

Young musicians sail to Norway to do their bit for community links

The Shetland Young Promoters' Group has travelled to the port of Glesvaer in Sund Kommune Norway as part of a trip aiming to strengthen the connections between the Shetland and Norwegian communities.

There are nine musicians in the group which left on the *Swan* last Wednesday.

Strong community ties already exist. Scalloway is twinned with Sund Kommune and has historic connections going back to the Second World War and the famous Shetland Bus operation.

Sund cultural minister, Lialia Klemetsaune and the Sund Kommune mayor Kari-Anne Landro contacted the SYPG through Scalloway's Kaye Sandison as a way of keeping up links. The young musicians will be playing at a series of concerts and taking part in a programme of activities provided by their Norwegian hosts.

The trip has been sponsored by Grieg Seafoods a

Norwegian company with extensive salmon interests in the islands which is keen to maintain the historic connections. The Grieg foundation is involved in many charitable projects around the world. The group has also been fundraising through bag packing, busking and beach cleaning. The trip is being supported by Shetland Arts' Fraser Mouat and Youth Services' Wendy Lowe.

The Shetland Young Promoters' Group which has been going seven years aims to offer young people the opportunity to develop their music using event production skills through practical experience and give young musicians, bands and DJs the opportunity to perform in a safe and supportive environment at alcohol free events.

Stephen Gordon



From left: Grieg Seafoods production manager Grant Cumming, chairman of Shetland Young Promoters' Group Eamonn Watt, youth development worker Wendy Lowe and peer mentor Shaun Goudie.
Photo: Stephen Gordon

Allure of Fiddle Frenzy brings far-flung visitors to learn traditional skills

BY ADAM GUEST

Fiddle folk pulled on their dancing shoes and dusted off their Boston two steps for the launch of the 13th Fiddle Frenzy festival on Sunday.

The evening opened with a soup and bannocks reception at Mareel and a Q and A session with this year's curators Claire White and Eunice Henderson.

Fiddlers from far and wide have signed up for this year's event, with musicians from Australia, New Zealand and Canada among those taking part.

White and Henderson spoke about the Shetland tradition, the upcoming programme and their memories of famous fiddle player Tom Anderson who they were both taught by previously.

A stellar selection of tunes was then performed by the South Mainland Young Fiddlers, with a mixture of Shetland and Orcadian music. Their entertaining and varied sets included performances from top young fiddlers Jodie Smith, Jasmin Smith and Anya Johnston.

Ten-year-old Ali Morrison also provided a sparkling accompaniment on keys.

It was then the turn of the Shetland Fiddlers' Society, who took the audience on a tour of Shetland, including music from Unst and Fetlar, with an accompanying slideshow of photographs.

The band played a rousing rendition of "trowie tunes" and a moving *Fetlar Lullaby*, as well as a piece composed by member Christine Hughson, penned for the ruby wedding anniversary of the late Ian McAlpine.

White had promised an "ice-breaker" dance to allow the visitors to get to know each other.

With the floor cleared in the Mareel auditorium the Alan Nicholson Dance Band struck up a tune and the audience danced the night away.

lots of Scottish people that emigrated to get away from this weather."

Tutor Emma had shown her a few Shetland fiddle tunes, she said, which had quite a distinctive style.

"I think the bowing and the emphasis which is used to set the dances is fine – I've just got to get my head around it."

Julia Williamson, from Glasgow had been up to Shetland several times before to see her in-laws.

She said she had enjoyed one of the slow sessions held at the club to get used to some of the new tunes she was learning.

Like Stephanie, she was getting to grips with the bowing style.

"It's a huge difference and it makes the [Shetland] sound much more than the left hand does".

Guitarist Mike Moss had also headed north from Glasgow, for this his third Fiddle Frenzy.

He spent the morning picking up vamping tips from local guitar tutor Brian Nicholson.

Mike said they came to Shetland on holiday about eight years ago, the week after Fiddle Frenzy.

He heard about the festival after chatting to some folk in a pub and has been uncovering Shetland guitar secrets since.

"I suppose it's the confidence to try different things, rather than just doing the same things. It's like 'this is what you can do'," said Mike.

Jane Winchester and her pal Janet Baker from Boston are regulars to the event.

Jane said she first came to Fiddle Frenzy in 2007.

"I've got to get my fiddle fix," Jane smiled.

"I really love the music. My introduction to Shetland music was hearing Catriona MacDonald in the United States and I sat in a workshop that she gave at the time.

"I was playing the harp and she was at Boston Col-



On Tuesday, guitar, fiddle and accordion tunes echoed around the corridors of Sandwick school, as scores of musicians picked up their instruments to enjoy workshops outside of Lerwick.

Stephanie Hicks (pictured) was taking part in a fiddle class with mother and daughter tutors Debbie Scott and Kaela Jamieson.

She had travelled all the way from Australia for the festival, complete with "snow coat" and was enjoying the tunes on her birthday.

"I'm in a celtic fiddle club in Brisbane with Emma Nixon and she has done a lot of research into Scottish music in Australia," she said.

"She has done a research paper on it because there's

leg and I just loved Shetland music for some unknown reason. I loved the way Catriona played and she gave a talk about Shetland itself and she said 'you should really go'.

Jane said she also saw Chris Stout and Catriona McKay perform in the States and is a big fan of Debbie Scott.

Having both Catriona and Debbie as tutors this year meant she was definitely jumping on the plane.

