



The Scottish Fiddle Orchestra

Scotland's National Fiddle Orchestra

NEWSLETTER

Patron: HRH The Princess Royal

Scottish Registered Charity No. SC010753

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Getting back to playing concerts

“Lockdown has led me to think that it's not so much the music I love in itself as the experience of playing music with others in the same room as me.”

Or words to that effect.

That's what one of our senior members was heard to say recently in an unguarded moment during another of the regular online Zoom meetings Board members have been holding to discuss SFO matters.

Although technology in conjunction with the internet provides various ways of simulating the ensemble experience for listeners, it's really just not the same from a playing perspective.

For that reason, you can rest assured that we are desperate to get back to in-person performing and doing all we can to make that a reality.

As things stand, though we do believe in miracles, that is what will be required for our Edinburgh “Hogmanay” concert to go ahead on 30 December 2020. Perhaps more realistically, the dates and concerts we are working towards are 27 February 2021 (Perth Concert Hall) and 24 April 2021 (Aberdeen – probably at the Beach Ballroom).

This edition of the Newsletter contains a thank you to a national consumer organisation for helping the SFO recover some of the money we paid out for our cancelled North America Tour. We also look back to a tour that did happen – 10 years ago, when we celebrated our 30th anniversary – and bring you up to date with various methods SFO members are employing to “keep in shape” for that eagerly-awaited time when the next concert becomes a reality.

Beyond that (and despite the unguarded comment above) the focus is on the music we love.

The tunes. Stories behind tunes, stories about tunes – some SFO-related and some not.

But first...

What Which? did

Part of the SFO's financial outlay for our planned tour to the Eastern seaboard states of the USA and Canadian Maritimes was for flights.

In common with just about everyone else in the world who had booked air travel from March 2020, we had great difficulty getting a refund. Replacement vouchers were a



possibility but we did not consider that to be a realistic alternative, given the amount of money involved.

Our Assistant Treasurer, Fiona Brodlie, had the brainwave of asking the consumer organisation Which? for help. They managed to achieve a successful outcome for us quite quickly.

We are very grateful to Which? and we appreciate our good fortune when so many people are still waiting for refunds.

SFO – 30th Anniversary Tour (2010)

The SFO's 50th Newsletter was published in September 2010. In that edition, Robert Clark reported on the orchestra's 30th anniversary tour which had taken us to Shetland, Orkney and Inverness.



Kirkwall, Orkney

Our 30th Anniversary celebrations continued after our Edinburgh Concert in the form of a "Northern Tour". What better way to celebrate such an event.

On 19th July the orchestra boarded the MV Hjaltland in Aberdeen for an overnight voyage to Lerwick in Shetland which lies about 100 miles north-east of Caithness in Scotland. We were blessed with a calm crossing and arrived to a fog-bound island the next day. The weather didn't dampen the welcome we received in the Clickimin Centre Lerwick, and we played to an enthusiastic (almost) capacity audience.

The next evening we crossed the sea to Kirkwall in Orkney known by the Norse as Kirkjuvagr (church bay) and it is dominated by St Magnus Cathedral established in 1137 to the memory of the martyred Earl Magnus. This was where many of the players were met by their hosts for the stay.

Old friendships were renewed and new ones formed. We had a full house in the Pickaquoy Centre and got a true Orcadian welcome. After the concert there was a marvellous ceilidh which hosted both local and orchestral talent, this being a 'thank you' to our hosts for their kindness during our stay – a great time was had by all.

Friday morning saw us once again in St Magnus Cathedral. The red Sandstone building lends warmth to the graceful, but solid structure, with its multicoloured glazed windows through which the sun streamed lighting every detail of the marvellous workmanship inside. We performed for a lunch time recital. The Cathedral was full with many visitors from a large ship visiting for the day joining the local audience for another memorable occasion.

