

Entertainment & Leisure

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Student engineer gave it up to play concertina

By JANE BRACE

IT'S hard to think of a band that has achieved so much and made such an impact on the trad music scene in their first few years as Glasgow-based trio Talisk.

One of the fastest rising folk bands in the UK, Mohsen Amini, Hayley Keenan and Graeme Armstrong are preparing to play Nettlebed village club on Monday (April 29) as part of a spring tour of the UK to promote their latest album, *Beyond*.

Nettlebed Folk Club organiser Mike Sanderson said: "Talisk's engaging and energetic combination of duet concertina, fiddle and guitar have landed them slots at festivals all over the world.

"They are winners of Band of the Year and the Belhaven Bursary for Innovation at the BBC Alba Scots Trad Music Awards.

"Mohsen Amini also won Musician of the Year at the 2018 BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards — the folk music world's Oscars."

That win, just over a year ago at Belfast's Waterfront Hall, put the Glasgow concertina ace in seventh heaven — coming as it did moments after the dynamic Scottish five-piece instrumental band Imar, of which he is also a member, had won the Horizon Award for best emerging act.

Mohsen couldn't have known that his reign as Musician of the Year was going to be probably the longest ever in the history of the annual BBC folk awards.

The awards have since been rescheduled from their traditional spring slot to autumn 2019, meaning he will hold the title for some 18 months.

Having previously been named BBC Radio Scotland's Young Traditional Musician of 2016, Amini is today one of the most popular musicians on the folk/acoustic circuit — a flamboyant force of nature and a natural showman with eye-defying, quickfire concertina skills and a never-failing bonhomie.

"It's been an unreal time," he says. "Last year we travelled all over the place, performed about 180 gigs and took 120 flights — it's been incredible! I released albums with Talisk, Imar and the quartet Fourth Moon, but unfortunately had to stand down from Fourth Moon due to having too many commitments."

"This year I've already toured Denmark, Ireland and America with Imar, then we have this spring Talisk tour and several festivals over the summer — from Cambridge



Flying high: Talisk's multi-award-winning concertina player Mohsen Amini and, inset, with bandmates Hayley Keenan (fiddle) and Graeme Armstrong (guitar). The band play Nettlebed village club at 8pm on Monday (April 29)

and Underneath the Stars in the UK to others in Italy, Portugal and Canada.

"In my opinion music is the best job in the world, but it's not as easy as it seems! Playing is great fun, but the reality is that you only play for about 90 minutes every day. The rest of the time is spent driving to the venue, checking into the hotel, sound checking and drinking — lemonade! — at night. You have to be ready to spend a lot of time away from home, so it's not for everyone."

Born in Glasgow 25 years ago to an English mother and an Iranian father, Mohsen, who also had an Irish grandfather, first picked up the concertina when he was about 10 years old and was immediately hooked.

"My sister Sophia and I went to Irish dancing classes and the musicians there hosted lessons on

Glasgow's Southside at a branch of the Irish music organisation, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

"I started playing the whistle there — I thought I might go for a few months and then opt for karate classes instead!

"Then one day the branch got a concertina and no one had a clue how to play it. They gave it to me and I managed to get a tune out of it so they said take it home and see what happens — and here I am 15 years later!"

When Mohsen won the BBC Radio Scotland award, he was the first concertina player to do so.

"It's an incredible but often overlooked instrument. I haven't a clue why it struck a chord with me, but it did — playing it came naturally and once I started, I couldn't stop. Over the years I've been tutored by folk musicians Mairi Campbell and Catriona



McArdle, but mostly I guess I've been teaching myself. Now my concertina and me are inseparable — I take it everywhere with me so it's great that it's not too big and can go in hand luggage!"

Mohsen quit a chemical engineering course at Strathclyde University to devote himself to a music career and has no regrets.

He says: "The concertina was my passion, even though I realised I would earn a lot less playing music than working as an engineer! I just love the whole folk music scene and the camaraderie."