Janet said she also enjoyed the opportunity to go and explore the islands, and meet the locals.

"You have a chance to go out and visit places like Unst and Yell and get an opportunity to see what these communities are like," she said.

Tunes and dialect at midweek concert



Fiddle Frenzy curators Claire White (left) and Eunice Henderson on stage at Mareel.

Photo: Dave Donaldson



This midweek concert was billed as a dialect concert and it was exactly as it said on the tin.

Performers were doing their stuff in the Shetland dialect, albeit that their roots were in different parts and different islands. One of the most delightful aspects of dialect is that while Shetland is not such a big place it is usually possible to tell where a person is from by the way that they speak.

It was not quite a full house but there was, nonetheless, a large crowd to enjoy this celebration of the mother tongue. Foremost among those who seek to preserve and promote the dialect are Shetland ForWirds and chairman, Davy Cooper kicked off proceedings when he introduced himself and the six others on stage with him.

"Dey wir nae knapping wi ony o dem bit we wirna lippenin ony."

Davy himself is a well known storyteller and he gave us a version of a story recorded from the late Jeemsie Laurenson

of Fetlar. It tells how a miller learned a tune from the trows, a tune that was known as *Gibbie's Spring* but nowadays more commonly known as *Winyadepla*.

Of course there were fiddlers, Eunice Henderson and Claire White, on hand to play the tune that is well known all over the isles.

No dialect night would be complete without remembering the work of Rhoda Bulter, her dialect poems are classics and Mary Blance read her story of how a tree was sadly cut down but given a wonderful new life when it was lovingly crafted into a fiddle.

For many the highlight of this slot was the singing of Freda Leask. The song she chose is also associated with Jeemsie Laurenson, it is called *Minnie o Shirva's Cradle Song*. It was beautiful and one Fiddle Frenzy veteran said he enjoyed it so much that it, and that alone, was worth the travel and the cost all the way from England.

The time that the Shetland ForWirds

were on stage passed all too quickly, they gave the audience great enjoyment.

I was honoured to be tagged on at the end of their performance to tell another story about a fiddler and a trow. This time the trow enchanted a fiddle so that the fiddler, who only knew two tunes, could now play hundreds of tunes. It was the Shetland version of a story told by the late Mickey Doherty of County Donegal.

Next up was the Scandi Fiddle Club. They comprised of 20 children from all over Shetland and range from primary five to secondary one and appeared with their teachers Henderson and Debbie Scott.

To say that the Shetland fiddle tradition is in safe hands is, very much, an understatement. Henderson told me that, at full strength, they number 36 and they meet in Islesburgh every clear week in the winter.

As the name suggests they play mainly Scandinavian tunes and they do this because they want to preserve the links between Shetland and places like Norway. They have some lovely tunes, some that

sound so familiar and the tutors had a bit of fun persuading the youngsters to pronounce the names of them.

After everyone settled down post-interval, the second half was given over to two very talented ladies Christine de Luca and Catriona MacDonald.

Essentially this was more storytelling illustrated with fiddle music but no ordinary storytelling. It was four epic tales chosen from the Finnish work called *The Kalevala* translated into English by Keith Bosley.

De Luca translated them into Shetland dialect, a task that most have cost a great deal in time and effort. The stories are creation myths but have numerous aspects in common with the beliefs of more conventional creationists.

These stories could be as much as 3,000 years old and were collected in the 19th Century. De Luca was commissioned to do this work for the Edinburgh Book Festival. On the night in Mareel it was the most powerful, high octave, perform-

ance and a masterclass in dialect speaking. She, by and large, avoided obscure words, but it was wall-to-wall unrelenting dialect.

The stories were clearly told but in the manner of an orator rather than the more conversational style of the storyteller who uses no script.

MacDonald made a significant contribution, blending fiddle music into the narrative. While De Luca told the story of the "birth of the harp", MacDonald used two fiddles to symbolise the kantela, the Finnish harp said to be made from the bones of a pike.

It was a performance to remember and an evening to remember.

Henderson and White have taken over the stewardship of the festival and on the evidence of this concert they are doing a great job and I, for one, hope that dialect concerts will always be a feature of the week's entertainment.

Lawrence Tulloch

Original techniques applied by Davis give an experimental feel

Elemental: New watercolours of Iceland, by Peter Davis, Bonhoga Gallery, until 11th September

Peter Davis works from landscape. A watercolour painter, he has painted the Shetland and Orkney landscape for a number of years.

Recently his paintings have become more and more abstract and experimental.

A trip to Iceland in 2015 made a strong impact upon his perception of environment, generating a body of work that forms the basis of his exhibition at the Bonhoga Gallery.

Iceland is a place of extremes; a topography that changes as you travel through it. In *Names for the Sea: Strangers in Iceland*, novelist Sarah Moss tried to find a vocabulary to describe a landscape so strange that it simply doesn't make sense. She found a "constantly changing geology ... passing fells of naked lava and rock... like seeing the world before it was finished... mountains being red as if the cinders haven't yet cooled... the black of embers, carved by valley ... where it seems... rock is still flowing..."

Davis's paintings too exist in a state of flux – which sums up this new work. Mirroring/reflecting the effects found in the environment, paint has been allowed to flow, shift and settle, much as sheets of ice move slowly across the Icelandic landscape.

Traversing Iceland, Moss suggests, is like passing through geological time. Lava formations around bubbling mud pools, plumes of steam and sulphurous smells hanging in the air. Iceland wears its age on its sleeve and Davis's watercolours reflect evolution of the landscape.

