



The Scottish Fiddle Orchestra

Scotland's National Fiddle Orchestra

NEWSLETTER

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Looking back on a memorable 2018

As we near the end of 2018, 38 years on from the inception of the Scottish Fiddle orchestra, we look back on a year of performances, recordings and tours.

As you probably know, the SFO aims to promote, preserve and encourage traditional Scottish music, with an emphasis on fiddle music.

2018 saw orchestra performances in Perth, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Elgin, Tain, Kirkwall, Lerwick, Eshaness and on the North Sea between Shetland and the Scottish mainland.

Though our geographical reach concert-wise was probably less than in an average year, the Northern Nights Tour was a real highlight for us, as discussed in our previous Newsletter. It was great for us to take in the fiddle music strongholds of Moray, Ross-shire, Orkney (with which our original musical director, John Mason, had so many ties) and Shetland.

Social media

During this last year, we made considerable use of "Facebook Live" broadcasts. During the Northern Nights Tour, we performed several pop-up concerts in aid of local RNLI branches.



Screenshot from Facebook Live - SFO Glasgow Concert 2018

Blessed by wonderful weather conditions, we were able to play outdoor concerts at: Glenmorangie Distillery, Tain; St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall; and outside High Level Music in Lerwick. These concerts were largely broadcast live via Facebook.

An additional highlight was playing at the graveside of Shetland Fiddle legend, Tom Anderson.

At the time of our visit to Orkney, we achieved the milestone of passing 5,000 likes on our Facebook page. We're so very blessed to have such a worldwide audience and it's a wonderful feeling to know how much our music is appreciated around the globe. We couldn't have achieved this milestone without your help, so we wanted to say a special thank you to you all for liking and sharing our music, posts and videos! Please keep sharing and helping us to share the joy of traditional fiddle music far and wide...

New SFO family members

2018 has seen us some new members join the orchestra. We are glad to welcome Angus Birnie (Elgin) to the bass section. The following players have joined the SFO's first violins: Jill Sinclair (Orkney); Amber Thornley (Fochabers); Kirsty Harrower (Glasgow); Patricia Carrington (Blairgowrie).

The SFO is a charity run by volunteers. 2018 was the year we were shocked and saddened by the death of Board Member and technology wizard, Douglas Smith. Douglas was instrumental in running our website and much of our marketing. He was the linchpin of SFO administration and

since his sudden and untimely passing in May 2018, we have had a struggle to fill the huge hole he has left.

We also want to mark and acknowledge the huge contribution, over many years, of husband and wife team, Jim Brodlie, Senior (Accordion) and Wilma Brodlie (Front of House team), who have retired from the SFO in 2018. Their work on behalf of the SFO has had so many facets – concert organising, merchandise selling, ceilidh mastering to name but a few – that it is difficult to express the debt the SFO owes them. Thank you, Wilma and Jim.

The majority of the SFO's Board are also playing members of the orchestra but we must make special mention of Jim Kerr – our Treasurer since 2015 – who is not a player. Without Jim's huge experience and steady hand, the management of the SFO would have been a much more stressful experience for the rest of the Board than it has been. We owe you a huge debt of gratitude, Jim, and we hope you feel appreciated. Thank you.

Looking forward to 2019 and beyond

The SFO's Glasgow concert (September 2018) was recorded by our friends at Red Barn Studio and we hope to issue this as a DVD and CD early in the New Year. Don't forget that our most recent previous recordings (In The Fair City (Perth – 2016); A Selection from the Caird and Usher Halls (2016); and Live at Belfast Waterfront (2016)) are available to purchase from us via the SFO website and at our concerts.



SFO Caird/Usher Hall CD cover

Some SFO members had a memorable time at the Scots Fiddle Festival in Edinburgh over a weekend in mid-November 2018. The Sunday of that weekend saw the bulk of the orchestra convene at Perth High School for our annual rehearsal at which we look at possible new music for the 2019 season, which will begin at Perth Concert Hall on 23 February 2019.

We hope to include a new composition by Andy Cant of Kirkwall City Pipe Band and also mark important anniversaries such as 25 years since the death of Willie Hunter, Junior, of Shetland and 50 years since the

Longhope Lifeboat tragedy (Orkney).

We are also looking forward to making a joyful return to Aberdeen's Music Hall which has been closed for a few years for refurbishment.

2020 will see the SFO reach its 40th anniversary and equally span the 20th and 21st centuries. We are already considering how best we can mark such an important milestone for the orchestra. We hope to be able to mark our 40th anniversary with some sort of tour taking us outwith the UK. This is something we have been investigating and planning for at least the last 2 years. It is a complex logistically and financially, not least because the SFO generally has to reckon on having to cover costs itself.

