

Shona's top of the trad ballad pops

By Pat Scott

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A WOMAN whose singing career began at Huntly Folk Club was crowned Bothy Ballad Champion at a competition in Elgin last weekend.

Shona Donaldson became the first woman to win the coveted Macallan Porridge Bowl and Spurtle in the championship's 34-year history.

In front of an audience of 600, Shona, who is 30, beat off stiff competition from five rivals, including last year's winner Hector Riddell, to achieve what she described as the highlight of her singing career.

Now based in Tarland, Shona, who was making her third bid for the title said: "There is no other competition like it in Scotland and the people competing have qualified from festivals all over the country.

"I went there thinking it would be lovely to win but we are all friends too so I would have been happy had someone else won.

"It felt great to be announced as the winner, although the result could have gone either way. The men were all very gracious about my win."

Mum of Hector (8) and Roderick (5) and wife of acclaimed fiddler Paul Anderson, Shona was brought up surrounded by music. Her father Matt is a piper and her maternal grandmother, Gladys Webster always plays the piano for family singalongs.

It was as a member of the Strathbogie Fiddlers' concert parties that Shona developed her passion

for Bothy Ballads and she particularly enjoys the fact so many of them relate to farms around Huntly. For the championship, Shona chose The Scranky Black Fermer which is based around Daniel Skinner at Earlsfield Farm at Kennethmont and dates back to the late 1800s.

Shona said: "It is one of my favourites. I first came across it working with artist David Blyth and went to Earlsfield to record it, so its words are all very real for me as I can picture the farm when I sing it.

"The traditional songs I sing are about actual people and real events and paint a picture of the history of the area. Keeping them alive is important to me and feels really special. I search out songs and bothy ballads with Huntly in them because I think I can tell the story better as it is where I grew up."

Last month, Shona sang at the Celtic Connections opening event as part of the Traditional Music Association of Scotland's 50th anniversary celebrations in the Royal Concert Hall in Glasgow.

She sang two bothy ballads, the Roving Ploughboy and Edomo Gordon, both of which are linked to Huntly.

In December, Shona and her husband travelled to Virginia and performed at a number of venues in the Blue Ridge Mountains where there is a strong Scottish music influence. In March, she is off to Ireland to guest at the 27th Inishowen International Folk Song and Ballad Seminar held to foster the folk song and ballad tradition of Donegal's Inishowen Peninsula



Bothy Ballad champion Shona Donaldson.

Picture: Daniel Forsyth.
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