It is a painting method in which paints are made of pigments suspended in a water-based solution. And they spread, shift and flow like glacial lakes and oceans.

As an oil painter accustomed to building up oil paint and marks



Peter Davis's *Jökulsárlon* is among the works on display.

over each other I find watercolours tricky and demanding. You have to get it right pretty much first time; it cannot simply be painted over.

The paper support is both absorbent and delicate, so paint can't simply be scraped off, like oil paint from a canvas.

But for Davis, watercolour is the most natural form of paint. "I wanted to take watercolour painting far from its association with genteel sedate topography... to take my painting practice back to basics".

His studio is like an alchemist's laboratory – rows of pots containing raw pigment, glass bowls and heavy pestles for grinding down pigments, jars of gum Arabic, glycerin and honey in which to suspend pigments and fix them to the painting surface.

He has spent time experimenting; pushing the water-based medium as far as he can. Working wet into wet, pouring diluted paint onto surfaces,

using a brush – even a scrubbing brush – spraying with salt water, judiciously tilting the thick paper, to allow wet areas to gently merge and mix, for paint to flow across paper and find its own level. But the most essential ingredient is the artist's imagination, together with eye and hand.

Visitors to this exhibition will recognise the natural colours of the landscape. Pale washes sit beside pools of luminous colour; textures of rocks and ice are echoed in the grain of paper and pigment.

Light permeates the work; the pure white of the paper acting as a foil for washes of handmade paint applied in bold, dramatic strokes.

Responding to Iceland's glacial lagoons where icebergs float sedately across the surface, to batter one another, melt and disappear, Davis has infused jumps of icy sea, water with pigment, just as icebergs

capture the colours of sky and land. These have been allowed to slowly melt and move across the paper, making his own glowing lagoons.

Washes of colour suggest mountains of cinnamon and turmeric, with tiny fragments of intense blue, purple and orange dropped into their wet surface. Tidal marks on the surface of the paper remind us of the sea, receding from the sand, to leave lines and patterns on the beach.

Davis is fascinated by the tension between representation and abstraction, of the ambiguity of scale and image in landscape. While some of the images are clearly more representational, in fact it is all abstract.

In the words of painter, Lucien Freud, "...painting, in order to move us, must not merely remind us of life, but must acquire a life of its own".

Davis's evocative compositions, while based on real places

- Sólheimajökull, Frostastaðahals, Skaftafellsjökull - are not topographical; they reference the landscape through recollection and experience. As abstractions, they literally re-present landscape. He describes the material effects of watercolour as intensely variable, "almost a microcosm of the natural world".

Some images speak as much about the process of making as the place that inspired them. Single colour images work best where they sit in the white space of the paper, and make their own journey across it. It is very easy for watercolour to become muddy – but here it is avoided.

Colours push against each other but retain their individual hue.

Iceland's landscape takes human form in these paintings; we perceive movement, limbs, bodies in the rocks and ice. *Svartagill* for example, evokes the skeletal frame of a creature found deep in the earth.

In *Icefall* (*Öræfajökull*), his most representational work, and the largest piece in the exhibition, and in *Vatnasvid* (*meltwater*), the structure of ice is recreated with an almost mathematical precision (in fact it is made by using cling film pressed into wet paint).

Edges and ledges are words that come to mind when looking at this work. *Jökulsárlon* is almost dissected by a strong dark line as colour flows beneath and above. Are we looking at a vertical slice through the landscape?

The image takes us deep below the surface of the ice and above to evaporate into a mist of air and light.

Davis's practice requires the acceptance of risk and a partial loss of control. It takes nerve, but here it has paid off, and, with characteristic modesty, Davis remarks "watercolour with its characteristically unpredictable behaviour did the rest".

Travelling gallery due

Shetland is playing host to a travelling Gallery later this month with a new exhibition, "Alt-w: Blush Response" which is in partnership with New Media Scotland and part of the Festival of Architecture 2016. The essence of the exhibition is in relation to artists who make use of technology, exploring the role that digital interaction can have on our lives.

The travelling gallery has been bringing contemporary art exhibitions to communities throughout Scotland in the custom-built vehicle since 1978.

It's a varied offering with intricate animated paper models by Charles Young, each only a few centimetres high; virtual reality headsets exploring brutalist architecture by Dennis and Debbie Club; Torsten Lauschmann collaborating with The Bothy Project and interactive drawing following the map of Crinan Canal.

Each newly commissioned artwork will have two related elements, a smaller work to suit the unique Travelling Gallery space and a larger work to be installed at a specific location in Scotland.

During its tour of Scotland, Travelling Gallery will visit the locations of each of the larger works, in Crinan, Dundee and Edinburgh and the two elements of the work will "blush" in response to each other.

It's all free and as well being at Mareel on Saturday 27th August, the bus will also be making appearances at the Baltasound school on Thursday 25th, and pupils will also have an opportunity to see the exhibition at Whalsay on Friday 26th and Sandwick on Monday 29th August.

BBC committed to local stations

The BBC is committed to its local operation in Lerwick's Pitt Lane, a high-ranking figure has insisted.

Donalda Mackinnon is BBC Scotland's Glasgow-based head of programmes.

Originally from Harris, she stressed the importance of small island stations during a ceremony at Mareel on Tuesday.

