



The Scottish Fiddle Orchestra

Scotland's National Fiddle Orchestra

NEWSLETTER

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A Memorable Northern Nights Tour

Having recently returned from an action-packed and very enjoyable Northern Tour, we thought we should break the trend of recent Newsletters by publishing less than 3 months after the last one (June 2018).

This edition is devoted entirely to a review of the tour and a selection of the photos we took. We hope this will help you appreciate what a thrill it was for us to visit some of Scotland's most beautiful locations, as well as celebrating their culture and music.

Our normal concert programme continues, as usual. Our next concert is at Glasgow Royal Concert Hall on Saturday 15th September 2018 at 7.30pm. See the table towards the end of the Newsletter for full details.

Go with the (Scapa) Flow for a mighty Muckle Flugga!



SFO Northern Tour T-Shirt - front

When Robert, the Dodds of Troon bus driver, picked up his first SFO passenger in Troon at about 7:00am on Saturday, 21 July 2018, our Northern Nights Tour was under way. The coach progressed northwards, collecting the touring party members along the way, via the A9 to Aviemore and then along Speyside to Elgin.

The travelling party consisted of about 65 people. The playing contingent was about 60. Some players could not undertake the whole tour but they took in as much of it as they could. Our good friends and regular singers with the SFO, Colette Ruddy and Dennis Haggerty, also travelled with us on the coach. The tour team was completed by a couple of extra carloads of players and front-of-house team – and, last but not least, our Roadie, Jim Hogg, in his hired van (along with Jamie Mason).



The coach arrives at Elgin Town Hall; Setting up inside; Tour poster.

DAY ONE – Moray and Elgin

The first concert was in Elgin Town Hall. It was an exciting moment when the long-awaited Tour T-shirts were distributed before the afternoon rehearsal. The T-shirts had a design of Muckle Flugga Lighthouse on the front, together with our tour slogan (“Go with the (Scapa) Flow for a mighty Muckle Flugga!”).



SFO Northern Tour T-Shirt - Back

Our guests were Elgin and District Pipe Band and Frontline and Friends (a group of young fiddlers from Moray schools). The local charity we supported was The Oaks Palliative Day Centre, Elgin. The bucket collection (plus some further donations) raised a total of £420 for The Oaks.

DAY TWO – Glenmorangie, Tain and the Pentland Firth

After a night where the touring party was split between the Laichmoray Hotel and the Royal Hotel, we left Elgin around 10am on 22 July to travel via Inverness to Glenmorangie Distillery at Tain.



Ready for the performance; Performance; Reward.

This was for a planned "drop-in" concert on the narrow tarmac area between the Visitor Centre and the Distillery itself. We played an open-air concert of about one hour's duration to a group of locals and tourists. The concert was in aid of RNLI Invergordon Lifeboat and the bucket collection raised a total of £230. Our founder, John Mason, regularly referred to a ceilidh as “a distillery set to music”. Our ceilidh had plenty of dancing. Annette MacKenzie and her staff in the Visitor Centre made sure that there was no shortage of whisky, shortbread and clothes pegs to stop our music blowing away.

We were on our way again by 2pm and we completed the journey to Scrabster in time to catch the ferry to Orkney at 7pm. Passing a misty Old Man of Hoy en route to Stromness, the coach took us onwards across the Orkney mainland to Kirkwall and Papdale Halls of Residence. This was our accommodation for two nights. Danielle Leslie and her team looked after us in very comfortable state-of-the-art facilities.



The SFO at Papdale Halls of Residence, Kirkwall, Orkney

DAY THREE – In and around Kirkwall

Monday morning, 23 July, was a free morning for orchestra members. Many of us visited the premises of Sheila Fleet Jewellery at Tankerness, where we enjoyed a guided tour. Very few of the group did not purchase some or other item of jewellery before the morning was over.

We returned to the Halls of Residence and then went on to the rehearsal for the concert in the Pickaquooy Centre in Kirkwall. The special guests for the concert were Kirkwall City Pipe Band and the West Mainland Strathspey and Reel Society, Junior Branch.

It was an eventful rehearsal, during which our only double bass for the concert fell over and suffered a broken neck. Fortunately, we were able to borrow another one and the concert was a success, with extra seats having to be added on the night to accommodate the audience. Special thanks to Laura Olsen and her team for managing to pack everyone in in time for the performance. Afterwards, we had a ceilidh in the British Legion Kirkwall premises until 1am, with the best cheese and pickle sandwiches ever, prepared by Mitzi Collingwood from a secret recipe.



At Sheila Fleet Jewellery, Tankerness, Orkney - Spot the male visitor!

DAY FOUR – St Magnus' Way

We had to vacate the halls of residence the following morning as that night we would be on the ferry to Shetland. After checking out, we had the morning free until we met up again for another pop-up concert on the green outside St Magnus Cathedral at 12 noon. In glorious sunny weather, we attracted quite a few of the numerous visitors who were in Kirkwall from cruise ships that day. The bucket collection at this free concert was in aid of RNLI Kirkwall Lifeboat and we raised the sum of £350.



