



EXCLUSIVE
by COLAN LAMONT

COUNTRY singer Catherine McGrath is a rising star — and is tipped for out-of-this-world success by Rocket Man Elton John.

The 21-year-old was stunned when the music icon contacted her to praise her debut album. Catherine, from Rostrevor, Northern Ireland, released Talk Of The Town in July after two-and-a-half-years of writing songs.

And after Elton played the title track on his Beats 1 radio show, he said: "This is a great song. It reminds me of early Taylor Swift. I think this girl is going to be huge."

Modest Catherine says: "He likes to play new music and discovers lots of artists."

"If I'm honest I couldn't believe he even had a clue who I was."

"He played one of my songs and then Facetimed me. We had an amazing chat where we spoke about songwriting and my album."

"He said he was a fan and couldn't believe this was only my first album."

"That really boosted my confidence and was such an exciting thing to happen and even crazier that it happened before my album was even out."

"My family couldn't believe it. It's Elton John so you don't expect it."

Since moving to London three years ago, the singer has built a large fanbase all over the UK.

In May, she played Glasgow for the first time and is coming back to the city's Saint Luke's venue on September 26.

With family across Scotland, Catherine hopes it will become a second home to her.

She says: "The first time I played there it was so much fun."

"Scottish and Irish fans are different to anywhere else as they're so enthusiastic."

"They are both such friendly and warm places and have this crazy love of music unlike anywhere else."

"Just like home, I notice it over in Scotland. Glasgow is one of the shows I'm most excited for so hopefully they will have as much fun as I

I'm talk of the town after Elton praise



ON SONG WITH YOUR SONG . . . Elton, left, loves Catherine and her album

know

that I'll be having."

After playing some one-off headline shows, this will be Catherine's first tour.

Though she's nervous, she can't wait to get top billing and is excited to be getting the chance to play live in different cities. She says: "This is the first time we are doing it as a headline tour."

"With the album just out I have loads of new songs and the most fun part will be see-

ing the reactions and finding out what everyone's favourite track is.

"I've been lucky that I've been able to support bands like The Shires in the past whose music I really loved."

"Each time people came and heard my music more people would learn about me."

"So it's really cool now to play these shows and the same type of music I know I'd be a fan of."

"All these people listening to my music are kind of like my

friends because we all love the same stuff."

"It's nice so many people want to see me."

"It's different for people who see you supporting another act and to go out of their way to listen to your music and show up at your own show."

"This has already been the best year of my life and it's only going to get better."

● Catherine plays Saint Luke's in Glasgow on September 26. Go to livenation.co.uk for tickets.

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It's no war game - more about how your loyalty works

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

WE love it when firms bring something different to the gaming table so props to Aardman and DigixArt for 11-11: Memories Retold.

The World War One setting has been the base for many good games, and this one is inspired by real events. But, in a neat twist, it lets you play as both sides — as a Canadian and German soldier. Aardman producer George Rowe and Yoan Fanise, the creative director at DigixArt reckon they have a bit of a star on their hands and took time out at Gamescom recently to tell our STUART CULLEN why...

Yoan says: "We say it's not a war game. It is set during it but it's a game about peace and about the interaction between humans during times of war. The game shows how the characters are not prepared for what is going to happen at war."

George, below, added: "The game follows two characters from both sides as they are thrust into something they don't understand for different reasons. They end up forming an unlikely friendship. Through the rest of the war, on the run up to the Armistice, their friendship is tested as is the loyalty to their families, friends and countries."

"At its heart the game is all about loyalty and, when it comes down to it, whether you are loyal to your friends and family or your country."

While they were conscious of the facts during WWI, they have given themselves some breathing room with the story.

George admitted: "The story is fiction but it is set in the real events so you go through the real timeline of the last two years of the war. You'll be at major battles and events of the war."

"Even though the story itself is fictional it is very much based on real accounts and letters and things that the team have read and taken inspiration from." But he insisted: "It's very important to us that people understand that this was a real event."

Yoan, above, believes the fictional element gave them more licence to entertain. He added "By creating fictional characters we can take all the very interesting things we researched and put them all together to give an overview of the whole war though the two characters."

"I think World War One is interesting because you don't have the black and white-like Nazi thing. You could not make the game in WWII because the idea of two humans who are just there and they don't know why they are fighting isn't as clear as it was in World War One. It is not as clean cut as good versus evil. It was more political and, ultimately, about jealousy between the countries."

"That is a silly reason to go to war but it's interesting. Do humans really want to die for that?"

George also reckons they got the timing of the release just right. He said: "This year is the century of the Armistice so hopefully the game will encourage some people to engage with it because it finishes at the Armistice that led to the end of the war. The game is going to be released 100 years after the events in the game so it's important for people to understand what happened."