In an address to invited guests, she highlighted a £40,000 upgrade in equipment at Pitt Lane.

She also spoke about the welcome response given to the BBC during the production of the drama series *Shetland*, which has been commissioned for another series.

She said she hoped *Shetland* would yield a return for the isles, with more people becoming interested in seeing the place for themselves after watching the successful adaptation of the Ann Cleeves novels.

"The value behind the number of people that come here, are intrigued by this place because of what they've watched on screen, is a great thing," she told this newspaper.

Away from crime drama, she highlighted a four-part documentary on Fair Isle, which has been shot over an 18-month period and is currently in edit.

But her overall message was to stress the importance of the local stations.

"It's really essential that we value and commit in the long term to the good health of these community stations," she said.



Donalda MacKinnon on her visit to Mareel.

Photo: Dave Donaldson

"They're hugely important to us. We recognise the great work that they do, beyond even the on-air stuff."

She also stressed the support given in the isles to the Children in Need campaign.

"I waste no opportunity in saying the amount of money raised in these islands represent more per head of population than anywhere else in the UK."

New curators put their stamp on the superb frenzy finale



Young fiddler of the year Jodie Smith is among the performers who show the tradition in safe hands.

Photo: Dale Smith



Shoes off! Ewen Thomson and Peter Gair.

Photo: Dale Smith

The Fiddle Frenzy festival should be, and is, a most enjoyable week for everyone involved.

For the students it is also a week of intense effort to reach the highest standard they can attain. It says much for their enthusiasm, and energy, that they are up for even more by the end of the week.

A reward comes their way when they are given the opportunity to strut their stuff on stage in Marcel in what is the clewing up concert of the week.

Including students and tutors there were around 50 on stage to show the fruits of the classes. Eunice Henderson, on the piano, was the cement that held the whole performance together.

This was a truly cosmopolitan gathering with participants coming from all over the world – Australia, New Zealand, Canada, America – as well as places nearer home. It was good to see Peter Day from England among them. Peter and his wife Liz have

perfect attendance and Fiddle Frenzy would never be the same without them.

The group started with that old North Yell tune that was given the name *The Heids o' Vigon* when the late Davie Henry could not remember its proper name. They finished with a Steven Spence tune written for the occasion and entitled *Da Fiddle Frenzy Class o' 2016*.

When the stage was cleared Henderson reappeared and with her was the delightful Jodie Smith from Bigton. This peerie lass despite being in Secondary 2 is the Young Fiddler of the Year. The rules do not allow her to enter again but, without a doubt, there will be plenty of demand for her music.

Her bowing, especially, is beautiful and she gets such a pleasing tone from her fiddle. She showed her prowess by playing a wide selection of traditional and contemporary music beginning with the session standard Willie Renwick's *Ferret*. She also included

a slow air, a polka as well as reels. Jodie was one of many highlights on the night.

This brought us to an interval of 20 minutes and the second, bigger half. Lois Nicol is one of the tutors and she was given the task of organising this, the lion's share of the show. Her first "guests" were Peter Gear and Ewen Thomson. Gear was Young Fiddler of the Year a fair few years ago and has since been a judge at the competition.

His music would never be described as conventional but it is refreshingly different. he is a great fiddler who has the confidence to do his own thing right down to playing in his socked feet. At times he was reminiscent of the famous County Clare fiddler Seamus Hayes.

Gear and guitar player Thomson have great rapport and humour in what was a really relaxed performance.

This second part of the concert flowed on seamlessly with a succession of bands and combinations of musicians. And it was not

all instrumental, Freda Leask and Sheila Henderson contributed vocals ably supported by Lewie Peterson, Graham Malcolmson and Nicol herself.

Peterson, resplendent in his waistcoat and dickie bow (dress code from a previous engagement) remained on stage to be joined by his father, Gary complete with mandolin and the hard working Thomson. They played some sets associated with Gary's band, Hom Bru including *The Nine Points of Roguery* and *The Star of Munster*.

The first tune was made famous by Donegal fiddle maestro John Doherty, it was known to him as the *The Black Mare of Fannad*. They finished their spot with another Irish "classic" Neilly Boyle's *Moving Cloud*.

Last up was the group, Tyunes led by Lynda Anderson, she is the Shetland Arts person in overall charge of the whole festival. It is amazing that she could find time in such a busy week to play along with friends

Kenny Johnson, mandolin, Grant Nicol, guitar and Graham Malcolmson, bass.

They play a combination of American bluegrass and Shetland music. They have an easy, almost quiet, style but they have plenty of life and lift and still feet were not an option for the audience. It was abundantly clear that Anderson's time spent in Nashville, and playing in venues like the Grand Ole Opry, was not in vain. It was a fitting climax to a super concert.

Nicol did a brilliant job but I would have liked to see more of her, she is a superb fiddler in her own right. However she led the stramash at the end and without any doubt hundreds of us will look forward to next year when Eunice Henderson and Claire White will, again, be the custodians.

Their first year has been a resounding success, all round Fiddle Frenzy is in good hands.

Lawrence Tulloch

Learn to play the Henderson way

BY ADAM GUEST

Renowned isles fiddler Kevin Henderson flew in from Norway to launch a new fiddle tuition DVD at a packed out gig in Mareel on Sunday.

The founding Fiddlers' Bid member played an intimate free show in the cafe bar, joined by a host of top musicians in Kris Drever, Lois Nicol, Ewen Thomson, Grant Nicol and Maurice Henderson.

