



The Scottish Fiddle Orchestra

Scotland's National Fiddle Orchestra

NEWSLETTER

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Newsletter time again and it never ceases to amaze me how much news there is to be relayed out to our readers.

Firstly however let me offer a sincere "thank you" to those kind souls who recorded their appreciation of the last newsletter.

It's always very gratifying for us scribes to receive an appreciative comment or two from our readers. It's good to know you're all out there after all, and we should never forget this newsletter is for you. So keep the comments coming along with your ideas for improvement and together we'll make it better and better.



500 YEARS
SKINNERS
1516 - 2016

In our last newsletter we highlighted our connection with the Glasgow Skinners and Glovers through Jamie Mason. This resulted in an invitation to a small group from the orchestra to play at their 500th anniversary dinner being held at the City Chambers. And what a night it turned out to be. Never having played there before this represented a clear logistical challenge to Bill Cook and his ensemble, but true to form they knuckled down and with virtually no rehearsal or sound check produced a performance which was deemed outstanding by the appreciative audience.

The SFO players seem to have this ability to always raise their game no matter the challenge or circumstances and on the night the sound and tightness of the playing they produced was on everyone's lips. So much so that other invitations have been forthcoming. Jamie was delighted and on his big night as host for the proceedings the ensemble provides a stunning musical backdrop.

A Budding New Wordsmith

It looks like SFO are witnessing the emergence of a budding new wordsmith in Peter Brash.

His recent online article on Aly Bain was outstanding and he is providing more and more material to the website and subsequently this newsletter. Peter puts a great deal into his writing in terms of research and anecdotal material so be sure and look up his contributions as they are well worth a read.

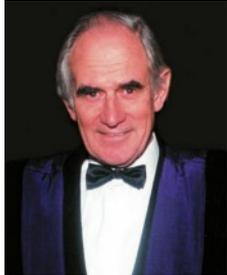
His latest article for the newsletter is featured on page 6.

Concert Diary					
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	30 th December 2016	0131 228 1155	www.usherhall.co.uk	
Perth	Concert Hall	18 th February 2017	01738 621031	www.horsecross.co.uk	
Aberdeen	Beach Ballroom	18 th March 2017	01224 641122	www.aberdeenperformingarts.com	
Gateshead	Sage	6 th May 2017	0191 443 4661	www.sagegateshead.com	
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	3 rd June 2017	0131 228 1155	www.usherhall.co.uk	
Belfast	Waterfront	7 th October 2017	02890 334455	www.waterfront.co.uk	

A Fond SFO Memory of Campbell's

Nice to hear that Janice (Mrs Gerry) Crean was with her party of guests at the Glasgow concert. Gerry was a much loved figure in the orchestra and it's good that his memory is so cherished.

Which brings me nicely to my next snippet, many moons ago whilst still accompanying Aileen as a "hanger-on" and not a member of this great orchestra, we were playing Aberdeen and staying in the Altens Hotel. I had the pleasure of being asked to play the piano and during my musical ramblings I hit upon one of my favourite melodies, namely that most haunting Irish classic "The Lark in the Clear Air".



To my astonishment, and subsequent awe it must be said, this dapper little elderly gent in a green velvet jacket approached the piano carrying with him a fiddle, and asked in a very cultured but distinctly Irish accent if he might join me.

At first I thought it was a leprechaun (I might have enjoyed a dram or two) but bravely invited him to join me and so transpired one of my fondest SFO memories, accompanying the legendary Gerry Crean, 'cos that's who it was, in one of his classic SFO pieces, in complete and blissful ignorance as to the identity of my companion. Happy days indeed.

New DVD and CD's

We're very proud of our front of house team and we rely on them to keep us updated with audience and patrons/friends comments.

For some time they have been requesting new CDs and DVDs and we can now announce that their requests have been granted.

Recorded at our last sell-out concert in Perth the latest DVD entitled "In The Fair City" has been produced containing a brand new programme which will surely enhance any collection.

Effectively we now have a DVD to offer our audience which reflects more or less each one of this year's shows. This will of course enable enthusiasts to buy a close programme of the performance that they have attended this year, when the music is still fresh in their minds.

