

DONOVAN

musician



Born in 1946, Donovan Leitch celebrated 50 years in the music business in 2015. He was 18 when his single Catch the Wind – which won the prestigious Ivor Novello Award – hit the charts. Pop star and folk troubadour Donovan was at the forefront of the ‘flower power’ generation and, as a keen follower of transcendental meditation as well as an accomplished musician, he was a major influence on The Beatles.

I LOVED SEASIDE HOLIDAYS AS A CHILD. My Granny Kelly would take a wee ‘but’n’ben’ in Ayr each summer and we kids would huddle by the sea wall eating sang witches (as we called them) and riding the donkey on the dark, wide sands. After, when I’d gone to bed, Daddy would read me Lewis Carroll and I would dream of a sleepy yesterday of crinoline and parasol, bottled sand, and griffins dancing with dodos.

I was born in Maryhill in Glasgow and, at one year, moved to St Vincent Street, Anderston. Billy Connolly was born in Anderston, I think. My daddy was a photographer, mostly amateur but sometimes a pro at weddings and barmitzvahs.

The tenement where we lived had a comic book store across the tram-lines where I would buy *Superman*, *Supergirl*, *The Green Lantern* and *Mandrake The Magician* comics. I would lie awake and watch the trams’ lights move across the ceiling of the old front room that

“ I live in Scotland in my heart”

I slept in alone. There were also parties in a room above the street and I heard the Scots and Irish songs which – although I didn’t know it then – were called folk songs.

My proudest moment was when 20,000 souls were silent in Madison Square Gardens as I sang my song *Isle of Islay*, solo on one acoustic guitar. But my favourite song that reminds me of my homeland is *The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry*. This is the tale of the Seal People of the Western Isles. A Seal Man lies with a human girl and a



“Roving the cliff, when fancy takes, felt like a tide left me here”: from Donovan’s Isle of Islay which he sang at Madison Square Garden

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The beach at Ayr*





child is born, and one day out in the boat his Seal Father surfaces and meets his child.

I learned rhetoric from my father and he, in turn, from the great orators of the Scottish tradition. I remember he used to recite half hours of poetry in the Bardic tradition, and his memory skills encouraged my own for my songs. I am the leading songwriter of the Gaelic tradition reaching all around the world with my compositions and performance in the ancient forms of Bardic and Troubadour skill.

Scotia – and that includes Gaelic Ireland as one tradition, not two – is so important in literature, music and social communications worldwide. Ancient knowledge is preserved in our Gaelic kingdoms which the Romans did not influence. Three million Scots and Irish entered America and, we now know, created for the most part the popular music we now enjoy. And, of course, Scotland invented the modern world.

I live in Scotland in my heart. Glasgow is my hometown and also my favourite city. The talent exploding there now is impressive and in one day there were four articles on the Modern Glasgow Creative Drive in *The New York Times*.

Besides Sean Connery, the Scottish people who have most inspired me are Robert Burns and Robert Service – I remember my daddy used to read me their poetry.

The fact of the well-read Scot is well known. The people of Scotland are Gaelic wonders. In the 1700s travellers in Scotland reported that Scotia had the most educated populace of any European nation.

This I see as coming from John Knox who insisted each village have a teacher and that the Bible be read by all. Knox did not reckon on the other books being taught like Greek classics, democratic humanist and social teachings that have formed the

Scottish educational system which is world-renowned. And we all know Robert Burns went to a village school that Knox began. The working man had a library, and so did my daddy ... and I have those books in my library now.

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*"Glasgow is my hometown and also my favourite city. The talent exploding now in Glasgow is impressive."
The 'Armadillo' in the SECC complex in Glasgow*

