

# B L E T H E R S

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL NETWORKS FOR TRADITIONAL ARTS AND CULTURE



A living flow of song, music, dance, story and wordplay  
Space for conviviality and collective energy open to all  
Creative practice inspired by shared memory and experience  
A wellspring for community identities and personal growth

**TRACS** / TRADITIONAL  
ARTS + CULTURE  
SCOTLAND

[www.tracscotland.org](http://www.tracscotland.org)

Scottish Storytelling Centre, 43-45 High Street, Edinburgh EH1 1SR

# SEASONAL BREAKOUT!

Scotland's finally getting ready to go outdoors. Check out those flowers pushing through the leftover snow and frost. And the bursting buds. That's called Spring. And we might even be talking May Day, or Beltane in Gaelic. That's called Summer. The beginning at least.



Traditionally, after being cooped up for the winter, we went green-wild at Beltane. Spring seemed to take forever. Then, trees blossomed, and the greenwood surged. Folk danced, sang and put on crazy street plays, with leafy branches as props.

That stuff is as old as Spring itself. But it's also as fresh as our feelings.

[www.tracscotland.org/tracs/resources/traditions-of-may](http://www.tracscotland.org/tracs/resources/traditions-of-may)  
[www.tracscotland.org/tracs/GiftingEveryChild/AScottishSeasonalCalendar](http://www.tracscotland.org/tracs/GiftingEveryChild/AScottishSeasonalCalendar)

We need to connect with the environment and get out of our worried little heads into something a bit crazier and joyful.

So, how are you going to mark this year's seasons from Spring to Summer, and then to Autumn and back to our Winter Festivals? And how will your locality or community celebrate?

Tracs has produced some great resources to help you get started, but, when things look challenging, even depressing, it takes people to make a small start on turning things round. **THINK GLOBAL but ACT LOCAL.**



## SCOTLAN'S SPRING

Frae the bud leaves are breakin  
Trees are dauncin, branches sway  
Blossoms in the wind are blawin  
Spring has come tae flooer the day

Tide o green we're lang awaitin  
Noo we're waukin tae the licht  
Gin we're leal tae yin anither  
Comin days could yet be bricht  
**Chorus**

Daurk the world wi cruel violence  
Fowk denied their daily breid  
Gin we pit brave herts the foremaist  
Earth kin rise frae dearth an dreid  
**Chorus**

Sae come all ye an yoke thegither  
Sisters, brithers haund tae haund  
Wi the pooers o life oerflowin  
Joy may flourish laund tae laund  
**Chorus**

# TRACS

Scotland's National Network for Traditional Arts and Culture

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## SUPPORTING . . .

Traditional Music, Storytelling and Dance with their national Forums, respective networks and the languages of Scotland.

## ENGAGING WITH . . .

Lifelong learning, community development, ecology and cultural diversity, contemporary arts, crafts, social enterprise, responsible tourism, and social justice.

## NURTURING . . .

Creativity and cultural heritage in all parts of Scotland.  
TRACS is based at the Scottish Storytelling Centre on Edinburgh's Royal Mile and organises the **Scottish International Storytelling Festival, Trad Seasons**, and development days across Scotland.



**TRACS** TRADITIONAL  
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TRACS

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# YOUNG TRADITIONAL MUSICIANS LEARN STEP DANCE

by Fiona McLean

What happens when a group of young traditional musicians spend a week learning step dance? 'Sheer magic' said one audience member; 'just wonderful' from another. The eight young people from the Fèis Spè Cairngorms Cèilidh Trail stunned audiences with their live step dance performances accompanied by fellow band members instrumentally and through puirt a' beul Gaelic song.

Fèis Spè is local to Badenoch and Strathspey in the Cairngorms National Park, promoting traditional music and Gaelic culture to young people from the ages of 5 to 22. There is a packed programme of activities, including weekly classes; Fèis Week for school age children where they can learn traditional music, song and dance; a cèilidh band for teenage musicians; and the Cairngorms Cèilidh Trail for 16 to 22 year olds, which goes on tour during the summer, playing to audiences throughout the Cairngorms National Park.

