



The Bard's Tale IV™  
DIRECTOR'S CUT

The title screen features the text 'The Bard's Tale IV™' in a highly ornate, golden, gothic-style font. The word 'The' is smaller and positioned above 'Bard's'. Below the main title, a horizontal line separates it from the words 'DIRECTOR'S CUT' in a simpler, golden, serif font. The background is dark with a subtle, shimmering texture.

**Preserving Scotland's sonic history  
through the medium of a video game**

# Overview

Interviewee:

Ged Grimes, composer and musician

During the pandemic, computer gaming and games development grew significantly. This case study explores the design of narrative, imagery and, in particular, the soundtrack created for *The Bard's Tale IV: Barrows Deep*.

This computer game intentionally evokes a recognisable place — Scotland. However, the setting is also entirely fictional. The digital gaming experience informs the ways in which cultural history and economic opportunity can intersect, and how games design may provide alternative potential methods of building resilience into the Experience Economy in the longer term, involving both creative and tourism sectors.

This case study is explored from the perspective of the composer and musician Ged Grimes, who created the soundtrack to the game. It highlights the importance of authenticity of experience, even in a fictional realm. The game's broader cultural impact was deemed to be of national significance, and it received publicity and support from VisitScotland around the release of the soundtrack.



KEEPER OF THE OLD WAYS

Find Fiona's House

# About *The Bard's Tale IV: Barrows Deep*

*The Bard's Tale IV* is a multiplatform, turn-based role-playing game (RPG). The genre is an evolution of classic tabletop gaming, such as the Warhammer or Dungeons & Dragons titles, where players pit competing forces against one another in imagined battle scenarios set in fantasy realms, using physical models, dice, deep lore and behaviour-determining character attributes.

*The Bard's Tale IV* was first showcased at the Game Developers Conference (March 2018) before full public release (August 2019). Set in a fictionalised version of Scotland, the game builds on the past cult popularity of the series, which launched in 1985 on the Apple II and Commodore 64 home computers with a medieval backdrop.

Blending an RPG with deep narrative storytelling and interactive player decision-making, *The Bard's Tale IV* features a soundtrack curated and composed by Grimes, current bassist with renowned band Simple Minds.



INTO THE WOOD  
Speak to the Leader of the Fichti

# The Land of Caith

for The Bard's Tale IV: Barrows Deep  
by game-maps.com

**Game trailer**  
(Click to play)



# Place-based context: the score



Set in 18th-century Scotland, the game features a score by Grimes that is integral to building out the depiction of this virtual world, and encompasses a range of historical musical genres specific to Scottish folk and religious musical traditions.

The soundtrack is comprised of 36 original compositions created in collaboration with local artists from across Scotland, in addition to which a fully orchestrated bonus EP featuring four tracks was released.

The soundtrack of *The Bard's Tale IV* informs the key narrative with emotional beats throughout the game. The soundtrack also offers an invaluable historical record and repository of endangered music that documents archetypal Scottish folk tales, oral histories and instruments and musical styles unique to the Scottish tradition.

While the game itself was developed by US-based studio [InXile Entertainment](#), the music was created and recorded exclusively in Scotland, and the appointment of Grimes ensured the development of an authentic score.



A HOME IN THE DARK  
Find the Adventurers' Guild

# Cultural development

In terms of creative execution and production, *The Bard's Tale IV* represents a unique exercise in cataloguing, chronicling and curating the Scottish folk and traditional music genre. With many of the game's players based outside Scotland having possibly limited or no direct prior knowledge of Scottish cultural history or traditions, and with the heightened circumstances of the Covid-19 lockdown, placing this music in the context of a video game was an entirely novel scenario. The potential for engagement with these traditions and sounds by new audiences was considered by VisitScotland to have a broader cultural impact and international reach that was of national significance, and consequently it endorsed the release of the game's soundtrack.

The music was created and recorded exclusively in Scotland. Importantly, performers and musicians were recruited to the project from across all age groups and regions of Scotland, serving to reinforce and enhance the already strong ties that exist across the various Scottish music communities.

