

Alasdair Fraser & Natalie Haas BIOGRAPHY

"... you would think they'd been playing together for centuries. While his fiddle dances, her cello throbs darkly or plucks puckishly. Then [Haas] opens her cello's throat, joining Fraser in soaring sustains, windswept refrains, and sudden, jazzy explosions. Their sound is as urbane as a Manhattan midnight, and as wild as a Clackmannan [Scotland] winter."

— Boston Globe

"Fraser, one of the most respected of all exponents of the Scots fiddle, would look long and hard to find a more appropriate cellist as a partner. Haas can switch just as effortlessly as Fraser from a gentle singing tone to driving, dancing melody. A positive joy."

— The Scotsman

The musical partnership between Alasdair Fraser, long regarded as Scotland's premier fiddle ambassador, and the sizzingly-talented young California cellist Natalie Haas may not seem an obvious one. Fraser, acclaimed by the San Francisco Examiner as "the Michael Jordan of Scottish fiddling," has a concert and recording career spanning 30 years, with a long list of awards, accolades, television credits, and feature performances on top movie soundtracks (Last of the Mohicans, Titanic). Fraser has been sponsored by the British Council to represent Scotland's music internationally, and received the Scottish Heritage Center Service Award for outstanding contributions to Scottish culture and traditions.

Natalie Haas, a graduate of the Juilliard School of Music, wasn't even born when Alasdair was winning national fiddle competitions on the other side of the Atlantic. But this seemingly unlikely pairing is the fulfillment of a long-standing musical dream for Fraser, whose cutting-edge musical explorations took him full circle to find a cellist who could help him return the cello to its historical role at the rhythmic heart of Scottish dance music.

"Going back to the 1700s, and as late as the early 20th century," Fraser says, "fiddle and cello made up the dance band of choice in Scotland, with the cellist bowing bass lines and driving the rhythm. Pianos and accordions elbowed out the cello, relegating it to an orchestral setting. I've been pushing to get the cello back into the traditional music scene for years, always on the lookout for a cellist with whom I could have a strong musical conversation, one that incorporated not just the cello's gorgeous melodic tones, but also the gristly bits—the rhythmic, percussive energy that makes the wee hairs on the back of the neck stand up."

Natalie Haas was just 11 when she first attended Fraser's Valley of the Moon Scottish Fiddling School in California. She responded to Fraser's challenge to find and release the cello's rhythmic soul, and four years later, when Natalie was just 15, Fraser and Haas played their first gig together. Now regularly touring with Fraser and creating a buzz at festivals and in concert halls throughout Europe and North America, Natalie is in the vanguard of young cellists who are redefining the role of the cello in traditional music.

The duo represented Scotland at the Smithsonian Museum's Folklife Festival, have been featured on nationally broadcast Performance Today, the Thistle & Shamrock, and Mountain Stage. They both teach at Fraser's popular annual summer fiddle courses (Valley of the Moon Scottish Fiddling School and Sierra Fiddle Camp in California, and at Sabhal Mor Ostaig Gaelic College in Scotland), and Natalie is on the faculty of Berklee College

of Music in Boston.

"Cellists are coming out of the woodwork to study with Natalie, to learn how she creates a groove and a whole chunky rhythm section," says Fraser. "It's inspiring to hear the cello unleashed from its orchestral shackles!"

One of the inspirations is the duo's debut recording, *Fire & Grace*, which displays dazzling teamwork, driving, dancing rhythms, and the duo's shared passion for improvising on the melody and the groove of Scottish tunes. The two instruments duck and dive around each other, swapping melodic and harmonic lines, and trading rhythmic riffs. The recording won not only critical acclaim, but also the coveted the Scots Trad Music "Album of the Year" award, the Scottish equivalent of a Grammy. *Fire & Grace*, and the duo's new CD *In the Moment*, and Fraser's many other recordings are on his own Culburnie Records label.