We then made our way to Stromness, boarding the MV Hamnavoe which sailed to Scrabster, passing on its way the famous rock stack the Old Man of Hoy. The high, western cliffs of Hoy make a dramatic sight seen from the deck of the vessel. Arriving in Scrabster we headed for our next venue which was Eden Court Theatre in Inverness. It is a number of years since we played there, but we once again had a full house. The "Team" that organised the tour worked hard and have to be congratulated on the arrangements made to facilitate the orchestra's tour which will be remembered by all who participated.

“Second class return to Dottingham, please.”

That's a line from a famous 1980s TV ad for the blocked-nose-relieving menthol sweeties called Tunes.

Those Tunes have always been in boiled sweet form. By contrast, Fiddle Tunes come in several different formats.

Much of the SFO's repertoire is made up of Marches, Strathspeys, Reels, Jigs and Slow Airs.

Some tunes are named after people and places: The Duke of Fife's Welcome to Deeside; Willie Kidd's Welcome to Orkney; Jim Sutherland's Welcome to His Opinions. Some tunes are named after events. Some tunes have interesting (or dull) or quirky or intriguing names.

Here are various tune-related stories and observations, some connected to the SFO but mostly not.

The mispronunciation

Irish-American fiddler, Liz Carroll, is a prolific composer of tunes and this is her explanation of one of her tunes – extracted from the Blarney Pilgrims podcast.

The tune is called the Diplodocus (pronounced "Diplodocus").

It's a tune I wrote quite a few years ago. It's a jig.

My son, when he was young, was very into dinosaurs, especially the names of them. He loved saying the names and he loved knowing the names. I had actually started a tune pre- that period. I had written 2 sections of the tune but I did not think that it was finished. But I couldn't think any more. Not with 2 kids – Patrick and Alison – in the house.

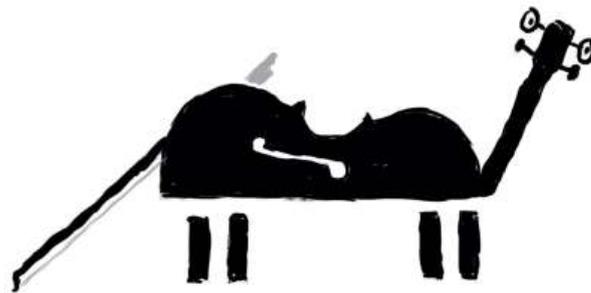
So when Patrick got to be about 3 years old and was getting into dinosaurs, I felt I had a bit more time and I managed to come up with the third part for the tune. Our favourite dinosaur – at least, to say – was "Diplodocus".

The book that we had about dinosaurs gave no pronunciations, so we were taking a shot at how to say it. But then, sometime afterwards, I did get a dinosaur book which told you how to pronounce the different names – and people told me this too – so it's really "Diplodocus".

To which I always say: "I would never have called a tune 'The Diplodocus' – What kind of a name is that?"

But "Diplodocus" sounded so funny and fun.

According to a comment on the tune on The Session website, the time that elapsed between Liz composing the first and second measures, and finishing the tune with the third section, was eight years. Tune composition should not be rushed.

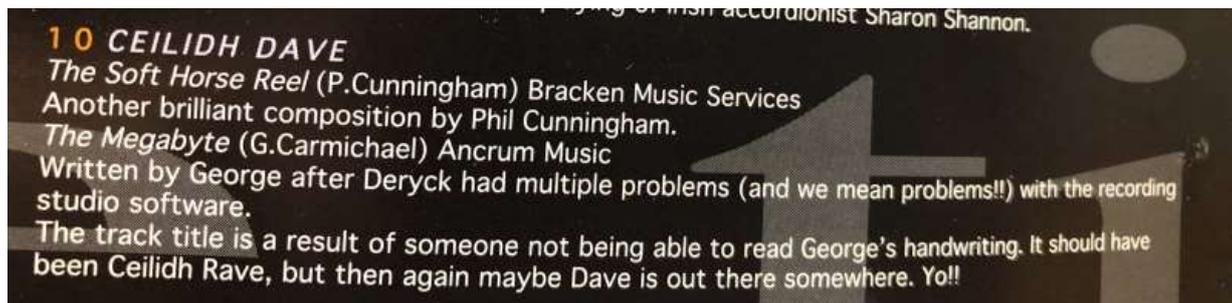


The misreading

One of Scotland's foremost fiddlers is Paul Anderson from Tarland, Aberdeenshire.

