



The Scottish Fiddle Orchestra

Scotland's National Fiddle Orchestra

NEWSLETTER

Patron: HRH The Princess Royal

Scottish Registered Charity No. SC010753

December 2019 / No. 82

As one chapter closes for the SFO...

We have to start with some very sad news.

Bill Cook, our leader since 1983, died suddenly on 05 October 2019 and we are still coming to terms with such a huge loss. Bill was not just the orchestra's leader but also its President and a composer and arranger of much of our new music.

Many tributes have already been paid to Bill. You can find "a fond appreciation" and a message from Bill's family on the SFO website.



Bill Cook (R) presents Aly Bain with the tune Bill composed for Aly's 70th birthday in 2016

Here are a few of the messages received at the SFO website by various people who knew and loved Bill.

"We have been privileged to hear the Scottish Fiddle Orchestra several times since the early 80s from Carlisle to the Albert Hall, York, Newcastle and Doncaster. Our latest catch-up was in Glasgow on 7th September 2019. Bill was a great leader and will be sadly missed. Our thoughts are with his family, friends and the orchestra."

"I only knew Bill for a few years but he was a true gent and I was privileged to hear him play solo a few times. He will be sadly missed by many, not just for his work with the fiddle but also for his painting abilities. Rest in peace, Bill."

"I have fond memories of being one of his many students. He was well loved by many and will be sadly missed by all who knew him and played beside him in the SFO."

Bill was absolutely committed to the SFO, past, present and future and a strong believer in "the show must go on" – and he would definitely approve of his successor as Leader.

... Another one opens...

Yla Steven BEM becomes only the third leader of the Scottish Fiddle Orchestra in its 40-year history. As a founder member, she follows in the footsteps of Willie Dunlop and the recently dearly departed Bill Cook.

Yla was born in Edinburgh – her Christian name is the original spelling of Glen Isla in Perthshire – where she lived in her early years. She began learning the violin in Edinburgh at the age of seven, continued her studies in Blairgowrie, and later graduated from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. A strong interest in Scottish traditional fiddle music developed at an early age, and she entertained at many events during her teenage years. In Blairgowrie she was taught

by Harry C. Ogilvie, whose father had taught leading fiddler and bandleader Ian Powrie. Another link with Ian is that they both attended Bendochy Primary School.

Yla competed at all the major Fiddle Festivals in Scotland, winning Championship Awards at Kirriemuir, Banchory and Aberdeen. In 1976, she was the first winner of the Daily Record's Golden Fiddle Award in Glasgow. En route to these successes she was mentored by Sandy Milne of Banchory and many other great fiddlers, like Hector McAndrew and Tom Anderson. Yla is now most renowned for her beautiful playing of slow airs which has won her many accolades at home and abroad.

Yla is at the heart of the traditional music scene in Edinburgh. For almost forty years she taught violin, viola and cello for the City of Edinburgh Council. She founded the multi-award winning Lothian Schools Strathspey and Reel Society and is currently Musical Director of the Edinburgh Highland Reel and Strathspey Society. In 1977, she played as part of "An Edinburgh Fancy" in the King's Theatre, Edinburgh at a Silver Jubilee Concert for the Queen and Prince Philip. There have been other "Royal" performances for our Patron, The Princess Royal, and for Prince Philip. She has also played for violin greats such as Yehudi Menuhin, Max Rostal and Yfrah Neamen.

In 1980, Yla was a founder member of the Scottish Fiddle Orchestra and was delighted when John Mason invited her to become its principal soloist. With the SFO, Yla has had the opportunity to perform all over Britain, from Lerwick in Shetland to the Royal Albert Hall, London. She has toured with the SFO to Canada, Ireland and China and will lead them back to North America in 2020. Yla has performed in most of the great concert halls throughout Britain, performed on radio and television and has numerous recordings to her credit.

Yla Steven's huge contribution was recognised with the award of the British Empire Medal in 2015 for Services to Scottish Music.

The Scottish Fiddle Orchestra could have no better person in place to lead them into their 40th Anniversary year.



The SFO's Compliments to North America

As mentioned in Newsletter 81 (September 2019), the SFO plans to tour in the USA and Canada in March/April 2020. The latest details of the tour are here:

The opening concert of the tour is in Portsmouth Music Hall, Portsmouth, New Hampshire on 31 March 2020.

We will bring about 50 musicians, travelling from Boston to Montreal, and playing 7 concerts over a 12-day period, performing programmes of Scottish traditional music.

We plan to collaborate with local groups to perform our signature concert arrangements for orchestra and pipe band.

During our travels in North America we hope to provide workshops for young musicians and host disability group members to rehearsals – widening access for people who find it difficult to attend formal concerts due to physical, mental or behavioural constraints.

There is a North America Tour (“NA Tour”) page on the SFO website, accessible via the main menu, and you can keep up-to-date with developments there.

