



# The Scottish Fiddle Orchestra

Scotland's National Fiddle Orchestra

## NEWSLETTER

Patron: HRH The Princess Royal

Scottish Registered Charity No. SC010753

June 2020 / No. 84

### *Celebrating 40 years since the SFO's inaugural concert*

How are you doing?

We hope you are staying safe and keeping well.

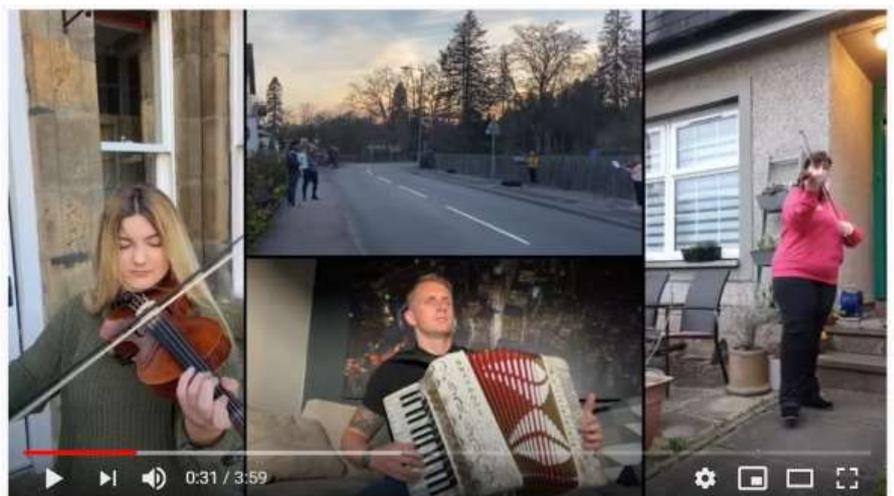
It would be easy to concentrate on all the things that have **not** happened since our last Newsletter, published on 01 March 2020.

Instead, we'll enjoy the fact that many SFO folk have had 'extra' time to play their instruments, have a good redd up and fish out some interesting memories and memorabilia we can focus on in this edition.

### *Everyday Heroes*

Skerryvore's hit tune "Everyday Heroes", benefiting NHS charities, has been a huge and deserved success.

Our regular concert compere, Gary Innes, appeared in the original video. Several SFO members recorded and posted their own versions of the melody. Hilary Turbayne of the SFO was featured in the all-stars version of the video (showing off by playing left-handed (!)).



#JoinTheBand #EverydayHeroes

Everyday Heroes - Skerryvore & (even more) Friends

17,186 views • Premiered Apr 23, 2020

460

3

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*Gary and Hilary in 'Everyday Heroes' (left and right)*

Several internet tune collections and online sessions have sprung up – including Duncan Chisholm's 'Covid Ceilidh', 'Quarantunes' and 'Tunes in the Hoose', in which the SFO's Sheena Mather has featured.

S03E87: Pete Clark

Kicking off the Tuesday tunes we have a stunning set from Pete Clark in Logisrair, Inc. See More



Sheena is the fiddler at the top left hand corner in the image.

It would be ideal if groups of musicians could get together online and play away together. What a way that would be to while away the hours.

Unfortunately, it's not as simple as that. Time delays on transmission mean that the only way these groups can play and sound sensible is by recording their parts individually and someone then editing it all together.

The Board of the SFO held its first ever Zoom meeting online on 22 March 2020 – something that reassured us we could manage the orchestra's affairs effectively from our wee boxes.



A small, select group of members went on to make use of Zoom for a reminiscing session about the SFO's first concert and that led to a birthday-greeting-cum-public-service-broadcast to send good wishes to our leader, Yla Steven, for her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The lack of synchronicity between audio and video was quite a laugh in some ways but things have gone full circle with the most recent "SFO Stalwarts Production" – in black and white, with gentle piano backing track and featuring handheld 'silent' captions.



Jamie, Bob and Catriona - "Hello and welcome to another chat with The SFO. Due to technical difficulties with synchronisation we have reverted to a more traditional tried and tested format." ...

