittern and vocals), Matt Tighe (fiddle), Eleanor Dunsdon (clarsach), Scott Turnbull (guitar) and Michael Biggins (piano). Guitarist Ed Boyd and fiddler Charlie Stuart also guest on a number of tracks on the album.

First question is about that name, *The Cobhers*. Luke laughs that it isn't pronounced "The Cobbers" and I joke we wouldn't want people thinking he'd formed an Australian bush band. Cobhers is pronounced as Gaeilge as *Covers*, and covers of well-known hits by the BeeGees, Stevie Wonder, and Dee Lite are interspersed throughout the band's own more traditional selections on their eponymous debut album, which will be available to hear and pre-order from the 1st of September.

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The opening track is Luke's arrangement of the classic BeeGees hit *Staying Alive*. Luke tells me how he melds popular music with traditional instruments and traditional tunes. "The pieces start by establishing the main melody or riff, (the part most familiar to listeners), which subsequently morphs into a newly composed trad tune (or tunes) that continue to follow the chord progressions of the song.

"Simply superimposing existing traditional tunes over pop songs was not my aim, creating novelty pieces, via a gimmick was not the intention. This is great music and in the course of creating this music I have taken a deep dive into tracks like *Groove Is In The Heart* and *Pick Up The Pieces*, learning a lot along the way about form and structure from the original arrangements." No surprise that three of

the covers come from the 1970s, an era of disco.

The idea for the Cobhers came about in 2019 when Luke gathered together a number of younger musicians from the Glasgow trad scene. "Glasgow has become a great place for traditional music, not only do you have new generations coming to study at Royal Conservatoire Scotland, there's a vibrant session scene in the city too, in which players exchange and develop new tunes and can form new bands with their peers. The Cobhers includes some of Luke's former students so he feels strongly about developing a platform for their music too.

Players from this band are also involved in a wider project (funded by Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland), which is collecting and sharing tunes from North Lanarkshire to create new learning materials for schools using digital animation. In the 19th century the region changed from a rural to an industrial economy, so animators are creating models of some of the local machinery from original plans stored in the archives at Summerlee Museum of National Industrial Life. Local schoolchildren are learning to play local traditional tunes via these animations. It adds an extra dimension of interest to the music and it's a great hook to get the children invested. There are 6 animations and six tunes to learn, so at the end of the teaching we can present a live performance at the museum with the children playing along."

Covid of course was a hiatus across the live music world. Luke says, "It gave me the space to do some renovation at home, and I took time off from playing the accordion, I played a lot of guitar during the lockdowns and I think the time away from the box was a way of re-charging my accordion batteries." Two tracks on the album are reflections on the lockdown: Luke's tune *Not In The Yeast* references the national yeast shortage amidst the home baking craze of 2020 and *Some Will Fall*, the sole song on the album is about those who we loved and lost during this time.

Is there a plan for the Cobhers? "We are looking to 2023. I hope we have created a live act and a sound with wider appeal, with a view to connecting to audiences and bringing new people to a love of traditional music."

From Sep 1st you can listen to pre-release tracks from the album at www.lukedanielsthecobhers.bandcamp.com/album/luke-daniels-the-cobhers

