

## SCOTS MUSIC GROUP

Annual General Meeting, 30<sup>th</sup> January 2022

### Report from the Chair

We are now into our third calendar year of Covid 19. Who would have believed that the pandemic would have lasted this long, although perhaps we are beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel? Let's hope so.

What has continued since the last AGM? Sarah Northcott is still our temporary Development Worker and is doing sterling work keeping the organisation moving forward. Helen Reid is our Co-ordinator, working in our office at the Eric Liddell Centre, making sure our systems for payment, website, multiple office tasks and newsletters happen efficiently. Our classes are now in their fifth term on Zoom. The Board has continued to meet monthly, again on Zoom.

During the last year we have downsized the office into one room, reducing our rent. The Iain McLennan Collection of CDs, LPs, books and minidisks has been moved to the Scottish Storytelling Centre, thanks to Dave Francis of the Traditional Music Forum. SMG donated various instruments (given to us by members and others) to Music Broth, a low-cost instrument library in Glasgow which runs community music groups and which has links with the Edinburgh Tool Library.

#### **Activities over the past year – June 2020 to June 2021 and beyond**

Our instrument classes included Fiddle, Piano Accordion, Guitar, Whistle, Smallpipes, Ukulele, 5-String Banjo and Mixed Instrument classes. There were two Singing classes – Scottish Song and Beyond and Sing Together.

From June 20<sup>th</sup> to date we have organised four workshops. Two song workshops were held in December 2020 and October 2021. The latter coincided with the preparations for COP 26 climate conference held in Glasgow. We also held A Day of Tunes 1 and 2; the first looked at types of tunes in Scottish Traditional Music and the second focussed on the music of Orkney, Shetland and Norway. Both workshops catered for mixed skill levels and were very popular with the SMG students who attended.

Our classes and workshops have drawn interest beyond Edinburgh and have attracted students from all over the UK and further afield, including Europe, Canada and USA – taking Scottish music and song to people who would otherwise not have had the opportunity.

In the year 2020-21, our total student numbers held up well compared to previous years. Some potential students have not been able to commit to online teaching and are waiting for the in-person classes to recommence, but many more have taken well to learning on Zoom despite its difficulties and limitations. However more recently we have seen a further drop in numbers signing up for classes which is extremely concerning for the future of our organisation due to the financial implications in the long run.

The main income for our organisation comes from class fees. As part of a prudent financial strategy, our policy is that our charges should cover all class costs except in circumstances where we want to encourage a class to develop. This year we have tried as far as possible to maintain classes with only a few participants as a way of building for the future post pandemic, and encouraging the continued participation of our students. Where appropriate we have sought to combine classes with very low numbers.

### **Scots Music Group in the Community**

**Sangstream** is affiliated with Scots Music Group and all Sangstreamers are members of SMG. It is a busy and well-known folk choir.

Sangstream had a change of Musical Director in June 2020 when Robyn Stapleton left and Corrina Hewat took over the post. Members continued to practise weekly via Zoom. In June 2021 they met up in Spylaw Park to sing together but the weather was against them and they adjourned to the Colinton Tunnel nearby, where the acoustics were excellent and led to a very enjoyable event. The choir have produced a video of Corrina's arrangement of Robert Louis Stevenson's poem *The Swing*, available at [www.colintontunnel.org.uk](http://www.colintontunnel.org.uk). Sangstream began to meet again in person in autumn 2021 and hope to resume again soon.

**Ceilidh Caleerie** is an SMG dance band that started in 2006 with Sarah Northcott's 'Playing for Ceilidh Dancing' class. Until Covid19 restrictions began in March 2020 they played for charitable ceilidhs and events in return for a modest fee, most of which was donated to SMG.

Ceilidh Caleerie finally met up again in person before Christmas, though they are continuing their regular Zoom rehearsals just now and look forward to getting together again soon. The Ceilidh Caleerie website is: <https://ceilidhcaleeriedanceband.wordpress.com>

**Balerno Buskers** are mainly SMG members who volunteer to play at the monthly Balerno Farmers' Market. They have between 6-10 players each time, mainly drawn from Sarah's Tuesday class and Ceilidh Caleerie, but open to all.

They began to meet regularly on Zoom in June 2020, and this is still going strong with about 20 people indicating an interest. Their repertoire list has grown to over 280 tunes! It was agreed that the social side of doing these sessions was every bit as important as the music. Other SMG students who wish to be included in the busking group can contact the group via the SMG office. The group is open to anyone, and they have a set of scores available on Google Drive.

**Café Ceilidh** sessions were held in the Storytelling Centre and were normally well supported, making generous donations towards SMG funds. Since the start of the pandemic, between June 2020 and 2021 no Café Ceilidh sessions have taken place. It is hoped that they may recommence when participants feel that it is safe to do so.

**St Bride's Ceilidhs:** Prior to the advent of Covid restrictions in Spring 2020 SMG ran a regular ceilidh programme at the St Bride's Centre, often selling out prior to the event.

We are looking forward to the time when we can reinstate the ceilidhs as they have been sorely missed and are a valued source of income to our organisation. The cancellation of our ceilidhs has had a considerable negative impact on SMG's finances.