SFO
SCOTTISH
FIDDLE
ORCHESTRA

40th Anniversary
North American
Tour
2020



Come and join us for a fabulous evening of fiddling, piping, drumming, singing and dancing at ;

Portsmouth Music Hall, Portsmouth, NH, March 31st 2020

Franco Centre for the Arts, Lewiston, ME , April 1st 2020

Fredericton Playhouse, Fredericton, NB, April 2nd 2020

Dennis Knibb Auditorium, St John, NB, April 3rd 2020

Riverview Arts Centre, Moncton, NB, April 4th 2020

Dalhousie University Arts Centre, Halifax, NS, April 6th 2020

Le Gesu, Montreal QP, April 8th 2020

Full details on our website at www.sfo.org.uk
Scottish Charity SCO10753



ALL VIOLINS

Patrol



Comp. J.M. Mason

FIDDLERS TO THE FORE

Working out a programme for the 40th anniversary

The SFO had its annual day rehearsal – at Perth Grammar School – on 17 November 2019 and began the process of putting together material for next year’s musical programme.

The plan is to include some of the music that featured in the orchestra’s very first set (at the Aberdeen Music Hall concert in March 1980), some ‘old favourites’ and some brand new music and arrangements.

We are very lucky to have had 5 new arrangements done for us by the incredibly-talented Jennifer Whyte, who used to play keyboard/piano in the orchestra many moons ago, and who is now doing great things on London’s West End.



The SFO rehearsing an arrangement of the Game of Thrones theme tune by Jennifer Whyte (17 November 2019)

York Concert ‘Tickety-Boo’

Our own Jamie Mason proved that he’s as much of a virtuoso in the concert-organising department as he is on the double bass, as the SFO enjoyed a welcome return to York Barbican on 28 October 2019.



Jamie Mason: Job done!

Most SFO members converged on the York Racecourse Stableside accommodation on the Friday evening via coaches starting in Ayrshire and Edinburgh. We found Stableside ideal for our needs: it had an especially good room for a ceilidh.

Though we had to shelve plans for an open-air pop-up concert or two in town on the Saturday morning due to weather conditions best-described as ‘dreich’, we had a very enthusiastic evening concert audience who seemed not to want to leave at the end.

Thank you very much to the management and staff of Stableside and York Barbican, and to the pipes and drums of York City Pipe Band

We were delighted with our local charity partners for the concert, The Snappy Trust, which does great work empowering children and young people with disabilities.

As is always the case with weekends away with the SFO, everyone was very tired by the time we set off on our homeward journeys on the Sunday morning (in beautiful, sunny weather).

Jamie could finally relax – and he certainly deserved a long sleep after all his efforts.

Longest and shortest

The above-mentioned SFO rehearsal in Perth fell on the second day of the annual Scots Fiddle Festival in Edinburgh.

It was fantastic to see that the festival as whole got a well-deserved '4 out of 5' rating from The Scotsman newspaper.

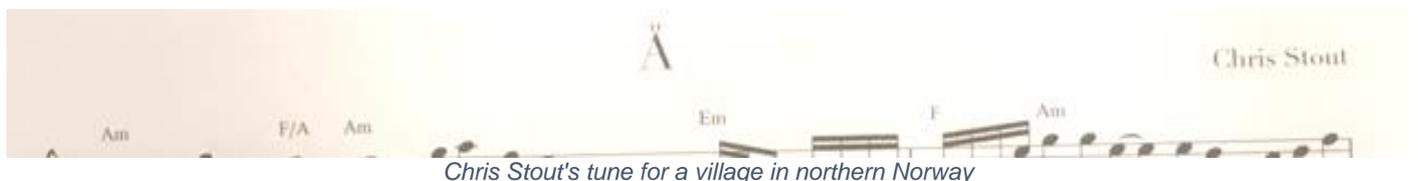
The Saturday night concert in The Pleasance was headlined by Irish-American fiddler, Liz Carroll, accompanied by Scottish guitarist, Jenn Butterworth.

Liz is a prolific composer of fiddle tunes, as well as being a living legend on the fiddle music scene. One of the recently-composed tunes of her own which she played was called *Margaret Stewart's Grand Tour of West Kerry* (named after the Gaelic singer from Lewis, who was car driver for a day out from Ballyferriter) and she explained that it had such a 'long' name because of the 'Scottish way of lengthy titles' (compared to the Irish way of shorter titles).

There may be some truth to that, though there are traditional Irish tunes with lengthy titles (e.g. *I buried my wife and danced on her grave*) as well as more modern tunes in that tradition (e.g. *Granny hold the candle while I shave the chicken's lip*). Or how about a modern tune with Glasgow connections: *A bottle of vodka, forty Embassy Red and £50 cashback, please*. Within the SFO's repertoire, you can think of Scott Skinner compositions such as *The Duke of Fife's Welcome to Deeside* or *Scott Skinner's Compliments to Dr MacDonald*. The longest SFO tune title may be *The Air played by the band as Mary Queen of Scots proceeded to her execution at Fotheringhay Castle* (entitled *Death of a Queen*, on some SFO recordings).