Apart from the opportunity to learn step dance at Fèis Week, there had been no previous attempt to mainstream step dance in the musical tradition taught to the young people. We were keen to rectify this, recognising that the rhythm of step dance was integral to the music and song tradition of Gaelic culture. Although there has been a concerted effort over the past 25 years to reintroduce step dance to Scotland, it has not yet reintegrated into the social fabric of the Scottish traditional music scene in the way it exists in Cape Breton. And we realised that this is because of its separation from the tradition of accompaniment by live music and Gaelic song. Or to turn it on its head, traditional music and Gaelic song had lost a significant dimension by not incorporating the beat, rhythm and spectacle of step dance.

We were on a mission. Not just to reinvigorate the step dance revival but to help sustain it, to augment our own musical tradition, by reintegrating it in to our musical and song repertoire. Pat Ballantyne wrote in a blog on her PhD thesis on the attitudes of Scottish traditional



musicians towards dance, that 'It appears that a problem for step dancers in Scotland is that not many musicians are aware of the rhythmic emphasis and impetus that the dance style demands'. As step dancer Màiri Britton kept emphasising to us, many Scottish musicians do not have the 'lift' that is required for step dance.

Our goal is for step dance to become mainstream to all Fèis Spè activities, with our bands including step dance as a feature of their performances, similar to the popular traditional band, Breabach. Our ambition is for step dance to become a feature of cèilidh dances, where participants dance a square dance alongside the strip the willow and dashing white sergent.

We decided to start our programme with the eight youngsters from the Cairngorms Cèilidh Trail, who could share the dances with other young people who participate in Fèis Spè activities and with the audiences on their tour. We received funding from our parent body Fèisean nan Gàidheal to match funding we had received from the Robertson Trust, Gannochy Trust and Hugh Fraser Foundation, while from Bòrd na Gàidhlig we were awarded funding for the puirt a' beul workshops.

We were incredibly lucky in attracting some of the best dancers and musicians in the traditional music and dance scene. Màiri Britton had literally

stepped off the plane from a year's sojourn in Cape Breton immersing herself in the step dance tradition; Caroline Reagh from the step dance group Danna was also going to be working with the youngsters throughout their tour; Ewen Henderson, a Gaelic singer who is also a step dancer, worked with the band members on puirt a' beul accompaniment; and the multi talented Mairi Campbell ensured that the music, song and dance were fully integrated.

The project took place over five days between the band's initial training programme and their tour of the Cairngorms National Park. Only one band member had danced to any extent before, the rest being musicians and singers. By the end of the week almost every member was sufficiently proficient at step dance to entertain an audience, to such an extent that the loudest applause was reserved for the step dance performances. Every band member thoroughly enjoyed the week, with a number of them intending to continue their step dance in order to include it in future musical performances. Even the band members who were not keen dancers felt they had benefitted significantly from the week, and all were huge advocates for including step dance in a traditional music performance repertoire.

# THE TWEED DALES

by Elspeth Turner

This, the fourth in the Journey's and Evocations series, published by Luath Press, combining folklore and history. It takes readers and travellers into the Scottish Borders on six circular journeys through the landscapes carved out by the river Tweed and its tributaries. Delving into the history and stories, legends, folklore and writings, the journeys explore how each unique landscape shaped and inspired those who knew and lived in it and was itself shaped by them.



The idea of a book grew out of Seeing Stories, a European project on the links between rural and urban landscape features and stories, where I got into discussion with Donald Smith. Donald and I both have roots in the Borders so exploring the links between the river Tweed and its stories only whetted our appetite to dig deeper into the stories and people associated with these dales. So, when Luath agreed that there was a book to be written, we unearthed books, dug deeper into the records and writings inspired by the Tweed dales landscapes and revisited familiar places with new eyes.

