

# A CULTURAL STRATEGY FOR SCOTLAND

A contribution to the conversation from

*Traditional Music forum*

and



## SUMMARY FROM TRACS

In partnership with three of its member organisations, **The Traditional Music Forum**, part of **TRACS (Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland)**, hosted conversations in connection with the development of the Scottish Government's proposed cultural strategy. These took place in Dundee, Aberdeen and Glasgow in early November, preceded by a discussion at a TRACS event in September.

The focus of the conversations was not so much on culture as a general idea but on the specific aspect of Scottish culture referred to as 'the traditional arts'. Discussion centred on their relationship to the wider culture, why these art-forms are important to people, the challenges they face, what they contribute to Scottish cultural life and what they might contribute to that life in future.

Some consistent themes emerged from all three discussions. The traditional arts are seen as a means of expression that enables people to celebrate their communities and share their heritage with others – heritage as something inclusive rather than exclusive.

There was a strong indication that culture is an important factor in other areas of policy concern: health and well-being, community development in particular. There is concern, however, that any loss of support for key aspects of infrastructure – public transport, venues and arts officers in particular – will erode community participation in the arts.

People wish the role of volunteers in grass-roots participation to be recognised. These are the people who run the clubs, concert series, festivals and other projects, without whom the traditional arts would not flourish. Their time and energy are a valuable currency, when cash is scarce. Their input is a marker of the democratisation of culture. On the that question people expressed concern about both the lack of 'geographical equity' in the distribution of support, with too much being drawn into the centrifuge of the M8 corridor.

Finally, there was a general agreement that the traditional arts in their contemporary manifestation – distinctive but inclusive, rooted but innovative - are a wonderful asset for Scotland, an important means of expressing our country to the modern world. In short, the traditional arts help us, in the words of the American cultural commentator, Arlene Goldbard, to understand who we are as a people, what we stand for, and how we want to be remembered. These three questions should lie indeed at the heart of any cultural strategy.

# **A CULTURAL STRATEGY FOR SCOTLAND**

## **CULTURE CONVERSATION**

**I**

**DUNDEE**

**Hosted by: Traditional Music Forum & The Friends of Wighton**

**Tuesday 7 November 2017**

**The Wighton Centre, Dundee Library**

**Number of participants: 8**

## 1. Why is culture important to you?

Culture in relation to traditional music (and arts) gives us **identity** in an increasingly globalised world. It provides a **sense of self and connection with history**. We also think it is a strong identity for us to have in relation to the wider world.

*“It reflects where we come from and where we are going.”*

Traditional music and arts is **inclusive** as it is the culture of the people. It reflects where they come from and where they are going.

Traditional arts as a cultural force are not just about history and the past. It is something people enjoy in the here and now. It encourages **community**, promotes **wellbeing**, is something people can get **passionate** about and is most importantly **enjoyable**.

*“It is the essence of our humanity”*

Culture is **essential to daily life** and permeates all aspects of our lives. It is the **essence of our humanity**. If it is taken away, or denied in any way, individuals and society suffer.

## 2. What is good about culture in Scotland and what needs to change?

### What is good

Traditional musicians and artists are often at the **forefront of what is new** musically or otherwise. It is a living and breathing tradition. More and more young people are getting involved and being **inspired** by the tradition. It is a route into being involved in the arts as well as learning about culture and history.

### Challenges/What Needs to Change

Dependence on inspired and inspiring people means we need people to have the **time and energy to get involved**. They run the venues, clubs, the community projects where people learn music, the concerts and festivals. Without them, the tradition would struggle and we would lose not only community resources but national and international recognition.

Funders often **do not recognise or understand** the traditional arts. There is not a lot of funding available, should people wish to apply for some.

The traditional arts can be innovative but not always. It is **not always about innovation but about sharing** of tradition and culture. This does not require innovation. Funders often require something 'new' or innovative. Funders need to value the stability, quality and accessibility of traditional arts.

The **national media** is often not reflective of, or understanding of the cultural traditions of Scotland. There is a blinkered view of this which needs challenging. (BBC Alba excepted, where many excellent programmes are covered).