Mohsen admits he quickly gets bored when the music stops — the only thumb-twiddling he enjoys being on the concertina.

"Seeing audiences clap along and making people happy has to be the best job in the world," he says.

Having already achieved so much in his chosen field at such a young age, what does the future hold?

"I just want to keep progressing my career and never stand still. We are tackling quite a lot of festivals I've always wanted to play in countries I've always dreamt of going to, so I guess the next step would be to figure out a way to headline those festivals!"

"I'm going to try my absolute best to champion the concertina and take it as far as I possibly can.

"Awards or not I'm happy playing a concertina for a living, though I still find it absolutely crazy from time to time that I'm actually doing it. But life doesn't get much better than this."

Monday's concert starts at 8pm, with doors opening at 7.45pm. Tickets are £15 in advance or £16 on the door. To book, call the box office on 01628 636620 or visit www.nettlebedfolkclub.co.uk

Comic's new show is not to be missed

Review

Jack Dee
Kenton Theatre
Tuesday, April 23

ONE of the very occasional bonuses of living in London (as I used to) was the ready availability of live comedy.

Venues like the Hen and Chickens pub-theatre in Highbury specialised in "work in progress" shows by well known names looking to try out their new material on an actual paying audience.

The likes of Frankie Boyle would stand there like a sort of clipboard comedian, ticking off what worked (most of it) and what didn't (not much of it) on his notepad.

It was cheap and cheerful fun and everyone got something out of the experience.

Jack Dee had a notepad too, which he placed on a little table next to his jug of water. But in the course of just over an hour lighting up the Kenton stage, he barely glanced at it. He didn't need to.

The young and highly likeable support act Jake Lambert had warmed up the audience with 30 minutes of confident chat about meeting and then moving in with his Australian girlfriend.

Then it was time for the man the late Jeremy Hardy called "a little ray of sleet".

People talk about observational comedy, and Dee does his fair share of that — but what really powers his stand-up is his dry, deadpan and baseline grumpy attitude to things.

The point being that it's an attitude nearly all of us share, whether we would care to admit it or not.

After joking that having done lots of sitcom work in recent years he was now



Heart of gold: Jack Dee with a Kenton guinea pig

returning to his first love — TV adverts — he fantasised about winning the lottery, gently mocking the slogan "Who wins if you win?" for its suggestion that the first thing you would do on winning a fortune is work out who to share it with.

"Who wins if you win? If I win ... I win," he said to cascades of laughter.

Like most comedians, Dee has done his fair share of benefit gigs for good causes over the years ("usually some horrible disease that you're probably not going to get anyway").

Everyone knows he's got a heart of gold underneath it all, but that just makes his grumpy pose all the funnier. Nothing is really off-limits but it never feels like he's being cruel either.

At 57, Dee is something of an elder statesman of stand-up in his trademark sharp suit, though he noted that he'd now reached the stage in his life where if he happened to be wearing a vintage suit — as he was on Tuesday night — people would just think it was one he'd owned from new.

With his four children now all of university age, he said he and his wife had found themselves "empty nesters" — something he'll be talking more about when he takes the show on tour.

Don't miss.

Matthew Wilson

Set the controls for the heart of Henley

FANS of legendary rockers Pink Floyd have a treat in store in the coming weeks, with not one but two tribute bands coming to town.

First up tomorrow night (Saturday), is a free concert by Brain Damaged at Lovibonds' tasting room, off the Greys Road car park.

The event starts at 8pm and runs until last orders at 11pm. For more information, visit www.lovibonds.com

Then on Friday, May 24, the Kenton Theatre is the venue for a show by fellow Floydians, Pulse.

A spokesman for the New Street venue said: "Pulse comprise seven experienced musicians who have been playing the music of Pink Floyd for a number of years but have only recently come together in their present line-up.