We also explored each dale, me by

car, Donald on foot before agreeing the best route to tell its story. It was a hugely enjoyable treasure hunt! And the light the stories of each of the Tweed dales threw on the lives and minds of residents and visitors brought both of us a deeper understanding of Scottish Border culture past and present. It also brought a reverence and respect for the legacy that comes down to us in legend, folklore, story and in literature and verse inspired by the landscape, its people and their stories.

Tweed Dales was a three-year collaboration. The seed for the book was however planted 25 years ago when Donald welcomed my mum

Nancy into the storytelling community. It is particularly fitting therefore that the book was launched at the Storytelling Centre on Donald's birthday and on what would, by coincidence, have been Nancy's 91st birthday.

Whether you journey into the Tweed dales from an armchair or on two or four wheels with the help of the maps and travel directions, we hope the spirit of each of these Tweed dales touches you. As Donald says, 'If you love the Scottish Borders you will love this book, and dip into it again and again'. And if the area is uncharted territory for you, we hope this book informs and the Tweed dales delight you.

# QISETNA - TALKING SYRIA

by Marion Kenny

I'm sure that many people will remember Qisetna: Talking Syria, from when they visited our international storytelling festival in 2015. They are a non-political social and cultural project aiming to engage Syrians and people with a connection to the country to share their stories. It provides a reminder of the humanity of ordinary Syrians through their relationship with arts, culture, sports and places.



Founding Members Bassam Dawood, Dima AlMekdad and Julia Rampen, shared traditional Syrian Hakawati stories as well as powerful, moving, contemporary stories from the non political, bilingual and inclusive Qisetna blog platform where Syrians feel safe to share their stories. The Storyteller or Hakawati was a central figure in traditional Syrian society.

The team were sent to the Isle to Bute as part of the storytelling festival outreach programme. At the time both the Festival and Qisetna were entirely unaware that they would be arriving on the Isle of Bute just weeks before the first twenty Syrians would

be arriving in Scotland to make this tiny island their new home.

The team were able to undertake ground- breaking performances and workshops with the island community who completely embraced Qisetna; they were keen to learn about the Hakawati storytelling traditions, cultural life and history of Syria. It gave islanders a chance to ask directly how they could make these families arriving feel at home. Dima Mekdad's answer was simply "Be kind"

The team made extremely strong connections here in Scotland and I was delighted when Qisetna

contacted me to join forces with them for an extraordinary project, which took place in September 2017. The residency was a unique opportunity which was funded by a grant for Arts Award for All England Grant from the Big Lottery Fund, and was organised by UK based project Qisetna: Talking Syria in collaboration with New Arts Exchange Centre and Nottingham School of Education.

Participants in Qisetna's storytelling workshop series were a mixture of Syrian newcomers and local community members of Nottingham, meeting for the first time.

The workshops were bilingual and resulted in the production of a bilingual performance of music and stories delivered by the participants. Over the residency I worked alongside prominent Hakawati Syrian storytellers Bassam Dawood and Dima AlMekdad as well as award winning artist and creative producer Juan DelGado who documented the workshops and performance.

We explored how traditional storytelling techniques can help cultural exchange and allow people to engage with unfamiliar communities. During the weeks residency we shared stories, music, songs, food and fun. And it culminated in a magical performance led by myself and Bassam Dawood at the Nottingham Lakesides arts Exchange Theatre where participants shared stories and music developed throughout the week to a full house and delighted audience.

Prior to the beginning of the residency I had asked everybody to bring along an object which was a personal treasure. This would become the basis for the story they would develop and share throughout the project. The residency began with participants taking part in a series of drama exercises to develop trust, eye contact, physical and spatial awareness.

Bassam and I shared folktales from Britain and Syria to demonstrate the many skills employed in the ancient art form of oral storytelling. This led to a lively discussion exploring the many themes found within the folktales and common threads shared by all cultures. Owning one's story is a crucial way to communicate it. To be a good storyteller you have to be a good listener. Vital to the residency was the extraordinary skill of Dima AlMekdad who worked as translator, magically and seamlessly moving between Arabic and English helping the group communicate and form deep friendships.

