

Mr Chancellor,

Folk music is part of our heritage. It weaves together tales about the people, places and history of this region into a rich, melodic tapestry. As an oral culture, it is primarily transmitted to successive generations through continuous performance; without which it is at risk of being forgotten. Newcastle is justifiably proud to have been the first English University to offer a folk music degree. We are equally proud that from its inception, we were able to draw on the expertise and talent of the distinguished musician, Kathryn Tickell, whom we are honouring today.

Kathryn Tickell is widely regarded as the leading contemporary exponent of the Northumbrian pipes. She is also a fiddle player of consummate artistry. Her work is deeply rooted in and inspired by the landscape and people of Northumbria. Names such as Willy Taylor, Will Atkinson, Joe Hutton and Dick Moscrop feature prominently in this narrative - skilful musicians whose unique phrasing or dynamic decoration of a traditional tune could only be learnt by watching, listening and above all, playing alongside them.

Throughout her career, Kathryn has worked across many musical styles and genres, collaborating with musicians as diverse as Sting, the Chieftains, Andy Sheppard and The Penguin Café Orchestra. She has composed pieces for Royal Northern Sinfonia, was Musical Director for Michael Chaplin's play, "Tyne" and has had music written especially for her, most notably Kettletoft Inn by Sir Peter Maxwell Davis, which was dedicated to her "in admiration and respect for her work in making her home county come alive with a reawakened awareness of its own musical heritage..." Her achievements have been recognised by many awards and honours. She has twice been the recipient of

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the BBC's Folk Musician of the Year award, and in 2009 was awarded the Queen's Medal for Music for her outstanding contribution to music. In 2015, she received an OBE for services to Folk Music. Catriona Macdonald, Director of our Folk and Traditional Music degree programme, first met Kathryn at the Shetland Folk Festival when they were both in their teens. She recalls "a confident, brilliant player, rooted and immersed in a tradition that she loved and respected." And as a female competing in what was a mostly a male instrumental tradition, she exemplified what was possible if you were brave enough to go for it.

Kathryn was born in Walsall, in the West Midlands, in June 1967. Both of her parents hailed from the North Tyne Valley, to which they returned when Kathryn was seven. She was musically gifted, achieving high standards in both piano and fiddle. She told me that the fiddle was her first love and she never really wanted to play the pipes. However, when her father brought a set home, she was curious to try them out and her affinity for them was soon apparent. She rapidly built up a repertoire of traditional tunes learnt from local musicians— absorbing not just the music, but the history of the people and places which inspired it. Andrew Davison, OBE, President of the Northumbrian Pipers' Association, recalls meeting Kathryn at a musical competition held at Bellingham Show when she was a young girl. What he most remembers is the exceptional quality of her music, how comfortably at ease she was with people of all ages, and her generosity in sharing her bag of sweets!

Alistair Anderson, the distinguished folk musician and composer, has known Kathryn since she was a child, and describes her as "a brilliant musician, always keen to share her love of music with others, who has helped to put the music of Northumbria and the Borders on the map." She has certainly done that. Her

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first album, *On Kielder Side*, was released in in 1984, when she was sixteen. Within two years, she was touring extensively in the UK and abroad. Her latest album, *Hollowbone*, takes old tales, poems and melodies and exuberantly re-interprets them for a modern audience. Whilst passionate about her own music, Kathryn is equally committed to ensuring others have the opportunity to explore and develop their musical talents. In 1998, she established the Young Musicians Fund, working tirelessly to raise an endowment fund to provide grants for young people to help pay their tuition fees or to acquire musical instruments. She is particularly keen that the fund supports young people from backgrounds where access to musical tuition would otherwise be unattainable. Ellie Turner, Principal Advisor for Partnerships & Engagement at the Community Foundation, which manages the fund, told me that Kathryn's commitment runs far beyond helping to decide where the grants are distributed; she is always on hand to offer practical guidance and advice to young musicians. Kathryn's support is also evident in her commitment to Magnetic North East, a community interest group she set up specifically to promote the culture, music and heritage of this region.

Everyone I spoke to whilst researching this citation mentioned the abounding sense of joy that is conveyed in Kathryn's musical performances. Andrew Davison told me he thought she was as happy performing in a small village hall as she was at The Royal Albert Hall – what mattered to her was that people engaged with and enjoyed the music. These reflections are echoed by Kathryn herself who told me the most important thing for her was to play music that she loved. Whilst she was always curious and excited by the possibility of exploring new ideas and interpretations, she invariably followed an experimental album with something more traditional. Those cultural roots keep her firmly grounded. Kathryn's affinity with the region is perfectly captured by the words of another of our honorary graduates, children's author, David

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Almond, who described Kathryn's music to me as, "...the sound of birds singing over Northumbrian fells, or waves turning on Northumbrian shores... It is music of wildness and mystery and great beauty. The musicians of the past sing and play through her. Bards and balladeers speak through her... She brings the past into the present, gives it a new form... She is of an ancient tradition, but her music is brand new... She is an inspiration to all of us who know and love the lovely North."

Mr Chancellor, in recognition of her inspiring, inclusive and joyous celebration of the music of our region, I present to you Kathryn Derran Tickell, OBE, as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Music, *honoris causa*.

*Citation by Jill Taylor-Roe, Senior Public Orator*

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