There is **scant understanding or recognition of the role of Scots** and the cultural importance of this and very little funding support for projects championing it.

There needs to be **more support for children and young people** to access traditional music. Schools are an obvious way in and support for this to happen would be welcomed. It would be good to see support for traditional musicians to go into schools and inspire young people (like other national art forms do), and back this up by learning of traditional music and song in schools. This can be very accessible e.g. song/singing and instruments such as whistles are cost effective and inclusive.

It was noted that there was historically **more practical support** for the traditional arts e.g. Trad Arts Officers in local authorities and the Trad Arts Trust which was based in Glasgow.

### 3. What do you want the future for culture in Scotland to be like?

The future of culture in Scotland must be to encourage **arts which are inclusive and accessible**. The arts and culture are well known to bring people together which encourage understanding. Future development of arts and culture in Scotland must recognise this and have it embedded into any strategy.

Participants reinforced that the traditional arts are not only culturally essential for the future of Scotland but also an entry point to arts and culture. People often do not recognise that they are involved in arts and culture, yet they play music and sing in music sessions, attend traditional music workshops and festivals etc. Supporting the traditional arts is therefore important in sustaining other art forms.

*“The loss of support has eroded much community participation in the arts”*

We wish this future therefore to be **well resourced**, to **support grass roots participation** in the arts and to support the tradition as part of this. This resourcing can involve funding, but also structural support from posts such as Traditional Arts Officers. Indeed, any **arts officers** or cultural officers would be good. The loss of such support has eroded much community participation in the arts (participation and audience).

We would wish the strategy to **embed the traditional arts and culture** into all aspects of daily life in Scotland – from tourism, to the media, education, health to local communities.

Finally, we wish the traditional arts to be part of any future strategy and through this have recognition of its unique and essential role in life in Scotland

# **A CULTURAL STRATEGY FOR SCOTLAND**

## **CULTURE CONVERSATION 2**

**ABERDEEN**

**Hosted by: Traditional Music Forum & Scottish Culture and Traditions**

**Monday 13 November 2017**

**Aberdeen University**

**Number of participants: 12**

## I. Why is culture important to you?

Culture in relation to traditional music (and arts) is not just important but vital to individuals and society. Traditional music was noted to be **a key cultural force** in Scotland. Participants expressed that, through traditional music, they had a **connection with history and heritage** and an ownership and understanding of this. For many their involvement with traditional music began in the home and involvement provides an ongoing and important **sense of home and self**.

*“it is part of my life”*

With involvement in traditional arts being predominantly **participative**, it was noted that it enables people to develop **skills** which provide many benefits – **social benefits** such as reduced loneliness, **health benefits** through improved wellbeing, and it was noted how important music is for brain development in children as well as benefitting adults with health conditions.

Involvement in culture through traditional arts was seen as something which **created and strengthened community**, through bringing people together and through providing a medium for connection. Some of the participants were not from Scotland and for them, involvement in traditional music enabled them to **feel part of Scotland** and not just welcomed into the local community but part of it.

Traditional music is also important as it is **intergenerational**, bringing people of all ages together. Today, traditional music is one of the key ways in which all ages can come together to learn and understand each other, as well as connect with culture.

Finally, traditional music and arts are important as they are relevant and valued not just locally but internationally and provide a unique way to express culture, traditions and heritage to the wider world.

*“it is part of us and it is brilliant”*

## 2. What is good about culture in Scotland and what needs to change?

### What is good?

It was noted that the traditional arts are **accessible** to all, **inclusive** to all and a vibrant cultural force. What is good is that the traditional arts operate on **many levels**, from grass roots to highly professional and performance based.

The traditional arts, in what they uniquely offer, are **diverse**, and there is something for everyone. Today a wider range of instruments and styles of playing can be taken up, as can other art forms such as **storytelling and dance**.

It was also noted that the ongoing development, delivery and success of the traditional arts in Scotland is due to the **enthusiasm and commitment** of people in local communities, many if not most are volunteers. This gives it a unique vibrancy and relevance.

