

# Traditional Fiddle Workshop @ Strachur

Newsletter  
March – May 2017

Registered Scottish Charity No. SC033935



## Dates for your Diary:

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### Committee Meeting

Wed 24<sup>th</sup> May 7pm

Strachur Memorial  
Hall

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### LFW AGM

7 pm

Wed 21<sup>st</sup> June

Strachur Memorial  
Hall

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### New Season Registration

Wed 30<sup>th</sup> August  
7.30

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### New Season begins

Mon/Wed 4<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup>  
September

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Wed 16<sup>th</sup> August  
Phil Cunningham

and Ali Bain

Inveraray Inn

7.30 for 8 start

Tickets from the  
Inn or phone

07786 392426

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## Editor's Musings.

Here is the latest newsletter of the session, and for me also a final newsletter.

I am reorganising my leisure time for next session and have decided that I am not returning at present to the weekly classes. I have had a great time since beginning the attempt to add fiddle-playing to my various interests, and in the three-and-a-bit years I have been part of LFW (at Strachur) I have learned so much and made lots of good friends while trying to get tuneful noises out of the fiddle. I have also learned that had I started away back when I was sub-teens I might have been a reasonable player! Almost sixty years of playing fretted instruments which do not go under the chin and do not require a bow have set my grip, muscle memory and posture immutably, I'm afraid!

I have been very fortunate in having as tutors Siobhan Anderson, Kathryn Bailie and Mairi Voinot plus those others who stood in for them on occasions when they were not available. My over-riding impression of them all has been their infinite patience and dedication to the task of teaching such a mixed group of students. My sincere thanks to all of you and I have learned so much from you all and will continue to learn, I hope.

I will continue to play fiddle in the privacy of my own home but will be playing much more on guitar and mandolin, my first loves, and continuing my playing with the small groups I am active with around Dunoon. I hope to stay in contact with all of you and will come along to any workshops which might be happening, and I'd certainly love to continue playing an accompanying role to any of you if there are occasions where this might arise, whether at the Gaelic Mods (both were great fun) or if you are playing for any of the groups we have entertained over the past few years. Thursday evenings at MacClure's will still be a highlight of the week.

Peter Ellwood in the previous issue of the newsletter gave us very interesting insights into the learning process and the frustrations felt by us all as we strive to improve. Peter's second part is in this issue and again is really informative reading.

LFW has been a great learning experience and I wish you all continuing success and progress in your pursuit of excellence in this most frustrating of instruments! Please keep in touch.

John K

## **The String School**

As flagged up in the last newsletter, our Tutor, Mairi Voinot, organised an excellent two-day series of workshops in the Annexe in Partick, Glasgow on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> and Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> April. There was a special opportunity in the Saturday programme for Junior fiddlers to have their own workshop and some of our Strachur Juniors were there to learn.

Teaching fiddle on both days along with Mairi were Gillian Frame from Arran and Adam Sutherland from Errogie, both renowned traditional fiddlers with a wealth of playing and teaching experience. Adam stepped in at short notice to replace Sarah Naylor who had to withdraw from the event. Seylan Baxter (well-known to many of the LFW fiddlers) ran a cello workshop and taught interesting accompaniment techniques as well as general cello playing. Christopher Ferrie, a guitarist who plays in many different genres, offered workshops on guitar accompaniment and the smaller numbers in the guitar section meant that students really got a lot of time and attention from Chris.

Several of the LFW regulars were present on both days, all but your editor attending the fiddle workshops – yes, I went to the guitar workshop with Chris and thoroughly enjoyed it, though I missed the Saturday classes, having prior commitments on that day.

Saturday evening provided the opportunity for the various tutors to showcase their own playing in a concert in Hyndland Community Hall. After the concert students had the opportunity to take part in an informal session. Judging by the seemingly delicate condition of some of the participants I met early on the Sunday morning the informal sessions must have lasted for a fair time, and maybe even a few refreshments were taken!

As well as set classes there were mixed sessions where players were brought together to experience what the others had been doing in their respective workshops, and on the Sunday afternoon an impromptu session was run with all players coming together for a very enjoyable finale. Each tutor presented his or her group to entertain the others. The finale saw all players working on one particular piece and creating a dynamic arrangement which highlighted the various instruments; Cellos and guitars provided a steady backing to underpin the fiddlers and harmonies were added to create a very pleasing piece of performance under Chris's watchful eye.

On Sunday after all the playing there were photos taken of the whole group and then there were further opportunities for any interested folk to head out into the Glasgow session scene with various well-known establishments on offer for players to try their newly-honed skills. An event to repeat, Mairi!

### "I Love a Lassie"

After many weeks of rehearsing, Friday 12th May dawned. Several of our members took part in a local community event, "I Love a Lassie". This variety show was to commemorate the centenary of the death of Sir Harry Lauder's son, Captain John C. Lauder, who, like so many of his generation, died in First World War. He was killed at the Somme on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1916.

