

Dougie (Doogie) MacLean is one of the premiere singer/songwriters on the Scottish music scene today. His roots are in bands such as the Tannahill Weavers and Silly Wizard, but he has been performing on his own since 1981. His work includes eleven CDs including the most recent release, *Roif* (1997).

This interview was conducted following a concert on May 24 in Columbus, Ohio. Dougie was very well received, even with the failure of air-conditioning in the auditorium...

DM - I thought I was going to die up there at this one point, cause of the lights and the heat it was incredible. It was a nice audience, a nice crowd. I didn't know what kind of audience I'd find here. You can't tell how people will be for you.

USS - It takes a while until they realize they can do more than sit quietly.

DM - Like I said in the concert, I couldn't go up there for an hour, hour and a half and sing song after song.

USS - You make your concert special by letting the audience get to know the story behind the song.

DM - Yes, I like to laugh with the audience and get to know each other a little over the course of the night. There are still moments when I can sing a really intense song and the people are well-behaved and quiet.

I like the story-telling side of performing. If you're just going to stand up on stage and sing, they could just go and buy the record. There are performers who work to sound just like

their recording on stage, but you never really get to know the performer.

USS - You record under your own label, Dunkeld Records. Isn't that quite a bit of work?

DM - Technology allows me to do it. And the technology lets me be my own boss. I'm fiercely independent. I won't get involved with the major record labels because I want to live and work in the rural north of Scotland.

I live in the schoolhouse where I

those corporate ones you find where its all trimmed down, how to order their CDs and that's about all. It's much more than that.

USS - You've been recognized as a talented and popular singer/songwriter in Scotland, especially with your mix of traditional instruments with a modern fire.

DM - That kind of mixing of music is what is great about what's happening in Scotland. I play fiddle and spent

years singing the old songs, but there had to be a contemporary edge to it. It's our culture today. Its nice to have a good grounding in our past and our historical background but we're still in 1997 and trying to make songs and styles that are current.

Scotland's a great place for music at the moment.

There's so many good things happening. It's a new sort of confidence everywhere, especially after the election.

USS - What is your opinion about the recent British elections? [Where the Labour Party came in power in Parliament and Tony Blair became Prime Minister]

DM - All I know is that in my village, my father was drunk for three days because we'd got rid of the Tories, the Conservatives. For his whole life there'd been a conservative MP in our constituency. The SNP (Scottish National Party) guy got in this time. It's an incredible shift.

All the major characters in the cabinet all lost their seats. I was on the phone with my sound engineer,

DOUGIE



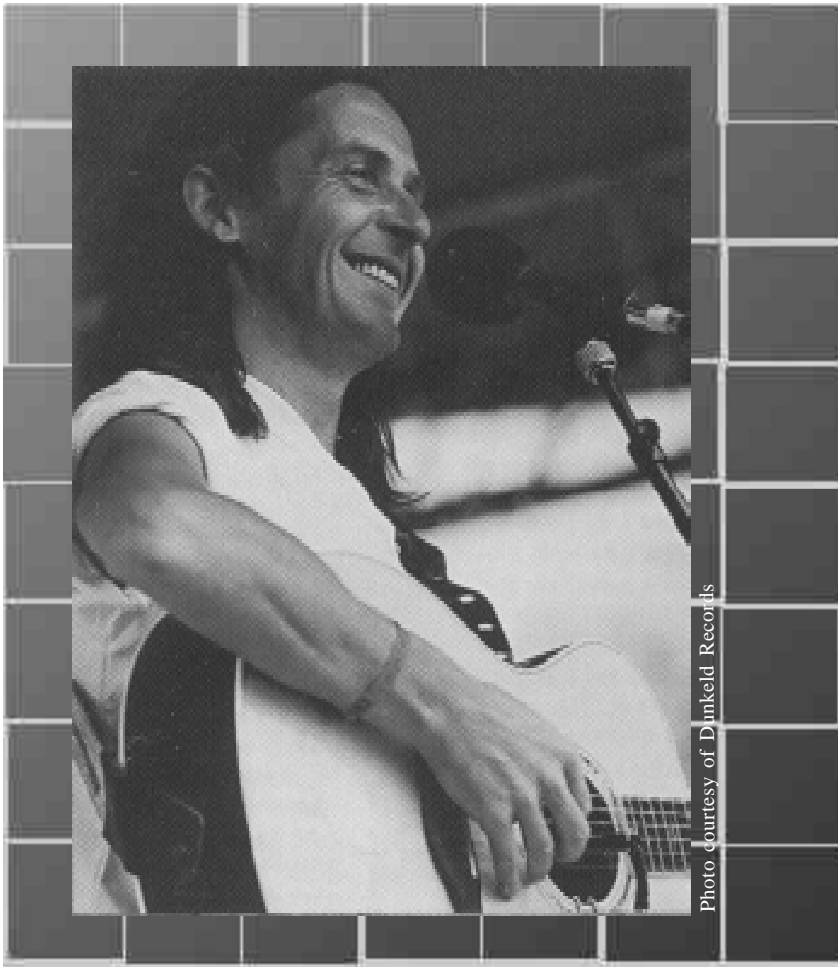
MACLEAN

went as a kid and my father went there in the 1930s. I have it set up as a studio. That's precious, that whole life. If I lose that side of what I'm doing, if I join up with one of the major record companies, I become just another product. I won't do it.

USS - The specialness of your home comes across in your music. You give your listeners a nice glimpse of an area most people won't be able to visit.

DM - That's what I'm trying to do with the World Wide Web site as well. [www.dunkeld.co.uk]. I'm trying to put art on the site, like my wife's paintings. I want to give a sense of where I live and what we do over there.

