

# SYR

by Erin Rado

At the recent Tucson Celtic Festival and Highland Games, I had the awesome experience of rocking out to the Saturday night performance by SYR.

This Celtic Rock band from Columbia, South Carolina is amazing. Taking inspiration from Celtic history, stories and myths, SYR (pronounced sire) creates powerful songs with themes of battle, love and victory. Each is inspiring and celebrates the rich heritage of the Celtic people in a contemporary style. SYR's reputation for high-energy performances has made the band a popular attraction for many Celtic festivals and events. Indeed, it was a head-banging time to be had!

Front man Kyle MacCallum founded SYR on the belief that his Celtic heritage could be brought to life with a unique musical voice. The rest of the ensemble is filled out by Kyle's sister, Laurel MacCallum (vocals & percussion), Kelly Vance (bass), Greg Vance (drums), Ben Campbell (guitar), and Worth Lewallen (fiddle).

From their humble beginnings at pubs and small local festivals, SYR has been welcomed to perform at The Celtic Classic (PA), Longs Peak ScotFest (CO), Niagara Celtic Fest (NY), The New Hampshire Highland Games, Tucson Celtic Fest (AZ), Savannah Irish Fest (GA), Tartan Day South (SC), Asheville Celtic Festival (NC), Irish Fest Camden (SC) and many others.

SYR has also been honored to perform alongside such established groups as Albannach, Glengarry Bhoys, Seven Nations, Enter the Haggis, The Byrne Brothers, The Tannahill Weavers, Steel City Rovers, and many more.

Now SYR prepares to release their much anticipated third album, *Sentinel*. Fortunately, SYR was kind enough to send me an advanced copy, which you can now hear on [Celtic Rock Radio](#). So how about we dive a little deeper into *Sentinel* and discover more about SYR.

**Erin:** Hey Kyle. First, thanks for sitting for an interview. Your show at Tucson was off the chart. You had the crowd right where you wanted them, and we all just loved you. So let's chat about *Sentinel*.

**Kyle:** Sure. I'm happy to be here, and I'm so glad you enjoyed the show.

**Erin:** As you know, I had the opportunity to listen to *Sentinel* before I saw you live. The first thing I noticed was how the music strikes a primal beat. It makes me think of ancient campfires and ritual dances. In the opening song, *Revenant*, your voice fills my mind. You have such a clear tone. And the chorus on this song just lifts me away into a musical flight.

**Kyle:** Thanks. We work hard on creating our sound, and each of our albums tells a story. We felt that *Revenant* was a good way to start things off.

**Erin:** I love the intro to the song, *Tir n' Aill*. It's everything I expect in a Celtic rock piece. A few bars of a single-string instrument before the full band kicks in. Then Laurel takes over, and her voice is so lyrical.

**Kyle:** I wanted to give Laurel more to sing, so I wrote more of an upbeat piece for her with *Tir n' Aill*. Ben and I are singing backup vocals on this one.

**Erin:** For *Specters*, I like the strong intro. This is a piece I will just sit back and let you take me where you want to go. It's a mello, yet pulsing, rock tune... with a bit of an edge here and there.

And then comes *Sentinel*, which definitely has that traditional Celtic vibe. But it's not long before the guitar underscores that vibe, as does the percussion, and before I realize it, I'm listening to a great song with ancient roots.

**Kyle:** Thank you, the goal with those songs was to blend the more traditional styles with upbeat and complex cadences.

**Erin:** *Sentinel* does have a complex cadence. It must have been tricky to write and perform. Am I hearing heavy metal influence?

**Kyle:** Yes, there is a bit of a heavy metal influence. During my teenage years, I played with a death metal band as lead guitar and vocals (screams). I grew to appreciate the catharsis of a song, and having a background death metal gave me experience in complex drum cadences.





### Kyle MacCallum and Kelly Vance

**Erin:** *The Painted Ones* starts with a good drum line, so I know something awesome is coming. The intro builds like a battle march. It's dangerous, and I'm on the edge of my seat. It almost reminds me of action thriller score until the fiddle and tin whistle takes over the melody. Then it's Celtic dangerous! Great instrumental.

For *Baobhan Sith*, the story of this ballad gives me goose bumps. You're singing about a guy who's clearly wandering into danger. The chorus is so haunting.

Brrrr... There's nothing more to say about this piece except that everyone simply has to listen to it and get swept away by the story. Anyone who knows anything about the Sith (pronounced Shee) knows that the main character of this story should have run away as soon as he had the chance!

**Kyle:** You got it. The character in this story is a hunter who has left the safety of the sheiling (or hunting lodge). He hears the song of a Baobhan Sith which is the equivalent of a vampire in Scottish folklore, and is drawn to her call. And as you can imagine, it doesn't end well for him!

**Erin:** *Lay of the Ashes* is another upbeat Celtic rock ballad. Your voice almost has a warning as you sing the story. Lots of forward energy in this piece. It makes me head-bang a bit. I love the instrumental bridge as well. It balances the vocals.

**Kyle:** It was hard for me to get through this piece in the studio as it was very personal for me. It's a song about growing and changing. In the story, a dry and withered tree, that's in the path of a forest fire, ultimately realizes it was meant to be part of the fire that consumes it.