With this year's Fiddle Frenzy also drawing to a close, visiting musicians and locals alike joined in with a lively session on the balcony afterwards.

Henderson said the idea for a DVD had always been in the back of his mind.

"Shetland fiddle is quite a unique fiddle style that is well known around the world. I've always had this idea in the back of my head for doing something," he said.

Videographer and local musician JJ Jamieson shot the DVD at his home in Sandwick and approached Kevin after a successful film of Shetland knitter Hazel Tindall.

"It was pretty challenging to teach to a camera," admitted Henderson after the show.

"It was weird to start with but I got into it. It was also challenging because I realised I had to get all the bowing and the ornaments right first time, rather than when you're doing a workshop.

"It was challenging to do but it was very enjoyable to see the finished thing.

"JJ has done an amazing job putting it together. He's great with coming up with quirky ideas and has got an eye for it."

The DVD features five Shetland fiddle tunes: *Oliver Jack*, *Da Delting*, *Bridal March*, *Vallafield*, *Da Trowie Burn* and *Ahint da Dykes o' Voe*.

Henderson, who now lives in Norway, said choosing the pieces came quite naturally and wanted to reflect the different types of fiddle music in the isles.

The local lad also launched a book of traditional tunes from his acclaimed album *Fin Da Laand*

Ageen, with pointers on bowing and ornamentation.

He said a lot of folk had asked for notation of his tunes in the past, which prompted the idea pulling all the tunes together.

Learning fiddle, he said was a mixture of learning orally and from paper.

"It's hard to get it stylistically when you see it written on a sheet of paper, it's very much a balance.

"Back in the day it was all done orally. It's good that these tunes are notated and transcribed, but on the flip side in Shetland there are a lot of tunes that have been lost.

"Shetland had four or five different styles... When it [the music] started to get transcribed it started to become standardised."

Sunday afternoon was standing-room-only, such was the turnout.

And for Henderson he was keen to have other musicians performing at the launch.

"I wanted to have a couple of tunes with Ewen because he plays on the DVD and I play a fiddle made by Ewen," he said.

"I thought it would be quite good to mention that because I quite often get asked what fiddle I used.

"I have been friends with Kris Drever for 14 years and he's one of my favourite musicians.

"He's an amazing guitarist and singer and multi-instrumentalist, and I really love playing with Grant, Lois and Maurice.

"I just wanted to create a 'session type vibe' on a Sunday afternoon."



Kevin Henderson with copies of his new tuition DVD.

Photo: Dave Donaldson

Fantastic stuff as Phil and Aly cook up a storm to send fiddle fans home happy

- Culinary opening precedes sublime music
- Pianist Tulloch joins duo on Mareel stage

This year's Fiddle Frenzy saw a surprising amount of diverse activities – apart from the celebration of the fiddle and its tradition in the isles.

It certainly had been a week when folk were immersed in Shetland's musical culture and community. The Aly Bain and Phil Cunningham concert on Thursday was no exception.

Before the music Aly and Phil shared their culinary skills with Eunice Henderson and Jane Moncrieff from Radio Shetland's *Shetland's Larder* programme. The broadcast duo tried to maintain some order among the anarchic humour of Aly and Phil.

The gig was a sell-out, folk queuing early with a lot going for the balcony seats. Marcel's usual lingering whiff of coffee was soon replaced by the smell of exotic spices wafting up from the stage quickly enticing the hunger pangs of some audience members.

There was no Glasgow salad (chips and beans) but a Greek one. Aly was in charge of the lamb kebabs and it was mushroom toast from Phil, all done in the "leckie" pans. Aly's measurements always amounted to a "peerie drap" and we learned that Phil doesn't eat fish.

"The last thing I ate that came out of the water was an egg," he said.

But at last week's concert both musicians were "cooking" on stage in both senses of the word.

This gig was near the start of their 35th anniversary tour (the partnership has lasted longer than either of their marriages).

Aly Bain has been touring for an amazing 48 years, but his bow still hits the high spots ably assisted by Phil's tactful mastery of the ivories and buttons.

Fochaber farmers heard about the anniversary and were apparently convinced Phil and Aly had "come oot".

That may not be the case but they are certainly folk aristocracy, and are probably as entertaining as any double act going. Not just with their musical prowess but the patter and self-deprecating humour between the tunes which presents a whole package of priceless entertainment.

They are as famous a "couple" as you'll find in the folk world, consummate slick performers, jokes often coming thick and fast. "What do you wear under your kilt?" "My Shoes!"

Phil at one stage described the accordion as a badly fitting bra, "Not that I would know" he hastily added. One of his funniest quips concerned Scottish Dance radio supremo Robbie Shepherd who introduced a tune for someone who was 111, after the tune he said, "haad on he's nae 111 he's ill!"

Another highlight of this fiddle frenzied spectacular was award-win-



Aly Bain and Phil Cunningham were in exceptional form as they entered the sell-out crowd in Mareel.

Photo: Dale Smith

ning young trio, Fjanna who, opening the concert, undauntedly swooned through a set which included the Willie Hunter classic *South End*, *Sleepy Laddie* and a slow air in honour of the closing of the last coal power station in Scotland at Longannet. You could see the local folk tradition in safe hands.

In the second half of Aly and Phil's set "Queen o' Lerwick" Violet Tulloch (who was celebrating her birthday), sat in with them, further boosting the performance.