The group had fun learning breathing exercises and vocal techniques exploring the musicality of the human voice. We quite literally became one

unified voice with group singing exercises. These skills would help them to deliver their stories more powerfully and to project their voices on stage in a theatre to an audience.

After hearing the folktale 'I love you more than salt' which is known in cultures all over the world, it was discovered that many proverbs and sayings about salt turned out to be common between Britain and Syria. Each person chose his or her favourite proverb about salt. These were used for a series of drama exercises to develop vocal and performance techniques.

Music is also an international language and shared by all of humanity. Everybody brought along instruments and shared and learnt tunes and songs from both Britain and Syria. It was a joyful experience that had the whole room dancing and playing together in celebration.

Participants also learned how to create the running order for a programme, weaving together music and stories in both languages. Timing the music and stories with translation took a lot of practice. Delivering the production on stage in a theatre to a large audience was a huge challenge given the short amount of time to prepare. It was an enormous success and the audience was thrilled. It was hoped the residency help inspire longer- term projects between Syrians now resident in Nottingham and the local community. I am happy to report that his has certainly been the case.

Stories created during the residency will in future be presented on the Qisetna blog in both Arabic and English. Hopefully Qisetna: Talking Syria will have the opportunity to run a series of workshops here in Scotland bringing communities together with music, stories and dance, celebrating cultural exchange and understanding. For more information about Qisetna Talking Syria and to receive their newsletters visit their website

[www.talkingsyria.com](http://www.talkingsyria.com)

## GUIDE TO THE NEW GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION (GDPR)

### DATA PROCESSING

Data processing is any operation carried out by a computer in order to record, classify, retrieve or transform information.

Much of what the regulations requires is based on clearly recording the actions and decisions you make, so keep a log. You should designate someone within the organisation to take responsibility for GDPR compliance.

### DATA AUDIT

You need to document the personal data you hold

#### Questions

What personal data do we hold?

Where did it come from?

Who is it shared with?

### INDIVIDUALS' RIGHTS IN RESPECT OF DATA

- The right to be informed
- The right of access
- The right to rectification
- The right to erasure
- The right to restrict processing
- The right to data portability
- The right to object
- Rights in relation to automated decision making and profiling

If you hold information on children you should have a procedure in place for getting parental or guardian consent for processing the child's data.

### LAWFUL BASES FOR PROCESSING

(a) Consent: the individual has given clear consent for you to process their personal data for a specific purpose.

(b) Contract: the processing is necessary for a contract you have with the individual, or because they have asked you to take specific steps before entering into a contract.

(c) Legal obligation: the processing is necessary for you to comply with the law (not including contractual obligations).

(d) Vital interests: the processing is necessary to protect someone's life.

(e) Public task: the processing is necessary for you to perform a task in the public interest or for your official functions, and the task or function has a clear basis in law.

(f) Legitimate interests: the processing is necessary for your legitimate interests or the legitimate interests of a third party except where those legitimate interests are overridden by the interests or rights of the subject (e.g. if the subject is a child). (This does not apply to a public authority processing data to perform its official tasks.)

Consent v legitimate interest as a lawful basis for processing can be a contested area. Helpful comment here:

<https://www.briffa.com/blog/general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr-no-consent-required-legitimate-interest/>

An example might be that of a musician or agent who holds contact information for venues. This would clearly qualify as a legitimate interest.

### PRIVACY NOTICE

You should encapsulate your recognition of the individual's rights, the lawful basis of the processing and the purposes for which you are holding the data in a privacy notice.

### ACCESS REQUESTS

You should write down how you plan to deal with any access requests from data subjects

### BREACHES

You should make procedures for detecting, reporting and investigating any data breach.

# DIALOGUE BETWEEN MUSIC AND DANCE

by Wendy Timmons

Rhythm is fundamental to our very being: A baby, before it is born, moves in the womb and performs rhythmical patterns which are known to have communicative and expressive significance (Lange, 1975). Rhythmical patterns can also be defined by uniform metrical rhythm that was a common approach in concert music in the Western world in the 19th century. Latterly the global amalgam of musical tastes and styles embraced the idea irregularity allowing rhythms to be expressed, manipulated and shaped by tempo, accents, dynamics, and in conjunction with flow and spatial properties melded together with bodily movement - to form dance.