**Nigel's Allstars** was formed by members of Nigel Gatherer's Mixed Instrument class in order to play music out in the community. Since March 2020 the pandemic prevented them from rehearsing and playing for their audiences. However, they kept in touch with each other and recently started rehearsing again.

**Caleerie Buskers** is a mixed instrument group of about 40 players which draws membership from a number of SMG classes but particularly from Sarah Northcott's Tuesday Mixed Instrument Class. The group plays at various events where busking provides them with the chance to practise playing in public with a friendly audience! They enjoy taking traditional music out into the community and promoting the Scots Music Group at the same time, raising funds for SMG and other charities.

For the past year (June 2020-to date) there have been no live gigs but many of the group have been getting together on Zoom on an approximately weekly basis. They are hoping to be playing together in person before too long.

**Inspire Community Music** transitioned into an independent Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) in April 2019. Unfortunately, no funding was secured, and the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic meant that the necessary core-cost funding became even more difficult to secure for a new organisation. The Inspire SCIO was wound up in 2021, although there is still potential for further similarly focussed work within SMG in the future.

### **Tutors, Staff and Members**

Scots Music Group is extremely fortunate to have tutors who are musicians and singers of the highest quality. They provide real inspiration and encouragement to our students at all levels, setting appropriate and achievable standards, and developing an awareness of the wide range of musical styles and traditions within Scottish music, dance and song. They have to a large extent made the past two impossible years somewhat bearable. Two tutors left us at the end of Term 3 in 2021: Rachel Walker (fiddle) and Ailis Sutherland (smallpipes). We wish them well in their future careers.

SMG has two members of staff, Sarah Northcott and Helen Reid, who know the organisation so well and who are committed to its future. They are able to make sure the office works efficiently and are able to problem-solve and be resourceful when that is needed. Sarah has been working from home but coming into the office when appropriate. Initially, Helen ran the office from her home but is now office-based. Over the summer we installed a new website under the guidance of Mac Walker, a former SMG Board Member and IT professional. Helen and Sarah assisted and were trained in using it.

SMG is a grassroots organisation, run by and for its members. We are all fortunate that we have such adventurous, interested and enthusiastic members who really care about their

fellow musicians and singers and look out for their best interests. The Board is grateful for the support from all our members.

### **Thank You**

Our longstanding volunteer bookkeeper is Liz Blair, who came to help us a long time ago because her late husband was our Treasurer. Liz is continuing in her role at the moment, but we are hoping to recruit a replacement so that she can retire after many years of valuable service to SMG.

Mac Walker helped us design and set up our new website as mentioned above, but he has also been invaluable when we have had urgent IT problems that need speedy attention. He always responds to our calls and gives effective advice.

Mary McCann, a longstanding member has run several Song Workshops, on Zoom and in person, to raise much-needed funds for SMG.

Thank you to our members and friends who have donated to SMG funds since the start of the pandemic. Donations large and small are welcome and we are grateful to those who have given one off donations, regular monthly via standing orders and yearly contributions or additional contributions when booking classes. We are able to receive additional funds on top of this through Gift Aid.

### **Planned Projects**

We are planning to organise more workshops in 2022, both online and in-person.

The new SMG tunebook is still in the early stages of development. This will be our fourth tunebook and we already have tunes suggested by our classes.

### **Departed Friends**

Since the last AGM, a number of our musical friends sadly died. They will remain in our thoughts as we start to play together again: we will miss them greatly.

Peter "Pav" Verity left us in October 2021. A multi-instrumentalist, he was involved in several SMG projects and groups over many years, both in person and organising Zoom sessions for the groups of which he was part.

Simon Cooper was a concertina player and multi-instrumentalist who was part of Mixed Instrument 2 and other groups. In addition, he made a substantial contribution to traditional music in a variety of ways. He left us in September 2021.

Margaret Littlewood passed away in July 2021. She was a fiddle and mandolin player who had been involved in classes, busking groups and Ceilidh Caleerie for many years, and she had been a stalwart of the Fiddle Festival since its inception.

Please do have a look at our Book of Remembrance on the SMG website, where you will find interesting and sometimes surprising information about these much-missed departed friends.

### **Moving Towards the Future**

As you might imagine, the Board has found that shutting down in Spring 2020 to keep everyone safe was easier than getting back to normal, in-person music opportunities. We are finding this very difficult to do as new variants of Covid 19 appear quickly and make significant impact on the best laid plans of many organisations. Some members of SMG are becoming tired of playing music on Zoom, even though it has helped us through the pandemic. This has led to the numbers signing up for classes, especially in the current term, falling significantly. Although we are becoming jaded with playing online, there are also many of us who are not quite ready to meet up in person. We also have a significant issue with venues, especially for evening classes – our low-cost school venue is not currently available and we don't know when it will be open to external groups. The Board is trying very hard to work through this dilemma and we are not alone. Please bear with us while we try to find a reasonable and viable solution that suits everyone.

**Edna Wilson**

**Chair**

**Scots Music Group**