There was a telling moment when Aly explained that many "Shetland" tunes were originally songs, redone as pure fiddle tunes, as Shetlanders were not great at showing emotion through song. In this light Aly could be considered more reserved to Phil's slightly more brash delivery.

Every now and again there was a knowing look or smile between the two accomplished musicians as, after all those years, they experienced the joy of the music.

I'd had heard some of the routine previously at the Cambridge folk festival and Mareel was seriously stuffy at one stage, but none of this really mattered as the two folk stars, in their comfort zone, showed why they are at the top of the folk tree.

Aly's parting shot brought on a smile. "Thank you for being here if you weren't we'd look quite stupid. There was never any chance of that happening."

Stephen Gordon

previously been involved in helping town hall, Lerwick North councillor

Amnesty director will share the stage at Screenplay festival

The director of Amnesty International UK will be in the isles at the end of the month as part of a visit that coincides with the Screenplay film festival.

Kate Allen will share the stage with film director Kim Longinotto after the screening of Longinotto's film *Dreamcatcher*.

Amnesty Shetland is sponsoring the screening of the documentary which provides an unflinching look at the story of a former prostitute who tries to make a positive change in her community. It will be shown on Sunday 28th August.

Local Amnesty members will also have the chance to meet Ms Allen at a meeting at 2.30pm in Islesburgh that day. It is open to non-members too.

Ms Allen has been involved with the protection of human rights for nearly 30 years. Prior to being appointed director of Amnesty International UK, she worked for the Refugee Council, the Asylum Rights

Campaign, and was seconded to the Home Office to help develop the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

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Sharon Shannon will be back in Shetland next month.

Button box whizz Shannon to return with a band in tow

She's one of Ireland's best-known button accordion players and Sharon Shannon will make a return visit to Shetland next month.

She will perform in Marceel as well as working on a project with isles' fiddlers that will be included on an upcoming album.

Work on the album is already under way ahead of a release next year. While in Shetland Shannon will work with a group of fiddlers, brought together by Haltadans' Maurice Henderson, on a track that will be included on the album. The track will be

performed, recorded and filmed as part of the show.

Shannon has recorded and toured with musical icons including Willie Nelson, Alison Krauss, Steve Earle, Bono and many more. She is known for combining traditional Irish tunes with many other styles including reggae, country and bluegrass.

She has visited the isles as a solo artist, her latest visit will also feature a four-piece line-up made up of traditional Irish musicians Jim Murray (guitar), John Reagan (fiddle) and Alan Connor (piano)

Singh puts a live vocal score to old *Drifters* film

A touring performance bringing together the disparate ingredients of beatboxing and herring fishing will launch in Unst on Wednesday.

The performance, entitled *Following the Fleet: Drifters*, will see London-born sound artist Jason Singh providing a live vocal score to the 1929 silent film *Drifters*.

A second performance is also due to take place in Lerwick on Thursday as part of the 10th Screenplay festival.

Drifters, by the acclaimed Scottish filmmaker John Grierson, is a documentary which follows North Sea herring trawlermen through their dramatic daily routines as well as the industry's struggles between tradition, modernity, technology, the environment and nature.

To tie in with the themes of the film Singh will tour his show around Scotland's former major herring fishing ports.

The performance will combine live vocal sound effects, voice manipulation, beatboxing and live sampling to create an exhilarating cinematic experience.

As well as the semi-improvised live performance

accompanying the 40-minute film, each public event will include an opportunity to hear more from Singh about his score and some venues on the tour.

Local performers will be invited to share songs and stories from the community's fishing traditions to complement the event.

Singh will also be delivering workshops with secondary school students, which will aim to inspire, create discussion and encourage participants to explore their own voices, culture, local histories and music technology.

They will be guided through an introduction to beatboxing by learning how to vocally recreate drums, percussion, natural phenomena like the sea and wind and also more experimental vocal sound effects.

Singh said: "I'm really excited about the *Following the Fleet* tour."

He added: "I'm keen to see what people will make of a live beatboxed score to a silent film."

"I'm also really looking forward to running workshops as it will give people the opportunity to explore their own voices in new ways and it will also give me the chance to meet, share and explore with new communities and cultures."

Brassy start to annual festival of film as Screenplay gets going

A brass band parade from the Market Cross in Lerwick to Mareel will get the 10th Screenplay Film Festival under way tomorrow.

Supporters, staff and volunteers will be accompanied by the Lerwick Brass Band and the Junior Jarl Squad. At Mareel they will enjoy some birthday cake before the first film begins.

Murray Shearer, who was born during the first festival, and his family will also be taking part in the walk and he will be presented with a present on behalf of the festival.

Once the screenings get started there will be plenty to keep film buffs happy with some locally-made movies getting the big screen treatment. Roseanne Watt, and Stephen Mercer of the Shetland Film Collective are among those whose films will be shown. Watt's *Death and his Mistress* will be screened on Sunday while the film collective's quirky comedy *Ragnar* will first be shown tomorrow lunchtime.

Festival director Kathy Hubbard said: "We want to wave the flag for Shetland film makers on this our 10th birthday so there are plenty of screenings of locally made films long and short. Along with other unique events such as screenings of the Shetland dialect opera *Hirda*, a lecture on Sami culture by Dr Andrew Jennings, and a very special screening of John Grierson's 1929 classic short film *Drifters* about the North Sea herring fishing, which will be accompanied live by sound artist Jason Singh, this promises to be a week of celebration of screen culture for all ages and interests."