## Photos and memories from the Aberdeen concert of 22 March 1980

Jamie Mason has cleared out his attic and found a trove of his Dad's photos from the SFO's very first concert, along with various scrapbooked newspaper cuttings.

These, in turn, sparked discussion on the SFO member's WhatsApp group as to who everyone was in the pictures – and stories about the many colourful characters associated with the orchestra in those early days.



*John Mason conducts the SFO at their first ever concert in Aberdeen's Music Hall in March 1980*

Jamie's comment on his Dad's dress code was: "Dad did not do kilts back then as they were not traditional in Orkney or in Dumfries and Galloway. He wore trousers and velvet jackets for many years until Ewen Mackay convinced him to wear a kilt for the London concert."

## From the Aberdeen Evening Express of Saturday, 8 March 1980

### New fiddle orchestra to have city debut – By Vivienne Nicoll

At a time when orchestras round Britain are under threat due to lack of cash it is encouraging to hear that a new orchestra has been formed.

It is the Scottish Fiddle Orchestra which will be giving an inaugural performance in Aberdeen's Music Hall on March 22.

One of the founders of the group, which will give every performance for charity, is Aberdeen social worker Mr Les Pratt.



Mr Pratt, 53 Wagley Parade, Bucksburn, is now court liaison officer with Grampian Regional Council but for a number of years he was a professional musician.

The orchestra is made up of 125 musicians from all over Scotland and the occupations of the members range from three Glasgow surgeons to a retired farmer.

## Dates

The age range of the musicians is also wide with the youngest member being 15 and the oldest about 70 years old.

Already they have five concert dates in hand with venues in Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Perth and the Usher Hall (*sic*) in London.

Mr Pratt said the idea to form the Scottish Fiddle Orchestra was only conceived in November last year.

And although they have not even given their first concert news of the orchestra has spread round the country generating a lot of support.

Prior to the inaugural concert musicians are to attend a civic reception in the Beach Ballroom in Aberdeen where they will present Lord Provost William Fraser with three music manuscripts.

The music was written by the orchestra's conductor Mr John Mason to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Aberdeen Strathspey and Reel Society.

The proceeds of the first performance will be donated to the Aberdeen branch of the Royal Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

On the day after their first concert, the orchestra will be playing in the North Church of Saint Andrew's inner Aberdeen which is known as the fiddle kirk.

*From the Aberdeen "People's Journal" for Saturday, 15 March 1980*

## Too many players wanted to join new orchestra

The newly-formed Scottish Fiddle Orchestra will hold its inaugural concert in Aberdeen's Music Hall on Saturday, in aid of the Royal Scottish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

The orchestra consists of fiddles, basses, cellos, violas, accordion, two pianos and a flute. Members hope to play four concerts a year in aid of charity – at Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Perth – although they have the Royal Albert Hall in London in mind, possibly for a performance in June 1981.



Orchestra members will, initially, have to pay their own expenses, and the profits from performances will go towards national charities – such as Cancer Research and the Royal National Lifeboats Institute. If adequate sponsorship is forthcoming orchestra may be able later to subsidise the expenses of its players to some extent.

The idea of the orchestra was mooted last November and players from all of the country were invited to apply for membership.

It attracted too many applications. Those who were not able to be included will still be to attend a weekend summer school.

The supplementary group will also be available to replace members who retire, &c.

## *Duettists*



*Dick Rob and Ralph Bell*

Dick Rob was one half of a saxophone duo with Ralph Bell, often playing an unannounced 'extra' Trad Jazz programme item, including 'When the Saints Go Marching In', which was busked by all on stage.

Betty Henderson and Reesa McGinn were the concert fiddle stars of the first few years of the SFO. They performed mainly tunes John Mason had written specifically for them, for example: The Shetlander; The Orcadian; The Academician; and The Trow Fiddlers.

At the very first SFO concert, they performed John Mason's 'The Hardanger' and 'The New Caledonian'. For more on The Hardanger, see later in this Newsletter.

Betty would play the first fiddle part in each tune and Reesa would play the harmony (though she also had to be able to play the tune, the first time through).