It handled everything with ease and at speed.

The 120Hz display makes everything look buttery smooth, although the auto brightness is not the sharpest when you are just moving around the home screen.

That also caused our only stressful moment — the light sensor went solo a couple of times and went so dark that it thought the phone was off and locked itself.

You might want to try to hard reset to sort that little problem.

We played everything from Tekken, Gear.Club, Max Payne, Fallout Shelter, PUBG and Guns Of Boom and they all ran really well with virtually no issues.

Given the size of the handset when using virtual



TAKE the game for a spin by downloading the Forza Horizon 4 demo now. In other news, the game has officially gone gold — development is done.

Thrills on the Horizon

FORZA Horizon 4 is gearing up for its October launch by PROVING it has some of the hottest arcade-style racing on the planet.

The guys at Playground are so confident they have raised the bar that they showed off some gameplay that will have fans drooling.

We were invited to a preview event at the top-secret McLaren HQ in Woking where we got to see some of the hot metal that will actually grace the game.

We were also given the chance to play an almost completed build of the game — the whole map and a number of races and showcase events.

It all kicks off with a sneak peek at the journey ahead, then you can pick from a hot hatch, sports car or a muscle motor as your starter car. It is all a neat glimpse at the variety of cars coming your way.

You then start to climb the ranks in a bid to become a Horizon superstar through racing, drifting and off-roading. And, on the way, you'll tackle a few events which throw up some unlikely but entertaining challenges.

At Gamescom in Germany, we went face to face with a motocross stunt team. That was a blast. This time it was a

hovercraft as it ripped through the Highlands and offered some stunning scenery. We also got a taste of Horizon's Edinburgh. We threw a Subaru Impreza around Princes Street and the tight roads were simply awesome.

It soon became obvious why Playground picked the city — prepare yourself for epic races, with wide straight and tight twisting backstreets.

Add in the standard Horizon fare, like smashing billboards for bonuses, using the speed cameras to set fast times and jumping the danger signs and you have a fun festival to feast on. There are also plenty of customisable options, from the painting booth to the avatars.

This may have been an early build but the developers have given it a nice polish from the light reflecting off the back window as you go sideways to mud flying as you race through a farm.

Fans and newcomers will be blown away by the new offer. Even veterans of the series won't be ready for the thrills. This is racing at its finest.

And just when you couldn't get more excited, we got a tour of real-life McLaren motoring magic. It is a tough job but someone has to do it. Sorry.

STUART CULLEN

THERE are phones, good phones then there is a Razer.

It may not be the first name when you think of the best way to call your mum, but Razer's gaming pedigree mean they bring a lot to the party.

That playing excellence adds a whole new dimension to the main reason why most of us have mobiles — to check the internet, watch programmes and play games.

The Razer Phone is a mobile that is built for gamers — it is brilliant with video, audio and just on looks. It is the first smartphone to support BOTH HDR and 5.1 surround sound content. Oh yeah, it also makes calls.

We gave it the ultimate road test — in the darkened halls of Gamescom in Germany for a week.

We shouldn't say it but we also dropped it a couple of times... and it is tough.

The first thrill is the BOX your phone arrives in.

Yes, it is just a box, but it shows the level of detail that defines Razer.

The handset is a big block metal case with a neat matt black finish just like the firm's laptops.

The size is obvious but it's not too weighty.

The operating system is Android with a 5.72in Sharp IGZO screen displaying 2560 x 1440 with 120Hz refresh rate with UltraMotion sync along with a Qualcomm Snapdragon 835 processor and 8GB of RAM. In short, it's a beast.

Buttery smooth

It has dual front-facing speakers with individual Dolby Atmos amplifiers, 64GB internal storage with the option to bump it up to 2TB, fingerprint scanner and 12MP + 12MP rear camera along with an 8MP camera.

It talks the talk and walks the walk, even if the cameras are a little bit of a let-down.

We used it for everything from gaming to emailing to texting and calling.

It handled everything with ease and at speed.

The 120Hz display makes everything look buttery smooth, although the auto brightness is not the sharpest when you are just moving around the home screen.

That also caused our only stressful moment — the light sensor went solo a couple of times and went so dark that it thought the phone was off and locked itself.

You might want to try to hard reset to sort that little problem.

We played everything from Tekken, Gear.Club, Max Payne, Fallout Shelter, PUBG and Guns Of Boom and they all ran really well with virtually no issues.

Given the size of the handset when using virtual

Razer Phone

£699.99 or contract with 3



buttons, the screen was still clear, even with your fingers and thumbs tapping and swiping like mad.

The impressive battery life came into its own at Gamescom.