Many of the films shown on the first weekend are aimed at children and families – *Wickie and the Treasure of the Gods*, *Operation Arctic*, *Labyrinthus* and *Long Way North*.

There will also be special guests over the weekend including British documentary film maker Kim Longinotto, who will be undertaking a Q and A session alongside Amnesty International UK director Kate Allen after her screening of *Dreamcatcher*.

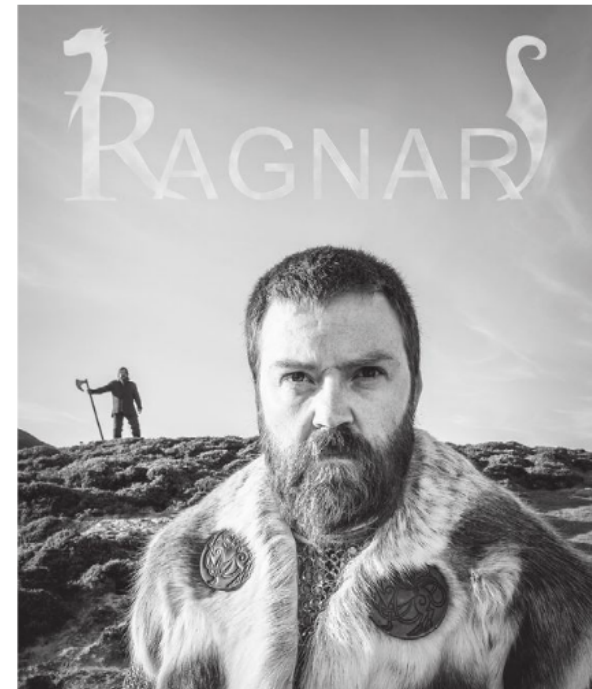
Stephen Howarth will introduce the 1957 Norwegian film *Nine Lives (Ni Liv)*, which tells the story of a betrayed Shetland Bus mission and the man (Jan Baalsrud) who survived it against all odds.

Co-curators Mark Kermode and Linda Ruth Williams will be here as usual and during the week Shetland Arts looks forward to welcoming songwriter Richard Hawley, who provided the soundtrack for the film *Love Is All* and who will be doing a gig at Mareel on Tuesday evening.

The producers and writers of *Moon Dogs* will be visiting. Their coming-of-age road trip drama begins in Shetland and the film made a big impression at the Edinburgh International Film Festival this summer.

As part of the Shetland Arts organised festival there will be screenings for schools every morning and some of the films will be touring care centres and community halls thanks to Shetland Film Club.

Screenplay runs from today to Sunday 4th September.



Shetland Film Collective's *Ragnar* gets its first screening tomorrow.

‘Unusual respect’ is the draw that keeps Holmes coming back to the isles

“There’s an amazing respect for music in Shetland,” says Edinburgh songsmith Adam Holmes.

A firm favourite in the isles, the gravelly-toned singer-songwriter returns next month – with a new collection of songs from latest album *Brighter Still*.

Holmes will play two shows with his band The Embers, with beguiling Highlands singer-songwriter Rachel Sermanni once again taking to the mic in front of a Shetland audience.

The gig at the cosy Carnegie Hall in Sandwick has already sold-out and Holmes is excited about the trip north to play new material.

“I’m nervous as well because it’s different and there’s some folk that enjoyed the last album,” he said.

The new single *People Come People Go* is a shift from previous acoustic guitar driven numbers on *Heirs and Graces*, though for Holmes it was important for the album to reflect “where I’m at now”.

“I write alone mostly,” he explains, penning songs from the heart, and not overthinking the process.

“The way I did the record was I woke up and wrote first thing for two or three hours, and wrote a bit more at night.

“Taking it to the band and the arrangement process becomes the second part,” he said.

“I set myself three months in which to write it and I was keen to have it written in that time.

“I very much wanted the record to be where I’m at now. A big thing for me is trying to represent where I’m at... It was trying to get it all done and out there in a timescale that was relevant for me.”

Holmes and the band have hit the road with new songs, playing gigs on the mainland though he says the live performances differ from the CD.

“I think a lot of stuff that we play on the record we don’t play like that live, because what is relevant to the live environment and to us as a band now is different to that time. We’re finding our feet as a little group that play together now.”

Collaboration with other musicians is something Holmes relishes, mixing musical ideas with renowned folk musicians John McCusker, Heidi Talbot, Martin Green and Eddi Reader.

Holmes has been touring with fiddle star McCusker, also joining him onstage at this year’s BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards.

Meanwhile, Reader’s rich and warming vocals appear on *Love Down the Line* – on the new nine-track LP.

He will also be landing on Shetland shores in October as part of super-group Flit created by Lau accordion Martin Green combining music and visual arts.

“The collaboration side of things is really what I’m interested in; I

ing music and visual arts.

“The collaboration side of things is really what I’m interested in; I get fed up of doing my own thing for a long time,” he says.

“A lot of what it’s about for me is exploring what my capabilities are. Being in different contexts is eye-opening in terms of that.

“It’s easy to have a conservative approach to music,” adds Holmes.

“What I like about working with other people is it’s changing my perception of what’s good and bad and pushing myself.”

