



# Natalie MacMaster and Donnell Leahy

A Celtic Family Christmas

Tuesday, Dec. 17, 7:30 p.m.

## Program notes

JUNO Award-winning fiddle virtuosos Natalie MacMaster and Donnell Leahy are hitting the road again to bring back their successful concert series *A Celtic Family Christmas*. The intimate and unique show will see the duo perform with their incredibly talented children, playing holiday favorites (including selections from their album of the same name) that are fun for the whole family.

“Christmas is where this whole concept started, and we are excited to be traveling as a family,” says Leahy. “It’s a perfect time to travel with the children and bring light and happiness to families and fans across the country.”

This year, *A Celtic Family Christmas* touches down at marquee venues across the United States, confirming the duo as powerhouses on the seasonal circuit. With a lineup of familiar Christmas songs intermingled with classic Celtic songs sure to warm your heart, *A Celtic Family Christmas* brings you in the door and welcomes you in as part of the family.

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### PLEASE NOTE

- Latecomers will be seated at the house manager's discretion.
- Photography and video recordings of any type are strictly prohibited during the performance.
- Smoking is not permitted anywhere. CU Boulder is a smoke-free campus!

## About the performers

### Natalie MacMaster and Donnell Leahy

Hearing Natalie MacMaster and Donnell Leahy speak reverentially about the fiddle, which has propelled their dazzling careers since childhood while cementing their status as Canada's reigning couple of Celtic music, is almost as electrifying as hearing them play it.

Indeed, when MacMaster and Leahy married in 2002—both were already stars in their own right—they could not have predicted their merger would recast what contemporary musical success looks like. Or that they would produce a large family and ensure their mantelpiece was jammed with JUNO and East Coast Music Awards while creating an inventory of achievements spanning the globe.

They certainly couldn't have imagined capping off what they jokingly refer to as their combined 83 years as performers with milestones, including another hotly anticipated Christmas tour, an accompanying TV special, a pending third installment of their Greenbridge Celtic Folk Fest, a recent Road Gold Award from the Canadian Independent Music Association, and last but certainly not least, the arrival of Maria, newest sibling to Mary Frances, Michael, Clare, Julia, Alec and Sadie.

Though MacMaster, a Member of the Order of Canada since 2006, and Leahy followed different trajectories to this point—she a Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, native who could step-dance before she could walk, he the oldest brother of acclaimed family group Leahy—both have confidently crested the traditional music peak.

Their synergy was brilliantly showcased on the pair's first recorded collaboration, 2015's Bob Ezrin-produced album *One*, a crowning achievement complementing combined album sales of over one million; a CV listing cellist Yo-Yo Ma, bluegrass star Alison Krauss, and banjo ace Béla Fleck as past collaborators (and Shania Twain and The Chieftains as fans); plus a devoted audience stretching from Sydney, Nova Scotia, to Sydney, Australia.

MacMaster and Leahy have seven gifted children, five of whom are often the showpiece of the live

set. The kids—whom the couple don't necessarily envision showbiz careers for—recently performed (actually knocked 'em dead) on German TV variety show *Willkommen bei Carmen Nebel*.

Other family endeavors include a TV special also titled *A Celtic Family Christmas* and *The Leahys: Music Most of All*, a short by filmmaker Peter Weyman, whose vivid depiction of Leahy and his touring musical siblings won an Academy Award for Best Foreign Student Film in 1985. And to top it all off, MacMaster and Leahy keep a farm: 120-acres of ancestral lands in Lakefield, Ontario.

But there's always room for more music. Ergo, the couple's launch in 2017 of the successful Greenbridge Celtic Folk Fest, which, for an August weekend each year, transforms the bucolic agricultural hub of Keene, Ontario, into a foot-stomping, fist-pumping, string-shredding Celtic ceilidh.

MacMaster returned to the studio in 2019 to record a solo LP, which will be co-produced by Leahy and feature the performances of Tim Edey. MacMaster describes the artist direction of the project: "I have something to say through my fiddle. It'll be a moment of joyous appreciation inspired by years of parenting, marriage, life, friendships and music. It is a moment during my 47th year of life, my 37th year of fiddling, my 16th year of marriage, my 13th year of parenting. I have chosen one of my very favorite musicians to join me: Tim Edey, an absolute gem of a player and person."

### Mac Morin

Mac Morin (piano), a founding member of the band Beòlach, has continued to perform his innovative Cape Breton piano style, touring and recording full time with Natalie MacMaster for nearly two decades. He has also appeared live and recorded with the likes of The Rankin Family, Yo-Yo Ma, Buddy MacMaster and the Chieftains and has recorded on many of the traditional projects produced in Cape Breton in the last 20 years. He also continues to travel as a guest with Scottish group Dannsa. As a well-known and respected dancer at home and abroad, Morin has traveled throughout Canada and the United States, the U.K., Europe and New Zealand to

teach the traditional Cape Breton style. Morin and his Beòlach bandmates have just released a new record *all hands* and completed a Celtic Colours 2019 residency.

## Elmer Ferrer

Elmer Ferrer (guitar), Cuban-Canadian musician, is widely recognized as one of the world's premier guitarists. An extremely versatile and prolific session musician, Ferrer has recorded and toured the globe with many of Cuba's top producers and artists. As a producer, arranger and session acoustic or electric guitarist, Ferrer has contributed to more than 100 music recordings, including two Latin Grammy-nominee albums. He has a prominent career as a composer and solo performer and is the leader of the remarkable Elmer Ferrer Band, known for captivating audiences and critics alike with its signature "advanced mix of Cuban Jazz and electric blues." He is about to release his sophomore album. Ferrer's touring includes performances at international music festivals. On the occasion of having Ferrer as a special guest of the Chucho Valdes quarter, six-time Grammy-winning pianist Chucho Valdes introduced Ferrer as "one of the greatest guitarists I have listened to in the last 30 years." Ferrer recently released his fourth solo album *Básico, no Básico y Dirigido* (September 2019) featuring Natalie MacMaster and Donnell Leahy on the co-composed song "Royal Hut."

## Rémi Arsenault

Rémi Arsenault (bass/guitar) has been a prominent side and session musician in the PEI music scene for over 20 years. He picked up bass, drums and guitar before he was 10 years old and grew up in a very musical family that is well known for its cultural contributions to the French-Acadian music scene on the island and beyond. He has toured North America and Europe numerous times with artists such as Vishten, Catherine Maclellan, Coig, Fayo, Dominique Dupuis, Gadelle, An Acoustic Sin and many more.





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