Grimes visited many of the regularly occurring fèis (informal musical gatherings), where Scottish musicians meet to perform, build connections with other artists and share songs, musical styles and stories as part of sustaining local and national cultural threads. At these events, he invited musicians to participate in the creation of the soundtrack, ensuring a wider network of performers was represented through the project — and, ultimately, ensuring the authenticity of the soundtrack.

# The Land of Caith

for The Bard's Tale IV: Barrows Deep

by game-maps.com

## Celtic Connections

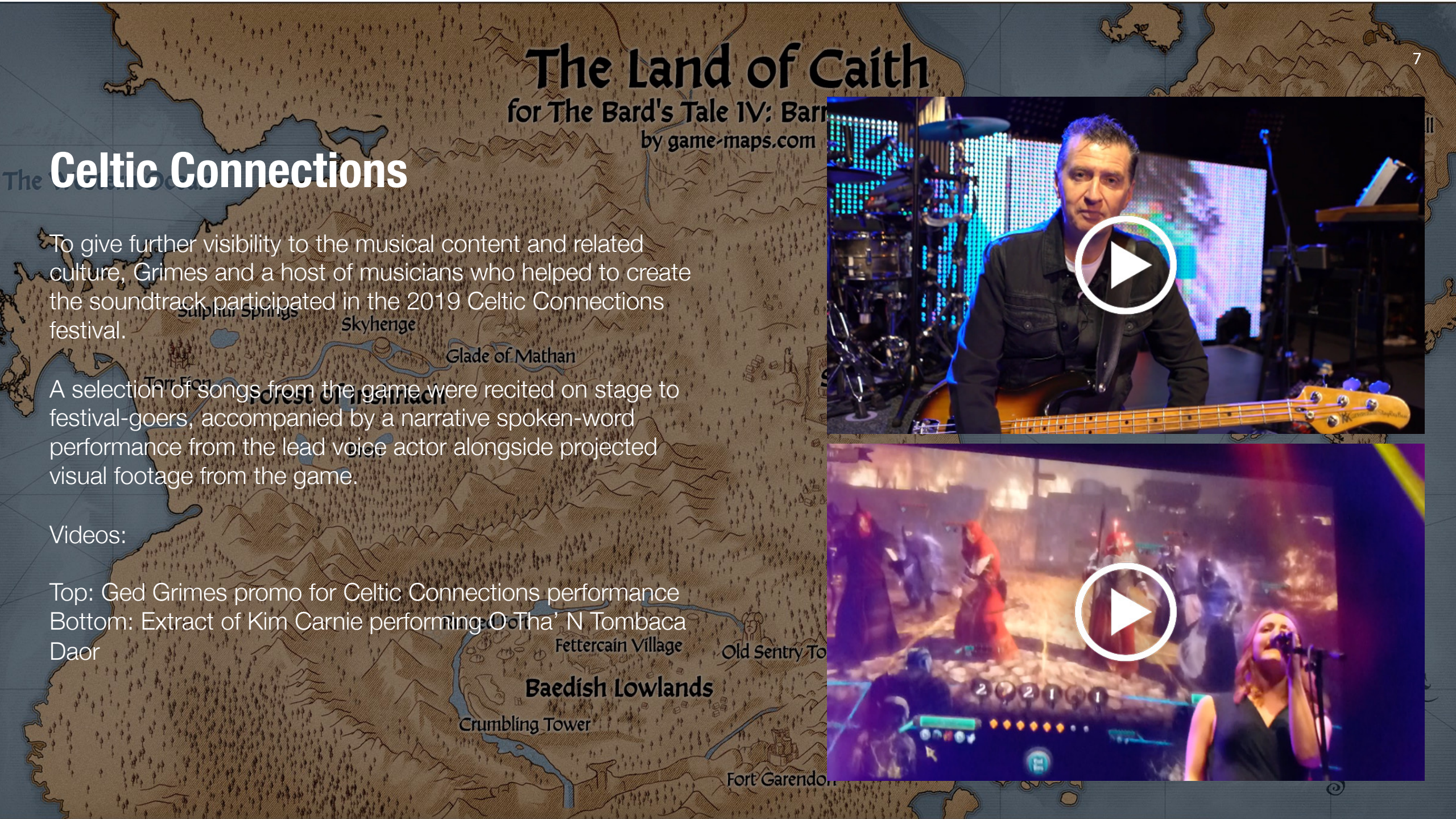
To give further visibility to the musical content and related culture, Grimes and a host of musicians who helped to create the soundtrack participated in the 2019 Celtic Connections festival.

