

MICHAEL MCGOLDRICK: *ARC*

OUT APRIL 6TH ON VERTICAL RECORDS (VERTCD111)

STUNNING FIFTH SOLO ALBUM FROM TOP CELTIC MULTI-INSTRUMENTALIST (*CAPERCAILLIE, MARK KNOPFLER, TRANSATLANTIC SESSIONS, USHER'S ISLAND, ZAKIR HUSSEIN*)

CO-PRODUCED BY DONALD SHAW

"Michael is in a class of his own - it's always a joy to share a stage or a studio (or a beer) with him"
(Mark Knopfler)

"One of the greatest flute players in the world" (BBC Music)

"McGoldrick is a rare pearl. He can pull off the impossible" (Ouest-France)

Don't be deceived by **Michael McGoldrick's** scant solo output: instead, be excited - be very excited - at the arrival of his new album, *Arc*: his first since 2010, and only his fifth in 22 years. Such unhurried intervals make any McGoldrick release an auspicious event, with each both cementing and extending the flautist, whistle player, uilleann piper and composer's repute as one of today's towering instrumental talents.

His solo work's slow distillation is directly symbiotic with McGoldrick's prolifically freewheeling collaborative career, across multiple genres, impelled by a seemingly boundless appetite for - and delight in - the music-making he's pursued since childhood. Listing all the notable bands, projects and recordings his playing has graced would take up much of this document.

Heavily edited highlights include co-founding both **Lúnasa** and **Flook**; numerous guest appearances with **Afro-Celt Sound System**, **Kate Rusby** and **Julie Fowlis**; a linchpin role in legendary percussionist **Zakir Hussain's** globe-trotting *Pulse of the World* project, and eight years' touring and recording with **Mark Knopfler**. Alongside his 21-year membership of Scotland's iconic **Capercaillie**, and his annual turn in **The Transatlantic Sessions**, McGoldrick also joins **Andy Irvine**, **Dónal Lunny**, **Paddy Glackin** and **John Doyle** in new Irish supergroup **Usher's Island**.

With its pithily apt title, *Arc* sees McGoldrick both reflecting and building on his trailblazing career trajectory, and the myriad musical adventures it's encompassed, connecting through his Irish roots and Manchester birthplace - where he still lives, and always has - with a worldwide wealth of traditions and contemporary sounds. "All my albums have been a progression over the last 20-odd years," he explains, "but this time I was really trying to use all those experiences to do something a bit different - different from how I've written and recorded before, and also from what anyone else is doing,"

True to that ambition, *Arc* does indeed embody a yet further, fuller realisation of McGoldrick's extraordinary gifts. His unmistakable melodic voice, expressive authority and polyglot rhythmic fluency are still joyously front and centre, while also in the thick of an ensemble sound both tighter and freer, packing additional heft and sparkling with spontaneity.

On the continuity side, McGoldrick's ever-evolving big-band, both live and in the studio, remains anchored by long-time cohorts, including Capercaillie band-mates **Donald Shaw** (*Arc's* co-producer) & **Ewen Vernal** (bass), renowned Dublin guitarist **Tony Byrne**, and trumpeter **Neil Yates**, with whom McGoldrick goes back fully 30 years. This last relationship, it turns out, was central to *Arc's* conception. Yates originally collaborated with McGoldrick's first band **Toss the Feathers**, and featured prominently on his last four solo albums. They also worked jointly on 2014's acclaimed **Undivided** project, leading a 23-piece jazz/folk ensemble.

"Through working with Neil, and now also **Alyn Cosker** from Undivided, who's known more as a jazz drummer, *Arc* has a lot more improvising on it than earlier albums," McGoldrick says. "Most gigs I do with other artists, I'm improvising - that's why they get me in - and I wrote the new tunes to try and build in that freedom, for everyone involved: a lot of the tracks were recorded in one take."

New in the mix, too, are **Sorren MacLean's** plangent electric guitar and stirring string quintet arrangements by **Shaw**, helmed by **GRIT Orchestra** violinist **Greg Lawson**. **Yates's** masterly brass arrangements are more assertively

to the fore, while **Cosker's** agile, forthright drumming – abetted by old-hand percussionists **John Joe Kelly** (bodhran) and **James Mackintosh** – lays down freshly spacious frameworks for the kaleidoscopic play of rhythms and time-signatures, all woven through by McGoldrick's sublime aural aerobatics.

“On previous albums, I'd often share the top line with other melody players,” he continues, “but the setup was basically me plus backing. This time, dynamically, it's much more about the bigger picture - all the different lines and layers everyone came up with - and especially the bigger picture rhythmically, partly from the jazz side, but also from working with people like Zakir and Fatou.”

'Fatou' is the wonderful Malian singer **Fatoumata Diawara**, from whose magical Celtic Connections performance with McGoldrick, a few years back, **Arc's** scintillating Afro-funk live cut '**Bakanoba**' was lifted. McGoldrick's sleeve-notes for the deliciously shape-shifting '**Wassalou River**' credit its inspiration to “performing with many great World music singers over the years” – singers also including Youssou N'Dour and Bobby McFerrin.

Other immediate standouts include the gorgeously uplifting '**Trip to Nova Scotia**', dawning from delicate, yearning expectancy to bubbling merriment, radiantly augmented by the strings, whose eloquent restraint also adorns the achingly lovely slow air '**Angel Meadow**', an equal-parts blend of heartbreak and bliss. The band's traditional core thrillingly flex their muscles over the majestic course of '**Simon & Candy's 50th Wedding Anniversary**', before cutting loose with end-of-the-night élan in '**The Ogham Stone**'.

Then you notice subtle Americana shades infusing the mellow, vibrant '**John Kelly's Concertina**' – then the softly luxuriant interplay **Tony O'Connell's** concertina and **Ed Boyd's** styling finger-picking guitar on '**Black Swan on the Turlough**'; the slinky brilliance and fiendish whistle/brass fencing of '**Five and Drive**'; **Maclean's** superb folk-funk picking in '**The Soaring Eagle**', lustrously layered with more horns – and soon it's time to hit repeat, again.

“I'm still really enjoying listening to it myself,” McGoldrick says, “even though I've been living with it so long. I'm still hearing new things in it - things the others are doing, just little twists and details in how they've played something – and that was another goal I started out with: I wanted to make a record that the more you listen to it, the more you hear.”

By this and all his other criteria - McGoldrick having always been his own sternest critic - **Arc** represents a resounding, resplendent, back-of-the-net success.

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“Mike McGoldrick is one of those rare musicians who never fails to serve the song and the moment in ways that cut through any blocks or filters. If pyrotechnics and passion are called for, he is there, delivering music that burns and soars. If a medium-tempo groove is needed to draw dancers to the floor, he is there with as strong a sense of timing and as infectious a sense of melody as exists anywhere on the globe. If an emotional slow air or a fluid ballad part is what completes an evening, or an album, then Mike brings forth that energy with a soulful tenderness all his own. In short, he is without doubt a musician's musician. . . but he is much more than that. It is hard to imagine anyone in the world not responding to the music that flows from him so naturally and beautifully, timed, always, to the rhythm of the heart”

(Dirk Powell)

Notes

The McGoldrick band presents a live performance of 'Arc' as part of the Big Whistle festival at the Bury Met on May 12th 2018. More info from Jane@Janeskinner.net

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