The SFO plays for dancing on the Kirk Green, St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall, Orkney

The afternoon was free to allow orchestra members to have a leisurely, late lunch and relax before the evening's concert in St Magnus Cathedral itself. The SFO were again joined by Kirkwall City Pipe Band and this concert included the world premiere of a composition by Andy Cant (of the Kirkwall pipe band) and orchestrated by the SFO's Fiona Morison, called "St Magnus Way". This piece was written to celebrate the recently-opened 55-mile-long [pilgrimage route through Mainland Orkney](#), inspired by the life and death of Magnus, Orkney's patron saint. Our other special guest performers were young players from Orkney Traditional Music project. In these magnificent surroundings, the concert also featured some memorable singing from Colette and Dennis.



DAY FIVE – Reaching Lerwick Harbour

We had to move quickly following the St Magnus Cathedral concert to pack up the van and get ourselves onto the coach, in order to get to Hatston Terminal in Kirkwall to catch the ferry to Shetland, which left after midnight. We were blessed with a calm, clear, moonlit conditions for our crossing and we arrived in Lerwick at 7am on Wednesday 25 July, as scheduled. After breakfast on the ferry, the coach transported everyone to Islesburgh Hostel where we left our belongings before heading into Lerwick's central pedestrianised area for another pop-up concert – this time, outside High Level Music, at the Market Cross at 11am. Many thanks to Fiona Adamson of High Level for providing storage space for instrument cases and power for this concert.

The area was, in fact, not entirely free of traffic – as could be seen from the various videos we posted on social media. Indeed, at one point, Dennis had to break from the usual words of Scotland the Brave to include a warning to a male pedestrian to "watch his back" and avoid being knocked down by a vehicle. This pop-up concert was in aid of Lerwick Lifeboat and the bucket collection raised £210.



We then moved to an afternoon rehearsal at Clickimin Leisure Centre ahead of our evening concert there. Special guests were Lerwick Royal British Legion Pipe Band and Kirmirren (a group of young fiddlers who won 'Shetland's Got Talent 2017'). This concert was notable for the significant number of audience members who got up to dance during the 'audience participation' section of the programme. The enormous dance floor (the space between the audience and the orchestra) was in fact due to a typographical error in the stage set-up instructions provided by the SFO to Clickimin – but it turned out to be a good mistake. The bucket collection at the concert was in aid of Shetland Relay For Life (a campaign under the umbrella of Cancer Research UK). The bucket collection raised £408.

Following the concert, we had a ceilidh in Islesburgh Hostel, which we had almost completely taken over due to the size of our party, anyway. Whilst there was barely room for dancing, there was plenty of music and singing.



DAY SIX – Tom Anderson, Eshaness and Leaving Lerwick Harbour

On Thursday 26 July, we were lucky to have Charlie Simpson of the Shetland Fiddlers' Society, as our guide on a coach tour to the north-west of Shetland's mainland and, in particular, Eshaness, the birthplace and final resting place of Tom Anderson.

Tom was largely responsible for the preservation of the various regional styles of traditional Shetland fiddling through the recordings he was able to make from around the 1950s onwards. At that time, he worked as an insurance agent and so his job took him all over the islands. He was also a wonderful composer of fiddle tunes and orchestra members were privileged to be able to play Da Slockit Light and Da Auld Resting Chair – two of his best-known slow airs – at his graveside.

Again, the weather was beautiful, allowing Shetland's stunning scenery to be seen at its best. There was also time for stops at Tangwick Haa Museum, Eshaness Lighthouse and Braewick Cafe before the bus travelled back to town to catch the 5pm ferry, bound for Aberdeen. This was the SFO "Leaving Lerwick Harbour", the Willie Hunter slow air our leader and soloist for the tour, Yla Steven, had performed at each of the main concerts over the week. She didn't disappoint on the ship, playing it as the MV Hrossey left port.



The SFO visiting the graveyard at Eshaness, Shetland, where Tom Anderson is buried.



The SFO's final concert of the tour was on board the Hrossey, as it sailed southwards.

Our conductor, Blair Parham, who had to cope with a seemingly impossible stream of rehearsals and concerts, as well as impromptu concerts, introduced the final set of swinging reels on the ferry as he usually does by saying: "Here's a wee tune to help you out the door..." – a comment which maybe does not work so well when you are on a ship.

DAY SIX – A Great Tour

The verdict of Northern Nights Tour Manager, Bob Diament (pictured inside St Magnus Cathedral in the right hand photo of three, above), was that the Northern Tour had been “musically and socially magical, and if the audiences enjoyed it as much as we did then a tremendous success.”

“It was interesting to find out that we are our best marketing tool: the “drop-in” concerts were our best marketing method and worked very well – a tribute to the adaptability of the band and the ingenuity of our Roadie, Jim Hogg, and Jamie Mason. We were so lucky with the weather. Pop-up concerts are something we should look at doing more of, weather permitting! I would like to thank everyone who worked so hard to make the tour a success. We received invaluable assistance from local people everywhere we went. Special thanks must go to our sponsors, Northlink Ferries. We hope to get back on the “road” and the “high seas” again before too long!”



Colette, Blair and Dennis warming up for the Glenmorangie Concert.



Catriona on the edge of the world at Eshaness, Shetland.

Concert Diary				
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	15th September 2018	0141 353 8000	www.glasgowconcerthalls.com
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	30th December 2018	0131 228 1155	www.usherhall.co.uk
Perth	Concert Hall	23rd February 2019		Tickets on sale from 1st Sep 2018
Aberdeen	Music Hall	27th April 2019		Tickets not on sale yet
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	15th June 2019		Tickets not on sale yet



Homeward bound from Shetland

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