"Reviews have described how they are not only musically brilliant but also how they 'absolutely nailed' the sound of Pink Floyd, with the magnificence of the guitar solo in *Comfortably Numb* being a particular highlight and capacity audiences loving every note.

"The classic 'Waters, Gilmour, Wright and Mason' line-up is



Tribute-worthy: Pink Floyd

supplemented by two superb female backing vocalists — one of whom was a backing singer with the UK's 2018 Eurovision entry — and a saxophonist who has played with the likes of the Blues Band, Cliff Richard and Geno Washington.

"The show is enhanced by images and videos projected on to a large screen behind the band. Allow the magic of Shine On You Crazy Diamond's keyboard intro to whisk you back to Wembley Arena in 1977 or Earls Court in 1994 — you will not be disappointed."

The show, which starts at 8.30pm, has a running time of 140 minutes, including a 20-minute interval.

Tickets are £21. To book, call (01491) 575698 or visit www.kentontheatre.co.uk

For more information, visit www.pulseband.uk

Library exhibition helps put things in perspective

Review

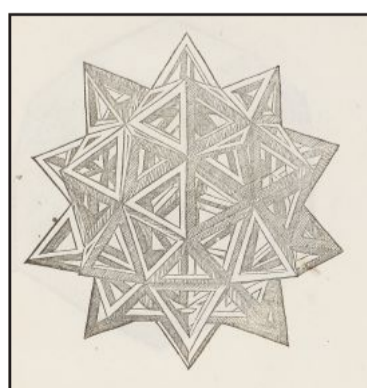
Thinking 3D
Weston Library, Oxford
Friday, April 12

THE recent picture of a black hole in a galaxy far, far away may have looked like a simple photograph but it wasn't, of course.

Rather it was the product of information painstakingly stored in a half a ton's worth of hard drives and then assembled like a monumentally complex jigsaw.

Thinking 3D, the intriguing exhibition currently on show at the Bodleian's Weston Library, delves back hundreds of years to reveal how human beings have tackled the problems of representing objects which are distant or complex or even hidden from sight altogether.

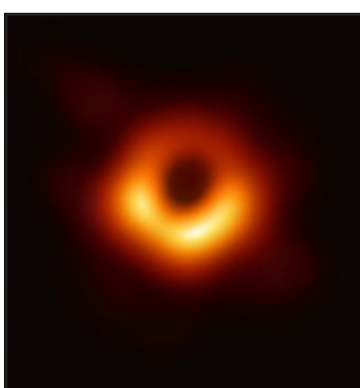
We experience things in three dimensions (four if you include time). How then do you "translate" those things onto the flat two-



Shapes in space: Da Vinci's icosidodecahedron and, right, the black hole

dimensional surface of a page? This question matters in at least four areas: abstract shapes, architecture, astronomy and anatomy.

Leonardo da Vinci was one of the first people to recreate in 2D what he saw or imagined in 3D. The only illustrations he did for a book published in his lifetime are of geometric shapes. On display here



is Leonardo's icosidodecahedron — that's a shape with 20 triangular faces and 12 pentagonal faces. Can't imagine it? Leonardo could and so he drew it. And George Hart, a geometric sculptor, has made a wooden model of it.

Exhibition visitors can also riffle through the pages of the Leicester Codex — pages from one of

Leonardo's notebooks — in an interactive display. Bill Gates bought the real thing for more than 30 million dollars in 1994.

How to depict the vast distances of space? In the 17th century Robert Fludd produced a book on cosmology. One of the pages is engraved black. Round the white margin there's a Latin inscription which reads "and so into infinity".

Architects need to visualise buildings inside and out, from above and below. Early illustrations here show that building design is a blend of art and geometry. Anatomists and budding doctors need to look inside the human body. Here are precise pictures which literally peel off the top layer to uncover the one beneath.

Thinking 3D runs until next February. It is an exhibition which is both absorbing and revealing.

For more information, visit www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk

Philip Gooden