Historically, the dance or Ballet Master provided the tempo for class with his baton on the dance floor, or with an instrument (typically the violin). This was clearly evidenced and powerfully documented in the impressionist works of Degas where Noverre (1727-1810) is depicted in the dance class, backstage and in rehearsals. In these settings Noverre maintained that balletic movements within performance should not only be technically brilliant, but should also result in an emotional engagement with the audience. This was achieved through Noverre's insistence that music should be composed to fit the movements, as opposed to setting the dance to existing scores; he pushed dancers to understand how to use rhythm expressively, rather than simply to count the number of beats. This fundamental tenet is alive today in the work of Farrell (NYCB) who emphasizes the importance of acute listening and relishes changes in tempo to 'challenge the dancer' (Jordan, 2000, p94).

Of course, dance and music enjoy individual existences as forms of rhythmical expression, however it is the togetherness of these expressions that is of interest here. Cavalli (2001) argues that music for dance 'accompaniment' is different from music for listening to - and should complement, reflect, motivate and



enhance the movement. Not in a thudding beat to maintain uniform rhythmical patterns, nor as frippery, but as an organic part of the dance as the dancer's body itself. Yet the term 'accompaniment' contains, for some artists, a misconception that an imbalance in creative worth exists between the dancer and the musician. Mistakenly, some musicians perceive that they are a garnish or accessory to the dance, rather than an integral part of the dance. In the traditional genres music, historically, the converse was the case (see figure below): Musician and dancer coexisted in their entirety, many of whom argued that the music and dance are one and the same, negotiating the nuances and complexities of rhythmical communication and expression in an interactive dialogue. Together they build and support each other, generating meaning that sadly will be lost if considered and pursued in isolation.

Separation and individuality as a worldwide process characterises

post-modern societies and the once accumulative sense of community and responsibility for others is today too often implicitly replaced by individualistic principles. This is indeed also now all too commonly apparent within the coexistence of traditional music and dance. The schism and appeal for separation may not be a result of individualistic tendencies coming merely from a practical, sustainable perspective that is a resultant of emerging digital technology. Whatever the case, the visceral unmatched high a dancer feels when supported by live accompaniment and the challenge the musician rises to when engaged in this expressive dialogue with the dance is one that should be reconsidered and cherished before this beautiful baby is thrown out with the bathwater...

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# THE KING'S TABLE: INTERVIEWING JEAN EDMISTON

by #FolkloreThursday's Willow Winsham



Image © Amanda Edmiston

The practice of storytelling is as old as the human race itself. Long before ink was first put to paper, the oral tradition of tale telling had taken root, with stories passed from person to person, from generation to generation, growing and changing with each new telling along the way.

It is always a great pleasure to discover a new story, and a good one stays with you long after turning the final page or hearing the last word. *The King's Table*, written by Jean Edmiston and published by The Hidden Dancer Press, is one such offering, gripping and drawing the reader in from the first page.

**'In the green heart of a fallen oak I found this story'**

So begins this skilfully and delightfully crafted tale. An old king who has spent many years surveying his kingdom from an ancient old tower, dies, and his son returns from lands far away to take the throne. Unimpressed with his inheritance, the new King's curiosity is sparked by the last bequest from his father, a wooden box with a note bearing the command to find the King's table. The table is duly discovered, but disaster strikes and the table is no more.

The search is then on for the one that can replace the famed table in all its glory. Who will prove up to the task? So follows a tale that will warm your heart and make your eyes suspiciously damp as you read through to the satisfying conclusion. Firmly rooted in the land and our common heritage, *The King's Table* subtly touches on themes of continuation of history, stories, family and belonging. There is also a strong feeling of the mystical running beneath the carefully chosen words, reminding us at every turn of the magic of the earth.