## Challenges/What Needs to Change

Traditional arts exist in a largely unfunded world, and are delivered within communities by communities. The lack of funding sometimes reflects the passion and commitment of individuals and the fact that the tradition is one which is handed across generations and communities, by individuals or tradition bearers. This does not always mean it is sustainable or without threat. It was particularly noted that **funding was not equal across the country**, with many areas receiving less funding than the central belt. It was also noted that accessing funding was not easy as traditional arts projects do not fit the priorities or requirements of many funders. It is ongoing work and one which faces a considerable demand. **The demand is a success story**, but to enable it to continue to be accessible, funding is needed for what is seen as **'core' costs**.

With **cuts to instrumental tuition in schools** and many families facing economic pressures, this generation of children and young people are not accessing opportunities to take part in music to the extent previous generations have. Participants expressed concern around this, as playing music and singing in the home was also perceived to be in decline. What needs to change is that traditional music and arts need to be more prevalent in community and school settings. Funding could be made available to take traditional music out into communities, enabling people **to access learning and participation free of charge**, where they are (with instruments also provided). Participants also wished more support for taking traditional music into school settings. This could include **support for teaching staff** to understand and utilise traditional arts, or involve traditional musicians going into schools to share skills. It was noted that all schools in **Shetland** have (or had) a fiddle tutor and this has enabled the Shetland fiddle tradition to have national and international recognition.

The traditional arts are dependent on people communicating and sharing the tradition, through playing, singing and performing. Participants highlighted that traditional arts are threatened by **loss of venues** (from clubs and pubs and concert venues to community centres). They are also threatened by a **reduced visibility in the national and local media**. Where traditional music is available through the media, it does not reflect the diversity of the tradition, nor does it recognise particular regional aspects. If less available through media outlets, accessing traditional arts on the ground, in communities and schools is far more important.

### 3. What do you want the future for culture in Scotland to be like?

The future of culture in Scotland must **recognise the importance of traditional music and arts** and in doing so give it a due place in any strategy. Participants reinforced that the traditional as important a cultural force as Opera, Ballet, Theatre and the National Orchestras. Indeed, participants deemed them more important due to the volumes of people involved in participating and performing traditional arts.

*“the current premier league model is not working...”*

The future for culture must be one where **people involved in delivering the arts (of any kind) are supported and valued**. This includes the volunteers, the tutors and teachers, the community organisations and educational establishments. Therefore, culture needs resourced, with funding being not just for one-off projects but sustaining good work in good settings, delivering far reaching outcomes.

*“every time I sing a song it is a creative process and creative expression”*

The future for culture in Scotland must be one where **culture is embedded in all aspects of life**. Much emphasis on **more cultural activity in schools** was highlighted by participants and in doing so recognising the value of this for educational outcomes as well as social and cultural outcomes.

A future culture must be **inclusive and accessible to all**. As evidenced here, traditional music and arts are well known to bring people together which encourage understanding. Future development of arts and culture in Scotland must recognise the importance of traditional arts in **creating community as well as creating excellence**.

# **A CULTURAL STRATEGY FOR SCOTLAND**

## **CULTURE CONVERSATION**

**3**

**GLASGOW**

**Hosted by: Traditional Music Forum & Royal Conservatoire of Scotland**

**Thursday 16 November 2017**

**Royal Conservatoire of Scotland**

**Number of participants: 8**

## I. Why is culture important to you?

Culture in relation to traditional music and traditional arts in Scotland was deemed as important to participants since it is about **identity** – personal identity and cultural identity. Participants noted how traditional music began in the home but grew to be something which was about **being part of a community**. In doing so, it enables people to **connect with their heritage and history**, and express the importance of this. The importance of traditional music in bringing generations together was also strongly emphasised.

*“everyone sang, and children were put to bed with a song”*

The importance of traditional music and arts as an **accessible** cultural force was emphasised. It is open to all and happens at the grass roots. People are learning from each other and are able to start learning at all stages in life.

*“I started learning in my 50’s and can now play 100’s of tunes”*

Culture was also seen as important since it enables people to come together to **share** and in doing so get a **better understanding** of each other. Participants highlighted how important culture was for **integrating people from other cultures** into Scotland. It was also deemed important as for **how the world sees us**. It is one of the things which tourists look for when coming to the city.

