



# The Scottish Fiddle Orchestra

Scotland's National Fiddle Orchestra

## NEWSLETTER

Patron: HRH The Princess Royal

Scottish Registered Charity No. SC010753

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### *SFO's 40<sup>th</sup> Season begins*

The performance in Perth Concert Hall on Saturday 23 February 2019 saw the SFO begin its 40<sup>th</sup> season of concerts, as we head towards our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020.

The opening piece of music in this year's programme is Willie Kidd's Welcome to Orkney. A composition of John Mason, it commemorates the SFO's trip to the Orkney Folk Festival in 2008 and is a tribute to one of the SFO's accordionists, who is also a founder member and elder statesman of the orchestra.

Along the way, we acknowledged through music the contributions of two former compères of SFO concerts, Jim McColl (The Horticulturist Two-step) and Robbie Shepherd (The Furry Boots Polka). This year, the pieces in which we combine with a local pipe band to raise the roof of the concert hall are St Magnus Way and The Sleeping Warrior, which have connections to Orkney and Arran, respectively.



*SFO Accordion Section, with Willie Kidd, left.*

After the usual finale of the whole ensemble (including the audience) joining in with Auld Lang Syne, we send everyone on their way with a set of swinging reels, ending with Caddam Wood. If the words "di-di-di-daaah" make you think of a certain Beethoven tune, the words "di-di-di-di dit dit dit dit daah" should help you to think of Adam Rennie's earworm.

Putting this Newsletter together in March 2019, it seemed appropriate to link to two events from this month, both with some relevance to the SFO and its music.

### *The Heroes of Longhope*

This forms part of the second half of this year's SFO programme.

17 March 2019 is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of one of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution's greatest tragedies.

On that night, in 1969, the entire crew of the Longhope lifeboat from the island of Hoy perished whilst going to the rescue of a freighter in the notorious Pentland Firth which separates the Orkney Islands from mainland Scotland. Overnight, the population of the little hamlet of Longhope was reduced from 43 to 35, leaving 10 orphans and seven widows.

The current coxswain of Longhope Lifeboat, Kevin Kirkpatrick, shares a direct connection with the tragedy, losing his father, grandfather and uncle in the disaster, as does his wife Karen.

Orcadian, Ronnie Aim, composed this air and John Mason arranged it for the SFO. The music opens in a quiet hymn-like way then builds to reflect the ongoing courage of the many volunteers who man these vessels in times of emergency. The mood then returns to the peace and tranquillity of the graveyard overlooking the sea where the "heroes" lie buried, watched over by a majestic statue of a lifeboatman. This monument was unveiled by Her Majesty the Queen Mother following the tragedy.

This is a piece of music which groups from the orchestra have performed in Longhope Hall more than once in the 1980s. One of our former members, who was in the audience at Perth, emailed us afterwards: "The "Heroes" brought tears to my eyes. I remember playing it in Longhope village hall all those years ago."



### *When Irish Eyes are Smiling...*

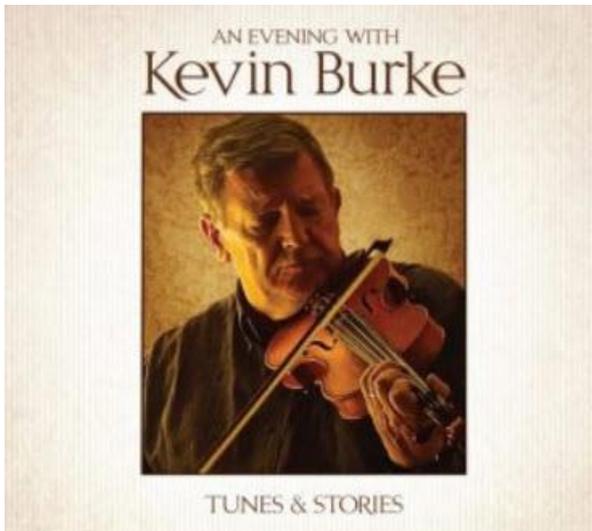
Of course, another 17<sup>th</sup> March anniversary is St Patrick's Day – which is a good excuse to slip into some discussion of a recent recording by Irish fiddle legend, Kevin Burke.

He was born in London – to parents from County Sligo – in 1950. He took up the fiddle at age eight, and went on to develop a style which epitomises that of his parents' home area. He later became a member of the well-known Irish traditional music groups The Bothy Band (1976) and Patrick Street (1986). He has lived in Portland, Oregon since the early 1980s. He has played as a longstanding member of the Celtic Fiddle Festival since their inception in the early 1990s – a group which has performed at the Scots Fiddle Festival in Edinburgh.

His playing is wonderfully rhythmical; his bowing economical and his left hand ornamentation crisp and electrifying.

He has an intriguing "Irish Cockney" accent and a great way with story-telling and amusing anecdotes.