*The King's Table* is the perfect example of the old adage that good things come in small packages; Jean Edmiston manages to effortlessly weave a tale that is both beautiful and comforting in its simplicity, drawing on the familiar, yet also keeping it relevant to a modern reader; timeless storytelling at its best. There is the added boon of a female character in a prominent role, and a positive one at that, taking an active role in redressing the balance of equality in storytelling and beyond.

The use of trees and associated imagery throughout grounds the story firmly in the earth, and Edmiston's carefully crafted text perfectly paired with illustrations by Andrew Foley brings the story firmly to life. It is the perfect tale to read alone curled up before the fire, or out loud to a group of rapt listeners; why not pick up a copy of your own and carry the tradition on yet further?

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[www.folklorethursday.com](http://www.folklorethursday.com)



# QUALITY IN MUSIC EDUCATION

by David Francis

The Traditional Music Forum last year published a census of the participation in traditional music teaching and learning across Scotland. The responding organisations reported that they provided teaching and learning for over 23,000 people, young people and adults. Given that response was received from a third of those approached it is fair to assume that total figure is somewhat higher.

The majority of these opportunities is in the form of weekly or fortnightly classes, serviced by over 500 tutors. Taking the numbers of teachers and learners together, what we have is at least the equivalent of 20 good-sized secondary schools, 5 colleges or a university. What we do not have is any kind of framework for good practice, quality assurance, professional development or career-long learning opportunities.

This lack and how to address it has been a topic of debate for the last twenty years at least. There are those who argue that there is no lack, that the numbers taking part, the exponential rise in the skills of young musicians in particular is justification enough for leaving things as they are. Traditional music has always been about informality, some say, and there is no need to interfere with that by bringing in any kind of formal arrangements. The suspicion is of regulation, unwanted administrative burdens, the imposition of inappropriate standards.

Nobody wants that. Research has shown that there is little appetite for formal qualifications, for example. But at the same time the current situation is so disjointed that there is little assurance that the seeming current successes will continue into the future. While there is some training provided by Fèisean nan Gàidheal, Fèis Rois, by the RCS to some Scottish music students, and by the UHI to all of its trad students on the

Applied Music course, there is no sense of a national, co-ordinated approach that would benefit the thousands of learners and the hundreds of tutors now and in future.

Much of the groundwork in this area has been done, both within the traditional music community over the years, and through organisations such as Sound Sense, the MU and the Natural Voice Network, and through initiatives like Artworks Scotland and the Scottish Mentoring Network. What remains is to take advantage of that groundwork and adapt and adopt the relevant elements in ways which suit the present circumstances. Crucially the question has to be addressed in a way that suits organisations, musicians and learners.

With that in mind the TMF called a conference last autumn to consider practice, quality and professional development, and from that came a small working group with representatives of the main non-formal organisations.

# A CULTURAL STRATEGY FOR SCOTLAND

The group has been considering a draft document comprising a Code of Practice, a Quality Framework and a Professional Development Framework, with the aim of getting organisations to adopt it and put it into practice.

The Code of Practice varies slightly depending on whether it applies to tutors and organisations. It is a starting point and sets out the key quality areas. The aim of the Quality Framework is not 'quality assurance' or 'quality control'. It is a contribution to a practice that acknowledges the importance of quality and aims for a culture of quality improvement. Quality principles are rooted in what is trying to be achieved and a sense of what that looks like. As with the Code of Practice, what that looks like will vary according to the lens you are looking through - whether you are a participant, a tutor, or the organisation which brings these two together. Tutors and participants want to work with organisations that hire the right tutors, communicate well, work well with people, are safe and responsible, encourage evaluation and reflection, and are committed to professional development of their staff and their tutors. Organisations and participants want to work with tutors who are musically skilled, are prepared and organised, work well with people, are responsible, and are committed to their own professional development.

The third part of the document, the Professional Development Framework, looks at the various pathways for development that are open to tutors in Scotland today, from short courses to post-graduate level.