In 1991, he was part of the band The Cutting Edge and they released an album called *Turning the Tide*, which contained a track called *Ceilidh Dave*, written by accordionist with the band, George Carmichael.

"The track title is a result of someone not being able to read George's handwriting. It should have been *Ceilidh Rave*, but then again maybe Dave is out there somewhere. Yo!!"



Memories (of China)

The SFO visited China over Hogmanay 2012 / 2013. Yla Steven – Leader of the SFO – composed a set of four reels, commemorating various incidents from that tour. As Yla explains...



The Laughing Buddha

Sleepless in Suzhou was composed during the night in a Suzhou hotel and was written down at 5:00am in the morning. It is

loosely based on a traditional Chinese folk song from the 18th century called "Jasmin Flower", which the orchestra had been playing throughout the tour. It became one of the first Chinese folk songs to gain wide recognition outside China and featured during events such as the 2004 Summer Olympics, the 2008 Summer Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai Expo opening ceremony.



Hangzhou Bay Bridge

We saw *The Laughing Buddha* when we visited the Lingyin Buddhist Temple en route from Hangzhou to Taican.

Hangzhou Bay Bridge is one of the longest sea-crossing bridges in the world at 22 miles long and the bridge shortens the distance between Shanghai and Ningbo by 75 miles. We crossed the bridge twice during the tour.

On the Run: I'll leave that to the listener's imagination!

The lengths to which folk will go to get inspiration to compose a tune

Drawing in your audience with a compelling description of the tunes you're about to play is an art in itself.

The late Arty McGlynn (guitar) was a master. Available to enjoy "live" on YouTube if you wish, here's Arty's lead-in to a set of tunes he and Cathal Hayden (banjo and fiddle) are about to play at the Baltimore Ireland's Fiddle Fair's 20th anniversary concert in 2012.



Arty McGlynn and Cathal Hayden at the 20th Baltimore Fiddle Fair, County Cork, Ireland

We are going to play a set of 3 jigs.

They have a story to them.

The first one is called Mrs O'Sullivan's jig. The second one is called The Priest in his Boots. And the third is called... – I don't have a name for the third one.

The first one was named after a fiddle player from Cork, Miss O'Sullivan.

She met a man from Cavan called John O'Sullivan. In the second year of her marriage, she was cycling her bike. She lived at the very top of Mountain Alley. She was going down Mountain Alley and the brakes failed on her bicycle.

*She hurtled down the hill at very high speed, the wind blowing through her hair, and the first part of this jig came into her head. But she fell off the bike half way down and she only had the **first** part of the tune.*

So she went back up to her husband. (She wasn't too badly hurt that time). She told her husband what had happened. She whistled the first part of the tune for him.

He said: "That's a very good jig – you should finish that jig."

So, the next morning, Mr O'Sullivan and a friend got Mrs O'Sullivan up on the bicycle, with her feet up on the handlebars and fiddle and all, and pushed off down Mountain Alley.

An innocent bystander on MacCurtain Street swore that she was doing in excess of 80 miles an hour when he saw her cross the street. She crashed through the front doors of the Metropole Hotel. She was very badly broken up.

When she got out of hospital after 2 or 3 months, she had this **whole** tune.

She only composed 5 tunes in her entire life...

Of course, by that stage, every bone in her body was broken up.