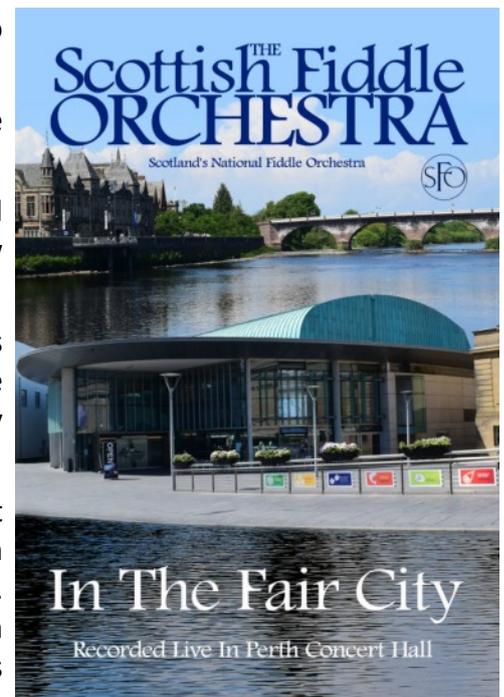
We are also completing a music CD, taken from the same concert but without any dialogue or extras. It was noticed that there is still a demand for them and we are more than happy to fill that gap. Recordings were also taken at Usher Hall, Edinburgh and the Alhambra in Dunfermline and a selection of pieces from both these recordings will be combined into another CD.

All of this has been set up by Bill and Campbell through Red Barn Studios who have proved to be a real find and these CD's will be on sale very soon.

On that note we also plan on releasing a DVD of our trip to the Waterfront in Belfast.

Under the stewardship of Jim Brodlie (who organised such a memorable trip to Nottingham earlier in the year) that concert turned out to be a real cracker. Stewart and Gill from Red Barn were with us on the bus and they recorded the orchestra both on and off stage. So with a bit of luck we'll have some truly memorable shots which we can use to make a great DVD. Nothing was too much trouble for these two and it turned out to be a very successful exercise.

Watch this space for some exciting new material.



Concert Summary

EDINBURGH



In June Susie and Catriona produced another sizzling concert in the Usher Hall, Edinburgh which reinforced just what a super pair of administrators we have in these two.

It is noticeable that our June audiences are slowly growing both in numbers and also in appreciation of the entertainment provided, so great credit is due to the Edinburgh team and the orchestra.

Robert Lovie couldn't attend this concert as compère owing to a prior engagement, so we were able to enjoy the company and talents of Jamie MacDougall for the night. In his capable hands the concert went with a swing and the audience clearly were having a great night enjoying the orchestra and artistes.

GLASGOW

It seems such a short while since we reported on a Glasgow concert and yet here we are, a year on and looking back at another highly successful evening.

As we have mentioned in earlier editions, this concert was held in association with the Guild of Glasgow Skinners and Glovers, under the Deaconship of our own Jamie Mason, son of our late founder, John Mason. This venerable institution was celebrating its 500th Anniversary and we were proud to be asked to collaborate with them as they looked back on some outstanding achievements.

To commemorate our involvement, another venerable institution (!?) in the form of our President, Bill Cook, wrote and presented a special tune entitled "The Deacon" to Jamie on stage during the afternoon rehearsal. Those who know Jamie well are only too familiar with his easy going friendly manner where he is seldom at a loss for a word or two and it was interesting to see him clearly caught up in the emotion of the presentation, finding it difficult to deploy his verbal skills just when he needed them! Not often we see Jamie shy and a little nervous! Nevertheless he carried everything off in style, and his award was treated with a round of applause by the orchestra.

Under the management of our West of Scotland Administrator Caroline Winn, the concert proved an outstanding success. She has been at the helm of the Glasgow event for three years now and it is no surprise to see audience attendances steadily climbing. It won't be long before she has returned Glasgow to its rightful place as a 'must do' feature of the musical calendar.

Needless to say the content of the programme must also feature, as must the playing and performing of the ensemble. This is most certainly being demonstrated in each of the concerts we play. Glasgow this year was no exception.

As part of the programme our principal soloist, Yla Steven, was asked to play one of John Mason's most beautiful pieces which commemorates the death of an outstanding Scot and champion of the Mod, the Reverend Archie Beaton, latterly minister of Dundonald Parish in Ayrshire.

To add to the occasion the orchestra was pleased to welcome as guests many of Archie Beaton's family including his daughter and grandchildren. Yla played with her usual skill and it must have been a proud moment for our visitors to hear in music the love which still is felt for the Reverend Beaton.