**Erin:** *Idistaviso* has a sound that doesn't match the rest of the album, which is very interesting. It has kind of a late 1800's story ballad feel, like an Irish Lament, a Civil War Lament, or maybe even a Celtic "Old West" cautionary tale.

**Kyle:** The title came from a battle in Roman-era Germany, and the main character's brother fights against him. It's a song about the loss of brotherhood and is a somewhat more 'folksy ballad' telling of an ancient story. In a way, the song is meant to sneak listeners into Celtic music, with both a Celtic and an Appalachian sound.

**Erin:** *Oran Na Gaillinn* - ah, a dulcimer and a whistle. Now that's a great way to start any Celtic song, but knowing SYR, this one wouldn't stay traditional, and in a few bars and the full band goes for it. Great sound on this piece. It's a classic stage song.

**Kyle:** *Oran Na Gaillinn* is a song that likens a battle to a storm. There is no shelter from the storm. You can't escape, and the storm will transform you no matter how hard you try to avoid your fate.

**Erin:** *Albion II* is sung in Gaelic, so naturally I wasn't able to follow the story. But it also has the same full sound as *Oran Na Gaillinn*. Great instrumentals amid the vocals.

**Kyle:** *Albion II* is a remake of a song from our first album, that we wanted to expand. We had a friend of ours, Jason Bond, a Gaelic instructor - "Gaelic with Jason" - help us with it.

**Erin:** *Legacy* is interesting. It has a very engaging cadence. The band really needs to watch what it's doing so that no one falls out of sync. I'll bet that death metal background helped keep the band together, right?

**Kyle:** Right. It's a very rhythmic piece, and it's based on the poem *Ozymandias* by Percy Bysshe Shelly.

**Erin:** I love the sense of motion in *To Avalon*. It again calls me to follow where the song goes. Quite driving and adventurous. Really great drum work. This is an awesome instrumental to finish the album. This is definitely the type of song you want to play when blasting down the freeway.

**Kyle:** *To Avalon* was an experiment in timing. I wanted to see if I could 'get away with it'



Front man Kyle doing his thing!

because it's a single drum hit for most of the song, which may not be engaging. But then other pieces come together to create a song that really pulses.

**Erin:** So, how do you come by your sound?

**Kyle:** For as long as I can remember we had traditional Celtic music in our house. My mom is a Celtic singer so I was kind of born into it. Though I played other genres through, my teenage years I was always drawn back to those roots. In the early years of SYR we played mostly traditional pub songs, but once I started writing my own songs, I restarted SYR to focus on our material. Our first album was fun, but with "The Winter King" we found the sound we were looking for.

**Erin:** How do you compose songs that evoke such emotion?

**Kyle:** I write songs that create a unique place and time, and I'm always looking for something different. If I have a chord progression in my head, I play around with it until I find the right combination, which can be both primal and archaic. Foggy Pictish hills imagery, rugged highlands, deep forests. They all inspire me. I write with a picture in my mind of where a song takes place.

**Erin:** So do you compose most of SYR's songs?

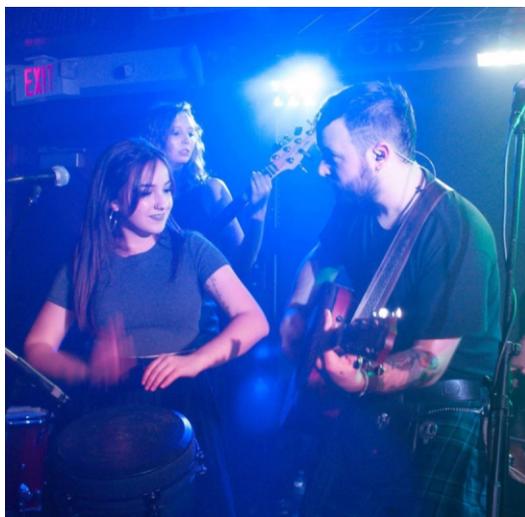
**Kyle:** Yes. I write the pieces in a song and then share them with the band members. They add their own flourishes, and everything comes together when we play live. We record when we're all happy with the way the initial performances go. I like recording before touring, that way people are surprised with the direction an album takes.

**Erin:** Since your work is so thematic, do you consider your albums 'concept' albums?

**Kyle:** Not really, but each song in an album takes place in the same "world" which keeps the themes consistent across the albums. It's a balance to evoke a primal feeling while giving listeners a good experience.

**Erin:** So what's next for SYR?

**Kyle:** Fortunately, a lot of festivals are coming back and have re-booked us so we're doing a lot of highland games and theater shows. Only two songs from *Sentinel* have been released as singles, but the entire album will be released soon!



**Laurel MacCallum and brother Kyle**

# SYR

www.syrmusic.com  
www.facebook.com/thebandsyr  
Instagram: @syr\_music  
www.youtube.com/SyrMusic  
Booking information:  
info@syrmusic.com



**Ben Campbell and Worth Lewallen**

### **SYR Prepares for Release of Third Album with New Single, "Tir n'Aill"**

With the online release of their newest single, *Tir n'Aill*, SYR has more than quadrupled their Spotify fanbase in a matter of days. The song's companion YouTube lyric video journeys through mystical and mysterious lands, and heralds the imminent release of their much anticipated third album, *Sentinel*.