## **2. What is good about culture in Scotland and what needs to change?**

### **What is good**

It was noted that the traditional arts are thriving at community level. More and more people want to learn traditional music and an increasing range of instruments are being taught on a weekly basis.

*“It was noted that people are moving to Scotland to learn traditional music here.”*

More and more young people are getting involved in piping – due to some strong support from voluntary organisations and individuals. It was also noted that people are moving to Scotland to learn traditional music here.

There are more professional musicians coming forward, with lots of new bands and ensembles performing to a high quality. Aligned to this there is much development of the tradition which many new tunes and songs being written and performed.

## Challenges

The traditional arts, and the cultural identity which goes with this, are in danger of being lost to many people in Scotland (despite the above noted strengths). With **cuts to instrumental tuition in schools** and many families facing economic pressures, this generation of children and young people are not accessing opportunities to take part in music to the extent previous generations have. Participants expressed concern around this, as playing music and singing in the home was heavily perceived to be in decline.

What needs to change is that **traditional music and arts need to be more prevalent in community and school settings.**

The participants suggested that more needs to be done in the **early years**. Traditional songs are important for cultural identity and heritage, as well as being fun to learn and enabling development of all sorts of skills – musical skills, communication skills, listening skills. Staff in nurseries need to be able to access skill based learning and culturally relevant and accessible materials need to be available.

It was also deemed important for traditional music and song to be more available across the school system. **Teacher training** should include more reference to the tradition and how to access it. More support for traditional musicians going into schools should be provided – **practical and systemic support.**

The **loss of the Education Scotland web-based materials** is still felt as they were a **key resource** for not just teaching staff. The reinstatement of these will be a starting point, but much needs to be done across education to ensure the cultural relevance, and the value of traditional music and song are embedded into learning. Support for increased **uptake of the Scottish Studies SQA** qualification is needed. The Elphinstone Institute in Aberdeen have created a Scots Language Pathway\* which aims to **safeguard Scots** in North East Educational settings – from nurseries upwards. This was highlighted as good practice and something which could be taken forward across Scotland.

\*<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/resources/scots-language-pathway-277.php>

## What Needs to Change

The breadth and diversity of traditional music also needs **recognition and promotion**. It is not just about learning a Burns song or poem. There is a rich and diverse tradition which is invisible to many.

The importance of traditional arts to the economy was also highlighted yet this is not recognised or supported by key agencies such as VisitScotland. Where they do, they take a **one-dimensional view** of traditional music which does not recognise the diversity on offer. People come to Glasgow and want to hear music and expect this as part of a tourist offering.

**Resourcing** traditional music and arts is vital. It was noted that funders often do not understand what traditional music is and why it is important. It was also noted that there was funding being made available for sport and to get people more active. Whilst this is welcomed, traditional music and arts contribute heavily to **wellbeing, community cohesion, education**, and also deliver **economic benefits**. The value they provide needs better understood by those who allocate funding.

It was also noted that traditional music in communities is being organised and run by volunteers, who do not have the skills in fundraising which other charities have and hence community based projects struggle to compete for available funding.

It was noted that the traditional arts seem particularly vulnerable to cuts in funding at a time when having a cultural identity is more important than ever to people and to our country.

### 3. What do you want the future for culture in Scotland to be like?

Culture in Scotland needs to be **open to all** and be something which is **embedded across daily life**.

The traditions of music and song appear vulnerable despite some of the key strengths we have noted. The future of culture in Scotland must recognise **the importance of traditional music and arts** and in doing so give it a due place in any strategy. A **national and international outlook** relies on an understanding of who we are, where we come from and how we express this.

The government needs to take leadership in understanding the traditional arts and the unique role they play and raising the visibility of them.

The traditional arts need to be as **valued** as all art forms and indeed other nationally important things such as sport.

*“carrying a fiddle case needs to be as important as carrying a tennis racquet or football”*

The future of culture in Scotland needs to be one where the **full diversity** of traditional music and song is valued and recognised as well as the importance in **creating community, increasing educational attainment** and **strengthening the economy**.