*An Evening with Kevin Burke (Tunes & Stories)* was recorded partly in Portland, Oregon and it's just him and the audience. In a way, it's the opposite extreme from the SFO and, just as massed ranks of fiddles (and more) is not to everyone's taste, so there is a risk that a solo fiddle for a whole album might become a bit one-dimensional.



As he says in his opening remarks: “I usually warn people that it’s going to be “mostly” fiddle music (!). If you don’t like fiddle music, it’s going to be a rough couple of hours.”

Fortunately, it’s a smooth and varied ride, in fact, as he takes the listener on a grand musical tour of Ireland and Irish fiddle music. Beginning in Sliabh Luachra (“Slieve Loochra”) in the mountainous south-west, with a set of polkas, he takes us to Counties Clare, Galway, Roscommon, Sligo and Dublin. There are detours to Portland and Paris. We hear jigs, reels, slides, a waltz and a “concerto”.

He relates the story of Turlough O’Carolan, whose life straddled the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. O’ Carolan was an itinerant harper who went blind as a teenager and supported himself by travelling round the country, visiting wealthy homes and performing for the owners and their friends.

In those days, of course, there was no such thing as “music without a musician” – so people were always happy to see him, as they knew they would have music for a while.

His most famous composition – O’Carolan’s Concerto – is reputed to have been written as a protest tune against the influx of music from places like Italy. It’s ironic that it should have acquired the “non-trad” tag of concerto. It’s not a concerto but it is a beautiful piece of music.

The SFO has several O’ Carolan tunes in its repertoire, including O’ Carolan’s Concerto.

The evening closes with a tribute to the late Scots fiddler, Johnny Cunningham (brother of Phil), with whom Kevin Burke played for many years in the band Celtic Fiddle Festival.

He tells how Johnny liked to make it known that he was half Irish and half Scottish – and that explained why half of him always wanted to drink and the other half never wanted to pay for it.

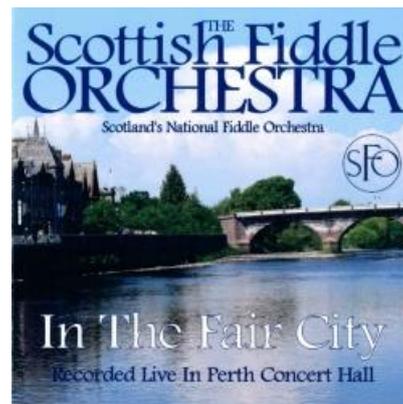
Two French-Canadian reels then finish off a concert which seems to have been a perfect blend of chat and tunes.

### *SFO Recordings to download*

Here’s a shameless plug for two albums of SFO music which have been released by the orchestra itself rather than, as previously, on the REL label. We reported this development recently in an article on our website entitled [A New Era in Digital Downloads for the SFO](#).

The SFO is itself a charity and to enable us to continue our work in benefiting other charities, we need to maximise our own income as far as possible. If you download music from either *In the Fair City* or *A Selection from the Caird and Usher Halls*, the SFO receives more income per download than if it is from any other part of the vast catalogue of SFO recordings available online.

All we ask is that, if you are considering buying some tunes or songs from the SFO repertoire, please have a look at these two albums first of all. 😊



### *And a request for help...*

Are you, or do you know, an accountant who might be a supporter of the SFO? Maybe someone recently retired who has some spare time?

Our current treasurer has indicated that he would like to stand down. While we have orchestra members able to help out, having an accountant willing to give up some time would be very helpful and this not be an onerous commitment.

**P.S. Don't forget that tickets are still available from the SFO's next concert at Aberdeen's revamped and rejuvenated Music Hall on 27 April 2019 (bookings [here](#)).**

<b>Concert Diary</b>				
<b>Aberdeen</b>	Music Hall	27 April 2019	01224 641122	www.aberdeenperformingarts.com
<b>Edinburgh</b>	Usher Hall	15 June 2019	0131 228 1155	www.usherhall.co.uk
<b>Glasgow</b>	Royal Concert Hall	07 September 2019		Tickets not yet on sale
<b>Inverurie</b>	Town Hall	28 September 2019		Tickets not yet on sale
<b>York</b>	Barbican	26 October 2019	0844 854 2757	yorkbarbican.co.uk
<b>Edinburgh</b>	Usher Hall	30 December 2019		Tickets not yet on sale
<b>Perth</b>	Concert Hall	22 February 2020		Tickets on sale 01 September 2019

<b>Contacts</b>	
<b>Secretary</b>	SFO Secretary, Karen Egerton, 44 Roman Road, Almondbank, Perth PH1 3LQ
<b>Treasurer</b>	SFO Treasurer, Jim Kerr, 21 Forres Avenue, Giffnock, Glasgow G46 6LH
<b>Patrons / Friends</b>	SFO Patrons, 24 Golf Crescent, Troon, Ayrshire KA10 6JZ
<b>Postal Sales</b>	SFO Postal Sales, 24 Golf Crescent, Troon, Ayrshire KA10 6JZ