In front of a full house in Strachur Memorial Hall, tutor Mairi Voinot and three of our junior fiddlers entertained the audience with a lively set of tunes.

Next, the adult beginner group, who started classes eight months ago, followed and were amazing! They played a set of four Gaelic tunes. These two groups received loud and appreciative applause from the very responsive audience. Finally, with the able assistance of Jean-Ann Callender, the mixed ability group played "The Lauder Medley" (arranged by Jean-Ann) which included many of his most well-known songs. Well done to all who took part. Thank you for supporting your workshop and helping to raise the profile of LFW.

A special thanks to LFW member Alison Diamond who played harmony throughout the medley and to Alison Duncan who prepared the entire script for the show and acted as narrator throughout.

For a more detailed account of the evening please see our website [www.fiddleworkshop.co.uk](http://www.fiddleworkshop.co.uk)

Evie



## A Day in The Life

Fiddles are fascinating things and it is always amazing to see just how tough they are and how well they can withstand the rigours and abuses of time. For such lightly-built instruments they have a remarkable resilience and this was brought home to me once again when one of the LFW members, Patrick Gibb, brought me a fiddle he had just acquired which was not really in a playable condition, having cracks in the soundboard, very unhappy tuning pegs and a neck which was held in place mainly by the tension of the strings. I found out about the neck when I loosened off the strings!

Having checked with Patrick that this was not a valuable heirloom nor a lost Stradivarius I agreed to have a go at making it playable once again.



First was to get the soundboard and neck off, done with applications of hot water and palette knives – not for the faint-hearted! I used a hypodermic syringe to get hot water into the neck joint. Fiddles are assembled with hide glue so that they can be taken apart. The glue is applied hot, and heating it loosens it once again.

Inside, the fiddle's history began to unfold. Notice the previous repairs to a crack in the soundboard. This was signed: "Repaired by J Lindsay, Perth 1977, for Trinity College Glenalmond" (left picture below).





## A Day In The Life (Continued)

The photo on the left shows Lindsay's repair and pencilled signature, that on the right the cracks I repaired and cleated; Lindsay's repair is at bottom left.

When the repairs had dried out, the soundboard was glued once again to the ribs of the fiddle. The clamping used can be seen here, four clamps already in position and the spool clamps ready to be fitted in the C ribs area



After the glue had dried it was time to clean the neck pocket and neck joint. This involved cleaning the old glue off then gluing and clamping the neck back in, making sure to get the neck angle set properly.



Here is the fiddle restrung and set up. It was a really interesting project and gave plenty of challenges throughout. It actually has a rather nice sound too! Wonder who is or was J Lindsay? Both our names are inside this fiddle now and if someone else carries out further work in the future, another name might well be added.

John K

### Amy Geddes Workshop

Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> March was the date for the eagerly-awaited workshop with Amy Geddes. Amy was previously one of the tutors at LFW and she is one of the leading young Scottish traditional fiddlers and has a very fine teaching style and great enthusiasm for fiddle teaching and playing.

Eighteen of us joined the workshop, and we had some other instruments as well as the fiddles; two guests joined us on accordion, another on viola and Martin Donovan and yours truly had mandolins and guitar to add to the blend.

Amy concentrated on playing in group settings and did a lot of very interesting work on rhythm and dynamics, and on arranging tunes to make them more interesting both to performers and to the listener. There is a big difference between playing for dancing, where the beat and rhythm are the important things, and playing in a concert setting, where the audience is listening much more closely and anticipating much more in the way of variations in dynamics, pace, voicings, etc. We all picked up a great deal of very valuable information from Amy in how to make performance more interesting both to ourselves as players and to our audiences.

As well as the above, Amy also taught one of her own tunes, Cruden Bay. Written as a 2/4 March, but with a lovely syncopated swing, this tune was a real hit with all the students and I for one certainly came away with it very firmly in my head. The tune came to Amy as she was strolling along the beach at Cruden Bay with her dog, and she became aware of the rhythm of the water coming up the beach and receding in an endless cycle. We worked hard at getting the tune under our fingers and playing along to the guitar rhythm Amy suggested as a backing.

JK



## Musings from a Slow Improver (Part 2)

(Peter Ellwood continues his personal take on the experimental fiddle class LFW has been running with Kathryn on Monday evenings)

As we said in part 1, no matter whether your aim is a fast reel or a slow air, once you've learned the basics, for good performance, fiddle technique is all. Hence the experimental class this year devoted to improvement in that area. We focused on four aspects: ornamentation (embellishments), fourth finger technique (really using that pinkie), unexpected rhythms and (surprisingly) third position playing and double stopping.