While we have not carried out an exhaustive search for a 'world record' here, the most-likely contender we have found for the fiddle tune with the longest name is a track by the seminal folk rock band, Fairport Convention, which is called *Sir B McKenzie's Daughter's Lament for the 77th Mounted Lancers Retreat from the Straits of Loch Knombe, in the Year of Our Lord 1727, on the Occasion of the Announcement of Her Marriage to the Laird of Kinleakie*.

At the other end of the spectrum, the shortest SFO title might be *Kate* – the air our former deputy conductor, Andrew McGarva, composed for his daughter.



Looking further afield, Shetland fiddler, Chris Stout, wrote a tune called Å. This is the name of a village in northern Norway which Chris visited while on a concert tour in 2009. He was struck by the beauty of the landscape there, within the Arctic Circle, and amused by the thought that 'with scenery like that, your villages don't have to have impressive names!'

In terms of timing of tracks, if you're looking to compile a playlist of the shortest pieces the SFO have recorded (apart from *Auld Lang Syne*), you should consider *The Bluebell Polka* (01:49), *The Hen's Mairch ower the Midden* (01:58) and (another polka) *The SFO's Compliments to Charlie & Eleanor Meek* (01:57) (Charlie is a subscriber to this Newsletter, long-time friend of the SFO and frequent contributor to SFO social media posts – hello, Charlie!).



The Hen's Maïrch Ower The Midden To The Crash Cymbals

The SFO's longest individual track on record is one of John Mason's greatest feats of composition and arrangement. It's the overture, *Prince of the Mists*, which tells – in musical terms – the short history of the Rebellion of 1745, culminating in the last battle to be fought on British soil (Culloden) in 1746. It is 18 minutes and 36 seconds in length.

Behind that, comes John's tribute to what is probably Robert Burns' most famous poem: *The Tam O' Shanter and Cutty Sark Overture* (13:29).

'Long' sets can be found elsewhere in the music of Shetland band, Fiddlers' Bid (*All Dressed in Yellow* – 2009 – 15:17 – from the album of the same name), Kevin Burke (A 16 minutes and 7 seconds set of Irish reels (reels!) starting and finishing with *Toss the Feathers*– concluding the album 'If the Cap Fits' (1978)), and two from Martin Hayes and Dennis Cahill (*Paul Ha'penny* set from 'The Lonesome Touch' (1996) – 11:51 – and (the winner?) *Port na bPucaí* set from 'Live in Seattle' – 27:38 (2000)).

If you know of other contenders or winners, please get in touch with your ideas. We'd love to hear from you.

Congratulations to Amber



SFO member (First Violin section), Amber Thornley, finished second at the senior solo fiddle championship at the All Scotland Accordion and Fiddle Festival held in Perth in October 2019.

She performed the March, Strathspey and Reel *King Robert the Bruce, Craigellachie Brig* and *The Spey in Spate*.

Amber is originally from Fochabers in Moray but now lives in Perth. We're delighted by Amber's success which goes to show the calibre of players we have in the orchestra. Well done, Amber!

SFO Board 2020

The current SFO Board is as follows: Chairman: R Diament; Secretary: K Egerton; Treasurer: R Langlands; Assistant Treasurer: F Brodlie; Front of House Manager: J Wallace; Concert Administrators: S Anderson (North); S Donlevy (East); A McLean (Central); L Norman (West); J Mason (South); Librarian: S Docherty; Digital Communication: A Davidson; Promotion: C Winn; Leader: Y Steven; Conductor: B Parham. (Company Secretary: P Brash).

Contacts and concerts

Contacts	
Secretary	SFO Secretary, 44 Roman Road, Almondbank, Perth, PH1 3LQ.
Treasurer	SFO Treasurer, 0/1 162 Hill Street, Glasgow, G3 6US.
Patrons/Friends	SFO Patrons, 24 Golf Crescent, Troon, Ayrshire, KA10 6 JZ.
Postal Sales	SFO Merchandise, 24 Golf Crescent, Troon, Ayrshire, KA10 6 JZ.

Concert Diary				
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	30 December 2019	0131 228 1155	usherhall.co.uk
Perth	Concert Hall	22 February 2020	01738 621031	horsecross.co.uk
North America	Tour- various	31 Mar - 08 April 2020		sfo.org.uk/sfo-na-tour-2020
Aberdeen	Music Hall	16 May 2020	01224 641122	aberdeenperformingarts.com
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	13 June 2020	0131 228 1155	Tickets on sale from 16 December 2019: usherhall.co.uk

Clickable links to the ticket booking pages for the various concerts above can be found on the SFO's home page at <http://sfo.org.uk/> - [HERE](#)

Back desk chat

I CUT A PING-PONG BALL IN HALF, DREW DOTS ON EACH END, AND PUT ONE OVER EACH EYE - SO IT WILL LOOK TO BLAIR LIKE I'M REALLY PAYING ATTENTION. OR DO I LOOK TOO INTERESTED?

DON'T THINK SO. I'M OVER HERE, BY THE WAY.