BELFAST

It's been many a long year since the Scottish Fiddle Orchestra was welcomed to the Emerald Isle. Holding a special place in John Mason's heart, this magical place has been the inspiration for some of his finest compositions. And so it was with a huge sense of anticipation that we descended on Belfast on Friday, 28th October.



Jim Brodrie had worked his usual magic in organising the trip impeccably, ensuring that everyone enjoyed a trouble free journey, some by bus, some by air and some driving to the ferry. Jim spends hours and hours arranging meetings, making trips to the venue and generally ensuring that all angles were covered, right through to the ceilidh at the end of the show. Normally he can relax a bit then and enjoy a bit of light hearted fun, but sadly this year it was not to be.

Whilst making a family trip a few months ago Jim encountered serious problems with his hip, which resulted in him being called to hospital for an operation to replace it. And as luck would have it the pre-op visits to the hospital came right in the middle of the Belfast trip followed shortly afterwards by the procedure itself. So no Belfast concert for JB. It was therefore up to us to ensure all his hard work paid off while he recovered from what has turned out to be a very successful operation. Mind you, he's having a little difficulty doing his handsprings and cartwheels which Wilma makes him do before he gets any breakfast, but generally speaking he is adjusting well to life with a stick and

should be back to normal before too long.

In the meantime, the show had to go on, and it most surely did.

Dodds of Troon were a huge asset, very deserving of a mention in dispatches, with John the driver being helpful, accommodating and extremely valuable with his intimate knowledge of the ferries and their routines which ensured a seamless run down to Cairn Ryan, but also right to the hotel door on the other side of the water. It made a huge difference for players to simply arrive at the bus pickup point, and deposit their entire luggage safely on the bus. They didn't need to touch it again until unloading at the hotel and it made for a very stress free trip.

A new feature this time round was the presence of Stewart and Gill Duncan of Red Barn Studios who were omnipresent with their cameras making a record of both the journey and the concert which it is hoped will make up a CD and possibly a new DVD.

Doubtless there will be a few red faces when some of their 'sneaky-peaky' shots are processed but the overall result should make good watching and listening, and a welcome addition to the orchestra's library. The Duncans are a welcome addition to the orchestral team, and never let us down.



However, things can, and do, go wrong. This time it was the Clark family, mum dad and our two dancers Catriona and Marnie, who arrived to find they hadn't been booked in owing to an oversight.

Big thanks to Chris Gowans who immediately stepped in and vacated his room, moving in with Blair and freeing up accommodation for the Clarks. They, as ever, took everything in their stride and were neither up nor down! But that's what it's like on tour. Players just muck in and things get sorted.



Saturday morning saw a trip to the Titanic exhibition for 29 players. Bus driver John was on hand to take the group down to the exhibition, which proved a huge success. Every trip has its little bit of humour, and this time it was "Mother Hen" Aileen who was clearly on a mission to collect ticket monies, keep Campbell away from creating mayhem with the list, and ensure that everyone was on the bus. No one escaped the predator with the clipboard!

The exhibition itself was memorable, leaving the spectator with a vivid sense of the enormity of the whole affair, from conception and design, through graphic images and old film of the exacting manual work of building the ship. At the end, actual voices of survivors brought the whole tragedy to life in front of the watching visitors who left feeling both hugely impressed by the exhibition, but acutely moved by the awfulness of that dark day.



After lunch it was on to the business of rehearsal and the meeting of two charming young sisters, Orla and Sinead Savage who were joining our own sisters, Catriona and Marnie in some dance routines. This item in the programme also involved a small group of orchestra fiddlers and turned out to be an outstanding success.

So full marks to all those who put the acts together. The girls really enjoyed themselves and are definitely up for some more gigs with SFO.



Another notable success was the Cleland Memorial Pipe Band. This was their first encounter with the SFO and they really rose to the occasion. Their preparation and tuning at rehearsal was exceptional and they carried that over into their performance at the concert. Like the dancers, they are looking forward to another evening with the orchestra in the future.

The concert itself saw an enthusiastic audience really enjoying the programme, as they listened to the orchestra who were on top form swinging their way through the evening. Feedback has been excellent, so much so that the venue has been booked again for next year.

