

The Burns Unit Biography

The Burns Unit is an 8-piece Scottish-Canadian supergroup described by author Ian Rankin as "one long, involving variety show, full of colour and spectacle and not a few surprises".

The Burns Unit features indie-rock icon **Emma Pollock**; Indo-Caledonian pop artist **Future Pilot AKA**; folk luminary **Karine Polwart**; alt-folk heartbreaker **King Creosote**; smouldering multi-instrumentalist **Kim Edgar**; drummer/producer **Mattie Foulds** and wild-eyed piano-man **Michael Johnston** (both from Canada), along with hip-hop polemicist **MC Soom T**.

"Side Show", The Burns Unit's debut, was named #2 Folk Album of 2010 by MOJO Magazine. Produced by the band's drummer Mattie Foulds, 'Side Show' was mixed with Paul Savage (Franz Ferdinand) and mastered by Jon Astley (The Who, ABBA, Norah Jones).

About 'Side Show', BBC writes: "brilliantly executed and splendidly presented...a little wonder that's considerably more than the sum of its admittedly excellent parts". Featuring no less than 6 lead vocalists, 'Side Show' presents "[a] brilliantly adventurous, sumptuously harmonised mash-up of pop, rock, rap, indie and alternative sounds" (*The Scotsman*).

"We may be the world's first accidental big band", laughs Johnston. Formed out of a one-week songwriting retreat - called "Burnsong" - held in rural Scotland in December 2006 (that also included Squeeze's Chris Difford), each musician arrived with virtually no connections to or knowledge of one another. "Together, we're such a mish-mash of personalities and styles", says Johnston, "we had no right to have gotten along as well as we did, let alone form a band and make an album. We often joke that we're the band nobody asked to be a member of."

With all 10 songs co-written by at least 2 members of the band, the collaborative sound on 'Side Show' is furthered by interweaving vocal parts (Kim Edgar and Karine Polwart's mesmerizing chant on "Send Them Kids To War" underscoring Soom T's urgent lead vocal); several duets (like the spellbinding opening track "Since We've Fallen Out", featuring King Creosote and Polwart, and the Jacques Brel-esque "You Need Me To Need This" delivered by Emma Pollock and Michael Johnston); hypnotic instrumentation (the heavy drum & bass groove of "Future Pilot AKA") and - most strikingly - each member stepping out of their more familiar styles as solo artists.

The Burns Unit's official debut, at the 2009 Celtic Connections Festival in Scotland, drew a sold-out crowd to ABC 1 in Glasgow. Later in 2009, The Burns Unit appeared at Fence Records' annual celebration, "Homegame". In addition to their full-band set, members of the Burns Unit sat in with KT Tunstall for her surprise acoustic set.

In 2010, The Burns Unit celebrated the release of "Side Show" with two sets at the Cambridge Folk Festival, and a sold-out performance at the Queen's Hall in Edinburgh.

In January 2011, The Burns Unit collaborated on no less than seven new songs, which the band introduced to a crowd of 1200 at the Fruitmarket in Glasgow. The Burns Unit made their London debut - receiving 4-star reviews from both The Times and The Independent - and also recorded a live BBC 6 session in Manchester with Marc Riley.

The Burns Unit - "forward-looking, boundary-troucing" – perform live on "Later With Jools Holland" alongside The Strokes in May 2011, and will be amongst the headliners at the 2011 Green Man festival in Wales, with a lineup that includes Fleet Foxes and Bellowhead.

MORE ABOUT THE BURNS UNIT:

***** this remarkable recording represents a coming together of all that's good in Scottish music over the past decade - *R2 Magazine*

**** Scots-Canadian folk-pop supergroup...first London show confirms how well their bustling diversity transfers to the stage - *The Independent*

**** an impressive, entertaining album, not just because of the unlikely array of musicians involved, but because of the quality of the songs - *The Guardian*

**** it should have been a shambles - *The Times*

***** if they are a supergroup, then they're the most democratic bunch I've ever heard...despite the dearth of egoism in The Burns Unit, their supergroup credentials are fully intact: the heartbreaking melodies; the aural virtuosity; the vivid group dynamic; the stadium-sized balladry... - *Herald Scotland*

**** spotlights artists swerving comfort zones - *MOJO*

**** ...singers melt together like honey - *Maverick*

**** indie-folk royalty let their hair down - *Songlines*

**** the chemistry and ideas combine beautifully - *Sunday Mail*

**** eclectic, excellent and endearing... - *The Sun*