The emergency power bank stayed in the case even though the phone was pretty much in constant use. It easily lasted a whole day on one full charge.

But here is some really cool info that will blow your mind.

Razer has a concept called Project Linda.

It is an ultra-portable laptop powered by your phone.

You think we are joking? No, simply fit your phone into a socket in the keyboard and you are up and running with typical Razer lights and colours.

The phone's speakers, performance and display combine with the bigger screen, keyboard and battery on the laptop to provide a pretty stunning piece of kit.

Razer may be proud of this little baby, but they are not resting on their laurels.

A new 2 version is in the pipeline, promising even more power and excitement.

They may be known for high-end gaming PC gear and laptops but this first outing into the mobile world is a highly impressive one.

This is not just one of the most powerful phones on the market but it is great to use and perfect for gamers on the move.

STUART CULLEN

Hello, this phone's a cut above



Razer Hammerhead USB-C

£79.99

HEADPHONES called Hammerhead are always going to have plenty of bite.

They are the perfect partner for the Razer Phone. It has the same polished style, fit and finish as the handset.

The Hammerhead has 10mm dynamic drivers which have a great range of clean, crisp sound. The sound stage and bass really do boom.

The earphones are made from aluminium which makes them feel really solid while the connecting wire is a flat cable in signature Razer green. They have an in-line volume control as well as a mic so you can answer calls while wearing them. There are a number of switchable rubber cups so you can use the ones that are the best fit for your ears. That's a nice touch.

The buds light up in typical Razer fashion — showing off the logo in green — and they are magnetic. That is simple, but clever because they can join together when you aren't using them. That is a winner when you are travelling on a plane and they are round your neck.

The headphones work well with the Razer Phone Dolby Atmos feature as you can build custom set-ups for gaming or music.

Another nice touch is the hard carry case which protects them when not in use, and is ideal for storing spare bud cups.

If you have Razer phone then you will want these. But if you have any device that uses USB-C, then Hammerheads rock.

STUART CULLEN

ERISKA

WHERE: Glasgow
WHO: Aileen Sweeney (accordion), Scott Figgins (pipes/whistles), Madeleine Stewart (fiddle), Dario Palazzo (guitar), Julian Pombo (bass), Gavin Paterson (drums)

FOR FANS OF: Skerryvore, Mánran, Skippin'ish

JIM SAYS: When Celtic Connections comes around each January in Glasgow, I'm always reminded about the huge wealth of young traditional talent out there.

I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have come across Eriska were it not for Celtic Connections. The six-piece played their first ever gig last year at the festival, and it opened many doors for them.

Featuring graduates and students from the traditional music, jazz and classical courses at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, they fuse traditional and contemporary music.

Personnel are drawn not only from Scotland, but Argentina, Italy and the USA. The background of each member adds to the mix. Accordionist Aileen said: "Each of us has a different musical upbringing. Scott grew



NEW MUSIC

By Jim Gellatly

up playing in pipe bands with a very traditional way of playing. I studied classical music at university and Julian studied jazz. Dario and Gavin met through playing mostly rock and pop to give the music its modern feel. Being from the USA Madeleine has a very American, bluesy feel to her playing. She's also a fantastic writer and wrote most of the tunes on the album."

They all have a unique part to play in the band. Aileen added: "Aside from playing styles, everyone has their own skill set. Gavin recorded and mixed the entire album in his studio. It took us over a year to record the album as we recorded only a few tunes at a time once we had finished arranging them. I was constantly wanting to change parts and



Watch a video of the band at: thescottishsun.co.uk

re-record sections again. We recorded just one particular drum fill 53 times until we got it perfect!"

The resulting album, At The Wrong Gig, is a stunning collection of tunes. Aileen said: "Having something to show for all the work we have put in up until now is really rewarding and the fact that people are loving it is really promising."

As for the album title, it's a jokey reference to some early gigs. Aileen told me: "We took any gig that was offered regardless of the event."

"We felt very out of place at some where we would be on the bill with punk, rock, thrash and metal bands. We would stick out like a sore thumb coming onstage with bagpipes!"

Most in the traditional scene seem to have embraced Eriska though. Aileen continued: "Most people who have heard us really enjoy what we are trying to do with Scottish music. There are a few that still prefer the traditional way of playing but in that case, we aren't the band for them."

Though At The Wrong Gig came out in July, Eriska celebrate the release with an official launch on Saturday at The Flying Duck in Glasgow. Aileen added: "We hope to organise a Scottish tour for summer next year, but there are some fantastic Celtic festivals abroad we'd love to play."

MORE: eriska.net

Jim presents a weekly showcase of New Music on Amazing Radio Sundays 2-4pm. Go to amazingradio.com and jimgellatly.com