The local doctor in Cork advised John O'Sullivan to take her somewhere flat, where she couldn't hurt herself. He suggested Longford. But, John O'Sullivan, being a very cautious man with his money – a wise man from Cavan – took a very hefty insurance policy out on her and he bought a place in the French Alps – where she hurtled to her death 2 weeks later.

At his trial in France, O'Sullivan was asked by the French judge why he hadn't taken the advice of the local doctor back in Cork. John O'Sullivan said that, in all truthfulness – in all fairness – he thought that, given the right circumstances, she had a symphony in her.

Space constraints mean we are unable to include here the story behind The Priest in His Boots.

Our thanks are due to fiddler, Dr. Laura Ryan, for filling in some of the geographical background details, as well as highlighting that Arty's explanation of the genesis of Mrs O' Sullivan's Jig may not be entirely factual.

"I think the street [Mountain Alley?] he is talking about is one of two streets. It's either York Street, a very narrow road that leads down to MacCurtain Street. I've sent you a picture on map. The fictional element is that the Metropole Hotel he cites is not directly in front of it as you'll see... The second option is Patrick's Hill. That is a wider road, though not by much! Given he uses the word "alley" I would go for York Street."

Judge for yourself...



GPS Details

Decimal: Latitude 51.90258 N Longitude -8.466017 W

Minutes & Hours: Latitude 53°21'21.7"N Longitude 6°16'06.1"W

Directions from Bus Station: Start at the station. Cross the bridge that is to your right. Take the second left, at The Leisureplex Bowling Alley, and turn onto Mac Curtain St. Take the first right turn up the hill named York St. At the top of York St., look across the road to your right and you'll see the sign for Sheila's.

From Cork Airport: (BY BUS) Take the [Airport Shuttle](#) bus into Bannell Place Bus Station. As

Happy 70th Birthday to The Princess Royal

John's Fiddle Treat is fit for a Princess



Bob, Jamie and Louise produced a lovely video in tribute to our Patron, Princess Anne, who has this year celebrated her 70th birthday.

It features the background story to the composition of the Patrol March, *Our Princess Royal*, by John Mason in 1994, and features the orchestra's performance of the piece at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall concert of 2018.

The video was released to coincide with the SFO's 2020 Glasgow concert (7th September 2020), which had to be cancelled due to Covid-19.

You can find the video on our YouTube page here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbokE6qp_RO

SFO members keep in shape as we wait for our next concert opportunity

Our drummer, David, has spent Lockdown lifting heavy stuff.



His parents, Fiona and Jim, have done 2,000 miles of Tour de Ayrshire.



Elisabeth performed the 6/8 Pipe March, *The 10th Battalion H.L.I. Crossing the Rhine*, on the summit of Dumyat in the Ochil Hills.



There was an SFO Golf Outing at Ladybank in Fife, featuring Amanda and Kirsty.



A socially-distanced Tune in Troon with the Ayrshire contingent in two gardens.



And a Zoom Gin Time!



SFO Contacts

Contacts	
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Patrons/Friends	SFO Patrons, 24 Golf Crescent, Troon, Ayrshire, KA10 6 JZ.
Postal Sales	SFO Merchandise, 24 Golf Crescent, Troon, Ayrshire, KA10 6 JZ.

Forthcoming concerts

Edinburgh	Usher Hall	30 December 2020	Tickets not yet on sale
Perth	Concert Hall	27 February 2021	Tickets not yet on sale
Aberdeen	Beach Ballroom	24 April 2021	Tickets not yet on sale
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	12 June 2021	Tickets not yet on sale

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

Thank you for your continued support of the SFO, keep safe, stay patient and, until the next time...

...the last word in this edition is from Inverness-shire fiddler, Duncan Chisholm. well-known for his work with Wolfstone and Blazin' Fiddles, as well as his solo albums and composing.



Duncan Chisholm
@DuncanWChisholm



If the chaos of the world is getting all too much then try to make your music louder than the chaos ❤️

