

EXCLUSIVE

Film warns Hamish Henderson's legacy is fading from Scotland's memory

16TH FEBRUARY FOLK MUSIC POETRY SCOTTISH CULTURE CINEMA ENTERTAINMENT HERITAGE MUSIC PEOPLE SCOTLAND

By Alasdair Ferguson Multimedia Journalist

Share 11 comments



A war hero, poet, singer, songwriter, and political activist, the late Hamish Henderson played a key part in awakening Scotland's cultural consciousness

Sign up to the Today's Most Read newsletter

Your round-up of the day's top stories.

Sign Up

By signing up, you agree to our privacy policy and terms of service.

A FILM celebrating a colossus of Scotland's culture, poet and songwriter Hamish Henderson, aims to highlight that his "legacy is in danger of being forgotten" despite his lifetime efforts championing the country.

A war hero, poet, singer, songwriter, and political activist, the late Henderson played a key part in awakening Scotland's cultural consciousness.

Best known for penning the South African freedom fighters' anthem Rivonia and his Freedom Come A'Ye, which has been previously called to become Scotland's new national anthem, Henderson spent his life celebrating and sharing Scotland's culture.

Born in Perthshire, Henderson, who died in 2002, was often described as a "colourful character" who recorded hundreds of songs and ballads from across Scotland, in a bid to preserve the country's culture for posterity.

READ MORE: John Swinney calls out 'dodgy money propping up Labour'

Despite his efforts, Henderson's own legacy is now in danger of slipping into obscurity, director behind the Hamish Henderson An Artist's Inspiration documentary, Michael Lloyd, has said.

"Hamish's legacy isn't just his folk-song collecting, which has been the focus of previous films," Lloyd said.

"Primarily it is his advocacy for a Scotland that has respect for itself. That is the motivation behind, for instance, the songs, the 'Freedom Come a'Ye' and the 'Banks o' Sicily'.

Lloyd added: "Hamish was an outward-looking nationalist. He didn't take former first minister Jack McConnell's view that Scotland is, 'the best small country in the world'.

"He didn't care whether it was or wasn't.

"What mattered to him was that it should be respected for what it is. And most importantly, that the people of Scotland themselves should value it.

"He was the antithesis of the Scottish cultural cringe."



The film features musicians from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland performing some of Henderson's most famous tracks in locations that played a part in the poet's life, like Edinburgh's famed Sandy Bells bar.

Lloyd explained that he wanted to explore a more visually and audibly interesting way to tell Henderson's life than just "talking heads".

"They gave really first-rate performances of music that was either by Hamish or associated with him," he said.

Friends, colleagues, and experts were also interviewed for the film as they celebrated Henderson's life and tried to answer the question of what drove the poet to "turn out the way he did", explained Lloyd.

READ MORE: SNP call for independent inquiry into Labour Together 'spying scandal'

"It asks questions about Hamish's character and personality and why he achieved what he achieved," he said.

In his lifetime, Henderson helped establish the Edinburgh People's Festival in 1951, which put traditional Scottish folk music on a public stage for the first time and arguably evolved into the internationally renowned Edinburgh Fringe.

In 1983, he turned down an OBE in protest at the nuclear arms policy of Margaret Thatcher's government and, as a result, was voted Scot of the Year by BBC Radio Scotland listeners.

He was also bisexual and campaigned for equal rights and Scottish independence, and was a strong supporter of the release of Nelson Mandela.



"It is very important, right now, with Scotland split between those who value it and those who do not," Lloyd said

"Our cultural horizons are shaped by a media which is focused largely on celebrities who draw their inspiration from other places.

"If you vox-popped in Glasgow city centre today, I imagine you'd find one person who knew about Hamish for every hundred that had heard of Taylor Swift.

"This is what inspired Charles Nasmyth, as an English outsider, to commemorate Hamish in the portrait that is at the heart of the film. He is worth remembering and should be an inspiration to future generations."

Lloyd explained the challenges in trying to condense Henderson's extraordinary life into one film as "there's so much to say about the man".

But he also wanted to touch on why Nasmyth decided to paint him, as the film explores how the artist was "moved" by Henderson's humanitarian socialism.

The documentary also explores common themes of Henderson, all things Scottish, where were expressed in the songs, ballads and stories he collected.

READ MORE: Keir Starmer denies knowing about Labour think tank 'spying on journalists'

He was also a fierce believer that the Scots language should thrive as a living expression of Scotland's identity and culture.

"He wasn't pretending to be anything else; he was absolutely true to his own views," Lloyd said.

"At the same time, he was someone who brought on other people; he was very keen to encourage people.

"The time he spent in Sandy Bell's bar wasn't just drinking and chatting, it was often to do with giving opportunities to people, encouraging people to meet other people who would help them in their career."

Lloyd's Hamish Henderson An Artist's Inspiration is set to be shown at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow and the Eden Court Theatre in Inverness this month. You can learn more about the film here.

FOLK MUSIC POETRY SCOTTISH CULTURE CINEMA ENTERTAINMENT HERITAGE MUSIC PEOPLE SCOTLAND

Share

11 comments

Get involved with the news Send your news & photos

Most read

- 1 Hugely popular Scottish craft brewery enters administration
2 BBC branded 'state propaganda channel' after latest royal coverage
3 Swiss broadcaster calls out Israel's genocide in Gaza during Winter Olympics coverage
4 Senior Scottish Government official questioned over Peter Mandelson ties
5 Reform UK would look at cutting minimum wage, says Richard Tice
6 50,000 people call for inquiry into pro-Israel influence in UK politics
7 Iconic 127-year-old Scottish ice cream-making business goes into liquidation
8 Popular brand returns to two Scottish cities as it rejoins high streets across UK
9 Travellers to Spain, France and Italy warned to prepare for 2026 ETIAS border changes
10 One of Scotland's oldest independent kilt hire firms goes into liquidation

Show more articles

Get in Touch

Contact Us Send Us Your News

Follow Us

Facebook Follow us on X.com Instagram

Useful Links

Subscriptions Exchange and Mart Students Archive | Sitemap Newsletters AI Notice Reader Rewards



This website and associated newspapers adhere to the Independent Press Standards Organisation's Editors' Code of Practice. If you have a complaint about the editorial content which relates to inaccuracy or intrusion, then please contact the editor here. If you are dissatisfied with the response provided you can contact IPSO here