

Haar - Lauren MacColl

Make Believe Records

MBR11CD

www.laurenmaccoll.co.uk



Credits:

Produced by Lauren MacColl
Engineering - Barry Reid at Watercolour Studios
Mixing - Barry Reid at Rosecroft Studio
Mastering - Sam Proctor at Lismore Mastering

Lauren - fiddle, harmonium drones
with
Alice Allen - cello
Jennifer Austin - piano
Mairearad Green - accordion
James Lindsay - double bass, moog synth
Anna Massie - acoustic & nylon guitars
Rachel Newton - harp, spoken word
(rachel, lauren, mairearad & anna - vocal chorus on track 8)

Original ink drawings for artwork - Zoe Paterson Macinnes
Album design - Elly Lucas
Map extracts from a personal copy of an 1689 'The Firth of Murry' map

All music composed by Lauren MacColl (MCPS/PRS) with the exception of An-raoir, a traditional air from the Inverness Collection (v1 -1888) - An-raoir a bhrudair mi 'm chadal.

Spoken word on Natal - extract from Sorley MacLean's analytical essay 'Notes on Sea imagery in seventeenth century Gaelic Poetry'.

Tracks 2, 4, 7, 8, 9 originally commissioned by An Comunn Gàidhealach and performed as 'An Ear | East' for Year of Coasts and Waters.

1 / Haar -

Haar or sea mist/fog is synonymous with our eastern coasts. It creeps onto the coastline and its communities, and brings with it an unsettled atmosphere, with no sense of horizon. Everything is void of colour and light. This music was written during a year of huge personal loss, when it often felt like the haar had engulfed me and those closest to me. Working on this album has been a solace, and at the heart of it is a strong pull towards the coast and both its fragility and strength. Haar - to me - is a reminder that after the mist, always comes light.

2 / Culbin -

The township of Culbin east of Nairn was buried in a great sandstorm in 1694, forcing the tenants and their factor to flee their homes. Their way of life; cutting turf for fuel and marram grass for roofing their homes may have contributed to de-stabilising the dunes, but people had been adapting to the fragile life there for centuries before. The Forestry Commission began planting trees a hundred years ago, and now Culbin is a thriving home to nature. It is an ever-changing place where shifting sands continue to remind us of the power of our coasts. A place full of dragonflies and singing seals

3 / The Lost Bell & Women of the Shore

A great tale exists of two new church bells bound for the parishes of Nigg and Fearn. They had been manufactured in Holland in 1624, made their way all the way to Cromarty, but a fight broke out on the last crossing over to Nigg, toppling one of the bells overboard. It lies at the bottom of the firth to this day.

The hardy life of the fisher folk of the coastal communities is one where women played a huge role. Where a pier didn't exist, the women would carry the men out to the boats on their shoulders to keep them from getting wet. Much is written about the huge numbers of women who followed the herring season from Shetland down as far as Yarmouth, gutting and packing on the shore when the industry was at its peak in the late 1800s.

4 / Natal

On the afternoon of 30th Dec 1915 whilst hosting a Christmas film party, HMS Natal blew up whilst at anchor in the Cromarty firth. 421 people lost their lives as the ship sank just 5 minutes after a series of internal explosions. Several nurses were on board from nearby hospital ship Drina, and wives and children of the officers. Of the 400 who survived, some crew were ashore playing a friendly football match when the explosion happened.

The spoken word read by Rachel during this track is taken from a Sorley MacLean essay 'Notes on Sea imagery in seventeenth century Gaelic Poetry'. His translation of the second half is particularly poignant;

"It is I who am heartbroken
If your bed is in the seaweed,
If the seals are your watchmen,
The high stars your white candles,
And your violin music the scream of the sea"

5 / North - light

This is an old term used in the north for the aurora borealis / northern lights. Some of the best vantage points to see 'north-light' our coasts, with huge horizons. During the writing of this music we were lucky

to have some awe-inspiring displays right on the doorstep, which got me thinking about what people must've thought they were whilst out at sea, long before we had a scientific explanation for their beauty.

6 / Lammas Fair

On 16th August 1809, over a hundred people boarded the boat from Meikle Ferry to Ferry Point to attend the Lammas Fair in Tain. It sank shortly after leaving the shore with only 12 survivors. Such a loss of life was keenly felt across the communities north of the Dornoch Firth, and prompted the building of a bridge upriver at Bonar Bridge.

7 / An-raoir (Last night)

A traditional melody from the Inverness Collection (v1 -1888) - An-raoir a bhrudair mi 'm chadal.

8 / Gentle Annie

The fisherfolk of Cromarty used to refer to the weather of the spring equinox as 'Gentle Annie' weather. A contradictory term, as such were the winds fishing would be stopped for up to 6 weeks at a time, causing great deprivation. Gentle Annie is connected to the wider weatherlore of Là na Caillich.

9/ Roodadoo

The last native speaker of the unique Cromarty fisher dialect Bobby Hogg died in 2012. Roodadoo is a local word for the heron, a common Black Isle resident.

10 / The Port

My maternal grandmother Catherine Munro (née Oman) grew up at Seafeld farm, Portmahomack and fondly spoke of her life there in 'The Port' for the rest of her days. She passed away the week before this recording was made. Her spirit - and that of all my family who have passed to me a deep love for our home area, its stories and people - runs through this album.