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DEBUT ALBUM FROM HEATHER MACLEOD, *CROSSING TIDES*, RELEASED ON JANUARY 27 2005

Scottish singer-songwriter Heather Macleod has just launched her eagerly-awaited debut album, *CROSSING TIDES*, with a concert at Celtic Connections festival in Glasgow on January 27.

Produced by Heather herself, and released on her own Leod Music label, the album includes the double bass legend **Danny Thompson** – who will also be joining Heather for the live show – and double Grammy Award-winner **Sugar Blue** on harmonica, heading up a hand-picked list of top Scottish based instrumentalists.

Originally from the Isle of Lewis, but based in Edinburgh for the past decade, Heather is already well known for her singing with such diverse acts as the **Eliza Carthy Band, La Boum's Wee Free & Jim Condie's Distant Cousins**. Over the last two years, however, she has concentrated increasingly on developing her own songwriting and solo work, which have been warmly received by audiences and critics alike:

*"... a solo talent to watch, marrying poignant, darkly piquant songwriting with a creamily curvaceous voice that ranged the full gamut from velvety intimacy to majestic, rafter-rattling intensity." * * * * ** (The Scotsman.)

"Her style touches on the roots conscious sound of Portishead and blends this with the finesse of a timeless jazz vocalist." (Blue Note Productions)

"She's making waves with her own song-writing and showcasing a unique creative identity. . .Painting vivid pictures with her seductively world-weary voice, Heather is definitely a performer to keep an eye on" (www.bbc.co.uk/celticroots/sessions)

As well as her own headline appearances, 2004 saw Heather opening shows for such leading artists as **Cara Dillon, Michael Marra, Eliza Carthy, Tam White, Bert Jansch and Paddy Casey**. Her startlingly individual voice, together with her songs' potent poetic language, vivid imagery and filmic atmosphere have drawn comparisons ranging from Annie Lennox to Goldfrapp.

It's those original songs that dominate *CROSSING TIDES*, among them the hypnotic, slow-pulsing *Languid Line*, the lyrical and nakedly emotive *Fantasy*, and the blues-drenched opener, *That Old Devil Called Drink*. The influence of Heather's beloved Led Zeppelin underlies *The Home Strait*, while her affinity with jazz standards can be heard in the tongue-in-cheek *Man of Many Valentines*. These jazzy tonalities feature among a broad palette of harmonic colours and subtly shaped rhythms, showcasing the versatility of a voice that can range from honeyed smoothness to biting astringency. Two compelling covers complete the collection: Richard Thompson's *Baby, She Don't Know What to Do With Herself*, and *Weightless*, written by former band-mate Quee MacArthur.

Although she sang Gaelic songs as a child (growing up on Lewis, it was well-nigh obligatory!), Heather would have hesitated to cite this rich home heritage as a major influence before *CROSSING TIDES* began taking shape. "I'm usually inspired to write by particular scenarios or incidents in everyday life, whether they happen to me or other people," she says. "But when I heard the songs as a group, I realised that although there might not be an overt link with the tradition, the overall feel and flow of the old Gaelic sea songs is actually a really strong element in the sound, as well as the blues, jazz and folk influences from the music I've been involved in since. There are many mentions of the sea or the weather, just an underlying sense of the sea and the tides as a presence around me – even though I'm not living on the island any more. The title also intends to reflect the breadth and diversity of the material on the album - which is another aspect I ended up being quite surprised at."

The recording process for *CROSSING TIDES*, which took place in the Scottish Borders and Brighton over a period of 6 months, was both organic and carefully considered. Once Heather had created a body of songs, the possibility of working with her long-time hero, **Danny Thompson** – famed for his seminal work with **Pentangle, Richard Thompson, Nick Drake and John Martyn**, among many others - opened up a host of new possibilities.

"A lot of those classic albums that Danny had played on had made a huge impact on me over the years," Heather explains, "so he'd been in my musical consciousness for a long time - I found I was hearing his playing when I was writing a lot of the songs. Then when I was just about to embark on recording, Martin Carthy – a good friend of Danny's, who I knew through working with Eliza's band – got to hear about this pipe-dream I had of getting Danny to play on the album. Unbeknownst to me, Martin phoned Danny to sound him out, Danny said yes - and it was suddenly really happening.

"I knew Danny would be true to the songs," she continues, "and would also raise the game for everyone else involved – especially for me! The key thing I love about his playing is that he's got a really distinctive and unique 'voice' as a direct result of working right across the board, soaking up different sounds and styles.

I recorded with him and the core of the band first, working mainly in a live format to capture his response to the songs. By getting that down, I hoped that the additional musicians would respond in turn to what he'd played, again often using a 'first-pass' approach to retain the spontaneity, but with that initial backbone through the material to create a sense of cohesion."

Apart from **Sugar Blue**, whom Heather originally met through working with Scottish bluesman **Jim Condie**, and who contributes his trademark scorching licks to two tracks, the rest of the album's guests have been drawn from her diverse experiences and acquaintances across the Scottish music scene. They include the multi-talented acoustic guitarist **Steven Polwart; Donald Hay** (Mystery

Juice, Unusual Suspects, Nusa, Bachu_, Sunhoney) on drums; leading jazzers **Paul Harrison** (piano), **Stuart Ritchie** (drums) and **Marcus Britton** (cornet/French horn); **Donald MacDougall** (Mystery Juice) on electric guitar, and an 4-piece string ensemble from celebrated alt.classical outfit **Mr McFalls Chamber**.

"Although on the one hand the songs are quite arranged, I think you can really hear the musicians playing with and off each other in the moment," Heather says. "It is a studio album, but I didn't want it to sound overworked and dead, which is often the danger when you've got a lot of different layers going on. The way it's evolved, though, it feels as if everyone's all in the same room together – even though some of the players haven't actually yet met."

After a final ten days with Al Scott (The Levellers, Derek B, Eliza Carthy) at Metway Studios in Brighton, he was left to finish mixing and mastering the album. As the final culmination of this long-time labour of love, ***Crossing Tides*** was officially released on Leod Music, Heather's own label, on January 27th, with a launch concert at the Tron Theatre in Glasgow, as part of Celtic Connections Festival.

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For full biography please go to www.heathermacleod.org.uk

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Notes to editors:

CROSSING TIDES (LEOD001CD) is released on Leod Music on January 27th. Distribution by Proper Music Distribution and Highlander Music.