The webpage isn't like one of



Graham, at about 3 in the morning, yelling back and forth “Prescott’s gone, God I can’t believe that!” Then five minutes later I’d ring back “Ian’s out can you believe it?” The Tories were dropping like flies.

You see Scotland is a traditionally socialist country, and I’m sure it has something to do with the old clan system where people looked after each other. Scotland never took kindly to the Margaret Thatcher kind of politics of everybody for themselves.

I’m a great champion of Scottish Independence. There is a devolved parliament promised, but if that doesn’t happen the s*** will hit the fan in Scotland. Blair won’t be able to get out of it. The ball’s rolling now and people are starting to think about it. Businessmen are beginning to think that it wouldn’t be so bad to be an independent country like Denmark or Sweden. I get the feeling that it will really happen. It’s great.

USS - Didn't this sort of movement occur around the devolution vote in 1979?

DM - They dribbled that. Cancelled it because not enough people voted, but only certain people could vote. The Scottish people voted for independence but at that time, the government ‘manipulated’ the results and said ‘no no, they didn’t.’. If there was a referendum on independence tomorrow, we’d have it.

Even the Scottish Labor Party people are starting to realize that the only way they’re going to get a real Labour Party is in an independent Scotland with another election. They’d be voted in since they’d brought the independence.

What I would like to have happen would be to have the American Scots be more aware of what’s happening and to support the idea of an independent Scotland. Scotland’s a small country with 5 million people, but all the Scots around the world are quite a bit more.

It would be great, if someone could get something organized where people of Scottish heritage could put their weight behind the whole thing. I’m sure there are lots of successful businesses over here that would help and support us.

USS - Do you see an American influence in Scotland?

DM - Well, Hewlett-Packard owns the loch next to my house. (Laughter) There you go. They use it as a fishing retreat for their executives. Its a wee loch, quite pretty.

In fact, we are being influenced quite a bit by America. We watch your movies and television shows.

I’ve noticed that there is a lot more in common between Scotland and America than between England and America, I think. We have the big American military bases in Scotland. The soldiers at those bases often become part of the local community. Many of them marry local girls.

USS - Have you seen the strength of the connection Scottish-Americans feel for Scotland?

DM - Oh, yes. You see it is because of the clan system that the Scots had. It was a very unique sort of tribal system. Even those who have gone away from the place hang on to it very passionately. To think that that love is passed on so strongly, not just one or two generations, but three generations, four, five. “You’ll not forget you’re Scottish.” (chuckle)

You’d think that after going to the New World, after three or four generations that sort of thing would disappear. But the Celtic people seem to have a much more passionate need to hang on to their identity and heritage.

USS - We’ve certainly seen that passion here in America. The numbers of people at the Scottish Highland games are amazing. Several events are said to draw up to 100,000 people every year.

DM - It is that great support you give the games that makes me wish Scots-Americans would get involved in Scotland.

You might have heard that we’re in a wee bit of a fight for our independence. I wonder how you could chan-

nel that interest and enthusiasm, and that 100,000 people who go to those games.

USS - We make connections with many American clan societies. Many of them don't seem to know what to do. Some support a charity or send money to Scotland to buy the clan lands or repair the ancestral home. But they concentrate on the historic aspects rather than exploring Scotland today.

DM - But that's exactly what needs to happen. Unfortunately, there's a lot of groups in the U.S. still living in a part of Scottish history which doesn't really exist anymore. It would be great if we could get them all in line with what is modern Scotland.

It isn't like we've given up all the old ways. I play fiddle in my local ceilidh every three weeks. We don't get away from that. The piping and all that stuff is still as big as ever.

But there needs to be a modern edge to it because if it dwells too much in that part of history, Culloden and that era, the legends, then it will die.

It would be nice if the societies could get in touch with modern Scottishness. I know they'd love it. They'd love to see the vitality that's around in Scotland today.

USS - Scottish-Americans could enjoy a much stronger connection to the living culture than the historical one.

DM - Exactly. Scotland today is a modern, vibrant society. A perfect example is that the biggest concentration of Silicon Graphics computer workstations outside of Silicon Valley is in Dundee, Scotland. There are like seven major corporations there. Scotland is a very modern country.

But they don't

forget the past. You get people with the high technology jobs and they all go out to dance at the ceilidh at night. It's great, the old and the new sitting comfortably side by side.

USS - How can we encourage connections to today's Scotland?

DM - The one thing I would love to see is Scottish-American involvement in independence politics. There are a huge number of Scots in America and if they could speak up, they would add an incredible weight to the independence movement. It would really help the confidence of the Scots who are doing the fighting if they knew their cousins knew about them and supported them. It could happen.

It isn't all wishing. The younger Scottish-Americans are seeing Scotland with a different set of eyes, through jobs in high tech firms or by serving in Scotland with the military. They're getting more connected, seeing more of the real Scotland than their parents ever saw.

The more that Americans can have direct contact with what's happening in Scotland, the better we'll all be.

USS - If you could talk to a group of Scottish-Americans who wanted to

know how to help, what would you tell them?

DM - I'd like to see a movement within the highland societies. Make a Scottish connection, kind of a "friends of Scotland Society." They need to be less *American-Scottish*, and have more of a connection with Scots today.

It's a shame that they have these huge organizations in isolation over here and the only contact they have is with a clan chief or the odd clan gathering over there. They need to communicate about day to day politics and social things.

USS - Often, the Scottish-American societies become a mirror to a particular past, only concerned with their own version of Scottish history.

DM - It can eventually become something that is not connected to the thing that it came from. It becomes a club, rather than what it could mean.

Establishing a connection to modern Scotland is key for both the relevance of the modern clan associations and for giving support to the Scots in their struggle for Home Rule.

- USS



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