A selection of songs from the game were recited on stage to festival-goers, accompanied by a narrative spoken-word performance from the lead voice actor alongside projected visual footage from the game.

Videos:

Top: Ged Grimes promo for Celtic Connections performance

Bottom: Extract of Kim Carnie performing O Tha' N Tombaca Daor



# Cultural regeneration/preservation

Work on the music for *The Bard's Tale IV* began in 2016. Game developer InXile Entertainment provided a brief that covered key narrative and character moments throughout the game, with discussions taking place ahead of composition to explore and agree on key elements such as mood and tone. Ultimately, Grimes was given autonomy over the creative direction of the soundtrack, composition, sounds and instruments — which added significantly to the novel approach undertaken and the authenticity achieved.

Grimes approached the project with the intention of including emerging Celtic talent alongside more experienced musicians, as well as actively seeking to find members of the broad Scottish folk music community with expertise in a particular style, genre or oral history. Promoting the culture and language of Scotland was key to his creative agenda, recognising the wider opportunity to bring previously unheard styles of music to the global gaming community.



# Cultural regeneration/preservation

Grimes spent time recording the stories and the oral history of the music of Scotland with its practitioners, ensuring he was cataloguing the backstory to every song as a creative starting point. His intention was to ensure the songs were being deployed in the correct narrative and emotional context to be authentic to their cultural meaning. Traditional Scottish genres and techniques used in the score include 'mouth music', a unique and distinct performance style that arose in the wake of the Highland Clearances (1750–1860), a period in which musicians had significantly reduced access to physical instruments.

Pipers and fiddlers formed a core component of the soundtrack, with Grimes making the decision to minimise the presence of keys (e.g. piano or harpsichord), which would not have been available to, or played by, musicians from the period being sonically documented.

Aside from the separate four-track EP, the main soundtrack includes no orchestration (common to game design) as this particular style of performance, composition and arrangement was not authentic to the way in which the songs would have originally been performed.

HARD TIMES IN SKARA BRAE  
Speak to Rabbie

# Monetisation

Grimes took a non-traditional approach towards his remuneration for the composition and curation of the soundtrack, reserving all rights — mechanical, synchronisation and broadcast — against his original works. This provides him the unrestricted ability to use the works as a library of Scottish folk and traditional music for onward sale or licensing to third parties, such as film and television studios, broadcasters and other commercial revenue streams.

In doing so he has ensured full autonomy over future use of the score, meaning he is now the owner of the most comprehensive library of fully mastered Scottish music available for commercial use and, most importantly, guaranteeing he has control over onward remuneration to all artists and performers involved in the creation of the works. Grimes has established his own music publishing company specifically for the purposes of managing rights against the three-album soundtrack.

The game follows the standard pricing structures of the platforms and consoles that support the title. For illustrative purposes and looking at the platform where the game is predominantly played, Steam prices the standard edition of *The Bard's Tale IV* at £27.99, with an enhanced director's cut available for £29.99. Additional features from the director's cut may be added to a pre-existing purchase for a one-time payment of £5.

On Microsoft Xbox specifically, the game is free to play for users with an existing subscription to Game Pass, which is billed from £7.99 per month for basic access, rising to £10.99 per month for enhanced access to an expanded library of titles and game features.



STRUCTURES OF THE SKARA BRAE  
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THE SONG OF THE MAIDEN

Catch Yadis

**To date, the collected works including the soundtrack  
have received approximately  
1 million streams through digital platforms.**