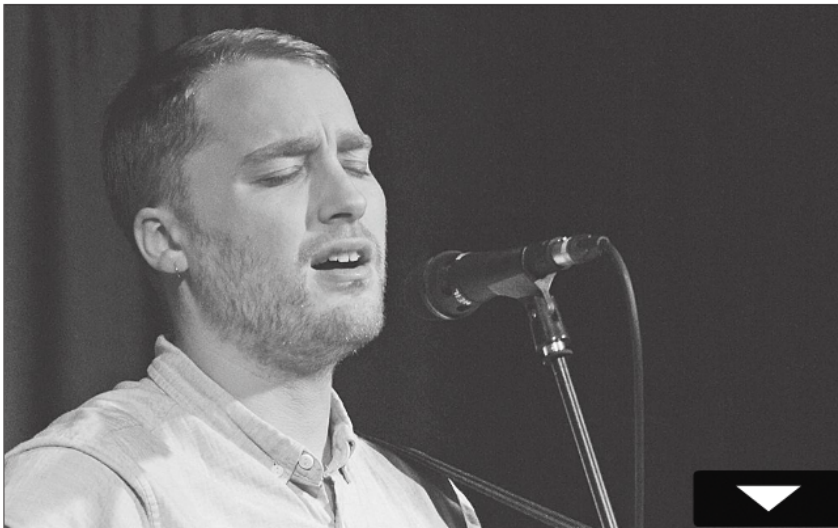
Holmes is also a fan of hip-hop and is planning on starting a band next year, with the aim of working with a rapper and DJ/producer.

So with numerous visits to Shetland, what is it that Holmes likes so much about the place?

“The people make Shetland amazing,” he says, looking back fondly at his first visit to the isles for the Shetland Folk Festival.

“I think there’s an amazing respect in Shetland for music and that’s very unusual.

“It’s very unusual to see, like at the foy people sitting through hours and hours of music and respecting the music. It’s completely different.”



Wild attraction for Sermanni

Almost two years after a delivering a tip-toe raising, spine-tingling, set at Mareel singer-songwriter Rachel Sermanni returns to the isles.

It's been a busy spell for Sermanni since she last performed in Shetland, releasing *Tied To The Moon* last summer – nominated for a Scottish Album of the Year award – as well as touring across the UK, Europe and Canada.

Quirky gigs in southern Italy, camping and “wild stupid adventures” have all been part of the course, though Sermanni says more recently she's been able to take some time out from gigging too.

Much like fellow singer-songwriter Adam Holmes, who is also playing the Carnegie and Mareel gigs, Sermanni harbours a soft spot for the isles.

“Shetland is wild,” she says.

“I suppose you're a long way away from anything that is familiar and yet it is familiar because of the people, there's so many familiar faces up there.”

Playing over two days means she has a bit of time to explore, with a run by the coast on the cards.

Shetland's scenery, she says is strikingly different and she loves the wet and wild weather.

“With the landscapes [in Shetland] you don't often experience that wildness,” says Sermanni.

“The austere-ness of the landscape is so rugged, and sharp and barren and I like being so close to the sea.”

Her previous outing featured

drums, piano and eerie slide guitar skills, though this time around Sermanni is performing a more stripped down set with, cherished friend and musical companion Jen Austin.

Austin, who hails from Orkney, is known to many folkies in the local scene having played several spots at the folk festival over the years.

It was working with the delicate and sensitive pianist that brought about Sermanni's new, and very personal EP *Gently*, recorded in a laid back session at Austin's flat.

“It definitely feels different [performing just with Jen].

“With Jen she's like my constant when it comes to playing with other people, we've played the most together, so I feel really comfortable.”

Of the EP she said: “All I wanted to do is sing really softly and slow. I had no care as to how it would be received and they weren't really songs I thought I would release, apart from Jen's song ... the [recording] process was very easy, very laid back and imperfect.”

She has plans to record another album in the future, having gigged with some musicians in Berlin.

“I've got eight to 10 songs I'm reasonably happy with and four boys who I think are exceptional musicians I played with once when I went to Berlin in May.

“I like playing with them so much I think it will be really interesting to go into the studio with them.

“They're playful, but they're also professional.”

Choir project to be trialled to assess if singing is good for heart and soul

A wellbeing choir leader is needed for a new music project to help boost mental and physical health, according to Shetland Arts.

The agency is on the look-out for someone to head the choir, which is hoping to pull in singers from across the isles.

Creative project manager Cara McDiarmid said it would be open to all abilities and for anyone over 16.

"It's been a pet project for [general manager] Graeme [Howell] for a while," she said.

"When he was in Bristol they had a few successful wellbeing choirs... the point of a natural choir is there's very little harmony, they don't read music. It's about having fun, picking some songs that are easy to

learn, and learning by ear as well."

Miss McDiarmid said they were also hoping to contact GPs and health centres to promote the choir as an option for patients.

"There have been a lot of articles I've been reading about what singing can do for your physical health; like your lungs and belting out some songs, or getting up and having a dance," she said.

"Also with your mental health it's feeling the satisfaction of learning something new and meeting new people."

A six-month pilot is to start on 20th September in Mareel, with the view to have an established group in future.

Miss McDiarmid said of the

leader search: "It would be great if somebody could come forward with a little bit of experience; of working with all different people in the community, or had experience of choirs or really any music project."

"We've already identified a couple of performances that could happen around events we're doing in future," she added.

"Obviously it's not mandatory to perform because that's not the aim of the group, but it's always good to work towards something."

The deadline for choir leader applications is next Wednesday.

For more information about the group email cara.mcdiarmid@shetlandarts.org