The after-concert ceilidh looked like it might face some problems in the slightly restricted cafe area of the hotel. But not a bit of it. After what could only be described as a superb supper, everybody knuckled down, and under the leadership of Freddie Prise, a really memorable ceilidh took place. Colette and Dennis seem to get funnier and funnier and always make a huge contribution to the evening, whilst this time we were lucky to have Thoren, Lewis and "a friend" (who was no mean flute and whistle player) play two sets for us. Orla and her sister joined the other dancers for an impromptu session, and it all went off in spectacular fashion. June played a selection of pieces in her own inimitable style which prompted comments from our little Irish friends to the effect that we were all so talented. There's no doubt they are correct, as there was plenty of that on display at the ceilidh.

Altogether the whole evening was a fitting tribute to Jim and the work he had put in, and after some very kind words from Bill the evening was concluded, and then the youngsters (and a few reckless oldsters) went off to the bar for another impromptu session which lasted till 4 in the morning! Talk about hangovers and raw fingers! Enough said!!

The trip home proved smooth and uneventful with everyone in high spirits after what was described as a truly memorable trip. There can be no doubt that weekends like these are really what make the SFO the friendly, family ensemble which everybody sees and hears in our concerts. Founder John Mason was very clear in his thoughts that the gain in fellowship was invaluable from these trips.

Looking back on this one there is no question that he was right. Here's to next year.

The World's Largest Ever Fiddlers' Rally

Scottish traditions and culture feature in various ways in the Guinness World Records:



- On 30 December 2000, in Edinburgh, 1,914 people danced the largest Strip the Willow, as part of Edinburgh's Hogmanay celebrations.
- The largest Burns supper ever was held in Glasgow in 2015, with 645 guests.
- 'Auld Lang Syne' is one of the most frequently sung songs in English. Some of its words were written by Robert Burns himself.

The term "Fiddlers' Rally" was coined in the early 1970s to describe the public concert held during the annual Gaelic Mod for the competitors from the various fiddle societies from across Scotland. The idea behind the SFO was that, by forming a fiddlers' rally of fixed membership, you had scope to widen the repertoire and achieve the highest standards of playing excellence.

The SFO has a current membership of 98. Being an orchestra, the SFO features instruments other than fiddles. Of the current membership, 72 are fiddlers. An average size of orchestra for an SFO concert would consist of around 80 players (about 60 playing fiddle).

We noted recently that there does not appear to be a world record for the largest ever fiddlers' rally, or equivalent. Our trawl of the internet has not revealed any records of that nature to be in existence.

Having exhausted digital methods, we resorted to more analogue means of research. Specifically, various SFO members searched through their vinyl record collections from the 1970s and 1980s, when fiddlers' rallies were at their height.

The SFO's own Yla Steven won the inaugural Golden Fiddle Award in 1976. Recordings of the concert/rally, held on the Saturday evening after the competition was finished, were released on 2 separate LPs.

The sleeve notes have the following description of the occasion:

"They came from the Shetland Isles, from little Border towns, from the East Neuk of Fife and the Western Isles. They stayed the night with friends, took a chance on finding a boarding house, or booked into a select a hotel. They represented every sphere of activity and every strata of income. Bus drivers, doctors, engineers and labourers... Schoolchildren, teachers, accountants and shepherds... All united by their love of Scotland's fine traditional music.

And on a late May evening in 1976, they combined in the finest and biggest fiddle orchestra ever assembled. On the specially mounted stage in the Kelvin Hall, Glasgow, they played some 250 strong before an audience of 3,000. There were drums, piano, 6 violas, 6 cellos, 14 basses and 9 accordions. All the rest were fiddle players.

This was the Daily Record Golden Fiddle Festival 1976".

You could argue that violas should reasonably be included (along with violins) in the definition of "fiddles". For the purposes of identifying a possible record for the largest ever fiddlers' rally, that is how we are approaching it.

The number of fiddlers totalled 219, accordingly.

The SFO's President and Leader, Bill Cook, also took part in the 1976 Golden Fiddle Awards Rally and his memories of the logistics of the occasion are interesting.

"I was actually there at that rally. I had not long taken over the Stirling Society and a bus was hired and several members and their wives went through to take part in the show in Glasgow. The size of the orchestra made things a bit difficult. One side of the stage couldn't hear what the other side was playing, the orchestra was so big. Part of Scotland's fiddling history, though! It certainly was the biggest assembly of players that I have had the experience to be involved with."

They say that records are made to be broken. Maybe you know of a rally which has featured a larger number of fiddlers, sometime in the last 40 years. If you do, we would love to hear from you.



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