We hope to be able to announce exciting tour plans for 2020 within the next 6 months or so.

Life in an Orchestra that's not the SFO: from first principals to second fiddles

The Irish Times ran an interesting piece about the RTE orchestra during November 2018. Though this is a professional and classical orchestra, there were many humorous references to different players and sections within the "band".

It well explains the structure of an orchestra, including that of the SFO. An orchestra has a pyramid structure. The conductor comes first – at the top of the pyramid – a description with which we're sure our own conductor, Blair Parham, would agree.

You then have the leader of the orchestra, the principal first violinist – in the SFO, that's Bill Cook.

After that, you have the section principals: Second Fiddle (June Nelson); Cello (Rona Porter); Bass (Kirsty MacKinlay); Flute (Sheena Anderson); Accordion (Fred Prise); not forgetting accompanist, Fiona Brodlie.

Towards the end of the 2018 season, we have welcomed young Catriona Norman as the SFO's piper and we look forward to her taking the lead in that role during our 2019 season.

We've had support from many different pipe bands this last year and their contribution is, of course, crucial in the centrepiece items in our concerts. There are many technical issues involved in pairing a pipe band with a string orchestra not least as regards the pitching/tuning of each ensemble. A continuing headache from that point of view looks to have finally been resolved through the kind assistance and sponsorship of McCallum Bagpipes who have made available to the SFO a number of Bb chanters. This will make a huge difference to the ease of rehearsal and performance of numbers such as The Sleeping Warrior and Highland Cathedral – good news for SFO, pipe bands and audiences alike!

Returning to the playing structure of the SFO, in which we had reached the level of section leaders, you then drop to the "rank and file section players". If the SFO were an army regiment, these players would hold the rank of private. As with the RTE orchestra, "It's a big family, and people look out for each other".

With the SFO, we might say that percussionists have even fewer notes to play than the bass section (rather than RTE's oboists, of which the SFO has none). Jamie Mason – double bass player and part-time crash cymbal player – knows the Far Side cartoon "Roger screws up" in which the luckless Roger awaits his big orchestral moment holding just one cymbal. But it's not happened to Jamie so far (though he did manage to break his bass at the rehearsal in Kirkwall's Pickaquoy Centre during the Northern Nights tour...).

It's said that, in orchestral terms: "You can get away with a lot at the back." In the SFO, the back line is formed by the accordions, the percussion section and the bass section.

In the RTE orchestra, horn players tend to be most vocal about things – "the troublemakers in the orchestra". In their case, that's thought to be because they play a very challenging instrument, an instrument that has certain risks attached to it. There's the danger of hitting a harmonic above or below the one that you want. The memorable analogy drawn is that, if the RTE horn section were in the army, they would be the bomb disposal team. Presumably, that's because, through their influence, the performance could suddenly "blow up" at any moment.

The nearest the SFO would have to that would probably be the bagpipes – whether that's an individual player or a section from a pipe band. In many ways, even a single set of bagpipes can



approximate to the volume of the whole SFO. The bagpipes as the SFO bomb disposal team, indeed...

John Mason's tunebook

Our founder and original musical director, John Mason, died in 2011. Since then, his sons, Rognvald and Jamie (both SFO members) have had the task of discovering, collating and publishing their Dad's compositions. This has proved to be a huge task – hundreds of tunes are involved.

The SFO's repertoire includes about 80 original tune compositions by John Mason. Of course, there are many more tune and song arrangements by John which still form the foundation of SFO concerts.

We hope that 2019 will see the John Mason tune project come to fruition, with the publication of the long-awaited book. No doubt, the SFO will look to promote, arrange and perform much of this "new" music so John Mason's position is cemented as one of the all-time great composers of Scottish fiddle music.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support of the SFO.

We wish you and your loved ones a Happy Christmas and a Peaceful and Healthy 2019.

We hope to see you at an SFO Concert sometime in the coming year. ☺

P.S. Don't forget that tickets are still available from the SFO's annual pre-Hogmanay concert at Edinburgh's Usher Hall on 30th December (bookings here).

Concert Diary				
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	30 December 2018	0131 228 1155	www.usherhall.co.uk
Perth	Concert Hall	23 February 2019	01738 621031	www.horsecross.co.uk
Aberdeen	Music Hall	27 April 2019	01224 641122	www.aberdeenperformingarts.com
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	15 June 2019	0131 228 1155	www.usherhall.co.uk
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	07 September 2019		Tickets not yet on sale
Inverurie	Town Hall	28 September 2019		Tickets not yet on sale
York	Barbican	26 October 2019		Tickets not yet on sale

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