*Fiddle for Dummies*, the tutor by Michael John Sanchez with online video and audio, lists **six** different types of embellishment used to ornament Scottish fiddle music: accents, grace notes, rolls, slurs, snaps and triplet runs. Trills, mordents, birds and slides should also be on the list. Those already in the LFW repertoire include:

- Accents (> above the note) emphasize certain beats, give drive to melody. Sometimes they are written in, as in Alistair McCulloch's *Coweta Country Breakdown*, sometimes not.
- Grace notes are those little notes (*acciaccatura* for music readers) played very fast before base notes. They feature in Henry Maughan's *Drimsynie Beg*.
- Rolls or turns work wonders in slow airs like Willie Hunter's *The Love O' Da Isles* introduced by Graham MacKenzie at last year's summer workshop.
- Slurs can radically change the mood of a melody—as we noted comparing the arrangement of *O'er the hills to Ardentinn* (practised for the variety show in May) with the way Harry Lauder actually sang it.
- Snaps, a distinguishing feature of all genres of Scottish music, add interest by changing the rhythm, as in our arrangement of *Comin' Thro' The Rye*.
- Fast triplet runs of three notes equalling one beat of time can be attached at the beginning of a phrase, often at the beginning of a piece, as in *The Reason Why I Noo Wear the Kilt* in the Lauder set.

Next we learned to make *better use of our fourth finger*. Already it deployed for the high B in the second half of *The Maid behind the Bar* and the high D in *Drimsynie Beg*. Our pinkies will really be playing their full part when we can fluently play the following exercise in octave jumps:



One advantage of learning tunes by ear is that you learn the rhythm and the accents that make it interesting at the same time as learning the notes. Some *unexpected rhythms*, for example accentuating the first, third and *sixth* quaver in an eight-quaver (continued on P8)

bar proved more of a challenge and playing them at speed (up to 200 bpm) consumed considerable class time—even when confined to one note on one string. First we used only a low A, then moved on to double-stopped low A with F# on the D string on each accent. We never found a tune with precisely that rhythm so we made one up:

## Kathryn's Pain



Given that nearly every YouTube video displaying the prowess of master fiddlers shows them playing in first position, our *introduction to third position* was a surprise. What it does though is break through the confines of our normal range—increasing it from broadly two octaves (low G to high A or B on the E string) to three or more. As in *Drimsynie Beg*, what it enables is an impressive variation, playing a melody first in the lower octave and finishing in the upper one.

## Drimsynie Beg



To get there we practised a D major scale starting with the open A on the A string, ending with a D on the E string at the top of the neck. The technique involves sliding the whole left hand up to play the A-string D with the first finger: it only works seamlessly if your chin and shoulder are really taking the weight, i.e. where we all started as beginners.

The final technique of the year, *double-stopping to add harmony interest* is another way to vary a repeated tune. Amy Geddes at her workshop in May demonstrated it perfectly with her own composition *Cruden Bay*. As an exercise in class we took double-stopping to (for us) extremes with a Bluegrass-style version of *Boil Them Cabbage Down*:

## Boil them cabbage down



That's as far as it went this year. None of it was perfect, but we have the summer to make it so.

Peter Ellwood



## **From The Chairman**

Another successful and busy year for L.F.W. We have had the services of two tutors concurrently. Kathryn Bailie agreed to return for a second year of teaching and works particularly on technique (see Part 2 of Peter's musical journey in this edition) . Mairi Voinot was a student member of LFW previously and we welcomed her back as our latest tutor. Mairi teaches in the traditional way, 'by ear'.

With their very different backgrounds Kathryn and Mairi have been producing some inspiring evenings for us all this year. Our classes were rearranged slightly differently with more mixed ability classes as well as Beginner and Improver classes.

We continue to play a significant role in the community. Over the past year we have been invited to take part in several community events including Strachur Youth Club, Friendship Group, Troop Aid and more recently the Lauder Variety Show. Taking part in these informal events not only raises awareness of our workshop but is good fun! Thanks to all who have taken part.

As usual, we worry about our future. Membership numbers are fragile but as the final words in the Lauder Variety Show we will "Carry On".

Have a good summer break. We hope to hold some informal get-togethers over the summer and perhaps arrange a workshop. Hope to see you all in September.

Evie

## **Events at Uig Hall – Summer 2017**

Thanks to Alison Duncan for the following notice of events which will take place in Uig Hall over the summer: Details can always be got at Bookpoint in Dunoon. Dinah the owner also looks after Uig Hall.

Friday 26<sup>th</sup> May at 8 pm: Elsa Jean McTaggart – folk song/fiddle duo.

Wed 19<sup>th</sup> July at 7.30 pm: Argyll Ceilidh Trail.

Sat 22<sup>nd</sup> July at 7.30 pm: Aria Alba – Edinburgh Fringe Opera.

Friday 28<sup>th</sup> July at 8 pm – Ceilidh dance with Canned Haggis.

Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> July: Riverbank Surgery fundraiser.