They were enthusiastic and charismatic players anyway but John's music really brought out the best in them.



*Reesa McGinn and Betty Henderson*

## *Willie and Bessie*



*John, Willie and Bessie*

Willie Dunlop was the SFO's first leader (1980-1984) and his wife, Bessie, always sat beside him at the first desk.

Several of the SFO's most popular and enduring sets were arranged by Willie (e.g. The Eightsome Reel).

## Rev. James Currie

Jimmy Currie was a Church of Scotland Minister, latterly at Dunlop in Ayrshire.

He was the SFO's almost-invariable compere from its inception until Jimmy's death at Easter 1987. A warm and funny man.

As with most comperes, he had a few jokes that he often repeated. Of leader, Willie Dunlop, he liked to point out that Willie's family tartan was MacIntyre – "because Dunlop have always been makin' tyres".

He didn't shy away from poking fun at religious themes.

"Last Sunday, at the morning service, only one person turned up. One solitary woman! And she fainted! My text for the sermon was: "And I will wrestle with thee until the breaking of the day" (Genesis 32:24 (approximately).

And he always mentioned the day's football results at a Saturday evening concert, ever anxious to report how his beloved Rangers had got on. When he called for '3 cheers' at the end of a concert, there was always an extra "one for the bloomin' Rangers".

Here are a few of the favourite Jimmy Currie stories we came up with in our WhatsApp chat.

*JC had been visiting an old folks' home where the television set had packed up. Mrs McGlumpher, to break the boredom, decided to streak through the gardens. Two of the residents caught a flash of her. "Whit was that?" one asked. "It was auld McGlumpher," the other explained. "An' whit was she wearin'?" "I don't know, but it was too big fur her."*

*Jimmy would visit a parishioner and he would have his tea and chew his way through the dish of Brazil nuts on the table next to his tea cup. As he got up and thanked the lady of the house for the tea and nuts she said "You are welcome to them. I don't like them" – and she then went on to explain that her son had bought her a box of chocolate-coated Brazils, but she only liked the chocolate...*

*There was the man who JC always claimed had sat through a JC-compered SFO concert and never once cracked a smile. His wife asked, "What's wrong, do you no' think he's funny?" "Aye, he's funny," came the reply, "but I don't like him. I'll laugh when I go home."*



*Rev. James Currie*



Even without sound, video or captions, we can probably guess which Glasgow Old Firm football club Mr Currie was trying to promote here.

## SFO Podcast

A Podcast is a digital audio file made available on the Internet for downloading to a computer or mobile device.

The SFO now has a podcast episode, available to download from our website.

This includes the audio of the “half-time chat” from our Perth 2020 concert which featured as text in our most recent Newsletter (No. 83 – March 2020).

The other main feature is excerpts from an archive recording of the SFO at the BBC Radio Scotland Hogmanay Show of 31 December 1981 – a little over a year after the SFO began.

Highlights include: several ‘old favourite’ SFO tunes and sets (The Irish Washerwoman, The 6:20 Two-Step); a performance of The Hardanger by Betty and Reesa; and a solo March, Strathspey and Reel from the SFO’s current leader, Yla Steven.

If you know the relationship between these two objects, then you are in a Covid-19 high risk category and you should stay at home and stay safe.



The recording of the 1981 radio broadcast was extracted from a TDK-C90 cassette tape. Coincidentally, an almost identical cassette has featured in a popular safety ‘advertisement’ recently circulating on social media (image left) – so we’re showing our age here.

Happily, no ‘pencil treatment’ was needed for this particular tape.

You can find the podcast at <http://sfo.org.uk/scottish-fiddle-orchestra-podcast/>

## 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.

North America	Various locations	28 March 2020 – 08 April 2020	CANCELLED
Aberdeen	Music Hall	16 May 2020	CANCELLED
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	13 June 2020	CANCELLED
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	05 September 2020	CANCELLED
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	30 December 2020	Tickets not yet on sale
Perth	Concert Hall	27 February 2021	Tickets not yet on sale

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](#)



CELEBRITY FANS OF THE SFO  
No. 1 - Prince plays Fiddlers 2 the 4