The document has still to be fully signed off, but we hope that organisations will bring it into their operations from Autumn 2018 onwards. We hope that it makes a contribution to creative learning, and to the role that creative learning can play in community cultural development through the traditional arts.



*Creative Mapping with Tracs*

## A first stage contribution to the Scottish Government's Cultural Consultation

In partnership with three of its member organisations, The Traditional Music Forum, itself a member of TRACS (Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland), hosted conversations relating to 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, for example - 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 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.

Tracs is now preparing for the Second Stage of the Consultation - Ideas and Contributions welcomed.

# ARM'S LENGTH WRESTLING

## Creative Scotland Once More!

by Donald Smith

As we go to print with this issue of *Blethers*, the arts scene in Scotland is once again in turmoil. And TRACS's own networks for Music, Storytelling and Dance Traditions are caught up in the troubles. Having applied like everyone else for three-year funding, we were awarded a grant 23% lower than our present level of support. But others have been worse affected, and others yet again, having been completely cut, then had funding restored in an unannounced and exclusive 'second round'. And all this, after the Scottish Government had stepped in to ensure stability for Creative Scotland's own finances.

The key word here is **CONFUSION**.

Creative Scotland has treated the three-year application process as if it was one particular funding scheme among others. They have awarded grants according to the current perceptions of a somewhat low profile Senior Management Team, utilising to different undisciplined degrees assessments of the plans submitted over a year ago by applicant organisations. But in reality three-year RFO funding is the backbone of the whole cultural infrastructure of Scotland, and it needs a sustained and consistent strategy, not a destabilising three yearly re-hash.

It was always madness to line up all of Scotland's core cultural organisations on the edge of a cliff, awaiting the starting, or finishing, gun. It was also crazy for Creative Scotland to demand reams of paperwork and then go into purdah, instead of talking with the applicant organisations to help shape the future. Any change in the portfolio of RFO organisations needs to be spread over three years with adequate notice and transition planning.



Image © Scottish Parliamentary Corporate

Apparently, this cliff edge is the way CEO Janet Archer and her colleagues did it in England, but it was never going to be right for the very different and often fragile cultural scene here.

Then there is further confusion between Creative Scotland's role and that of the Scottish Government, which is its principal funder. National performing arts companies, museums and galleries are already directly funded by the Government under the scrutiny of the Scottish Parliament. If we don't like what they do, we can ask questions, and if necessary vote them out. But what about Creative Scotland?

Historically arts funding has been at 'arms-length' from Government. But why? If Education, Broadcasting, Heritage and Healthcare are subject to open discussion between professionals and public funders, and to the cut and thrust of democratic debate, why not the arts? Surely that is why we have a Scottish Parliament. Of course, freedom of expression must be upheld, but that applies in politics and the media as well. Moreover, many arts funding issues are to do with organisations and infrastructure, not the artists.

A democratically debated cultural strategy would make the politicians accountable too, not just the party in power. It is strange listening to members of the Parliament's Culture Committee interrogating Creative Scotland about funding for their own areas, regardless of whether the

relevant local authorities are supporting local arts and culture or not. It cannot all be down to one central pot. That will never provide the scope, spread and range of activities that are needed in Scotland's communities.

Finally, a properly debated public strategy also makes the arts sector itself accountable. The professional bodies, such as Arts and Business or the Federation for Scottish Theatre, so favoured by Creative Scotland in its funding announcements, love to be on an inside track. They and Creative Scotland are peas in the same pod. But they are not the artists, and do not deserve the same hearing as those who have won their position the hard way, through creative love and labour.

Nor are these insider arts networks connected with the general public who at the end of the day provide the vital money, and people power. Since the 1990s a strong consensus has built up around support for arts participation. It is heart breaking to see Creative Scotland fly in the face of that wider awareness with careless announcements about children's theatre and organisations supporting disabled people.

The Creative Scotland era is played out. And it has been a painfully extended tale of chaos and discontent. Few now remember that Creative Scotland is the legacy of Labour Culture Minister Lord Mike Watson, whose sole idea it was to

merge the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen, and label it 'reform'. He is now best remembered for criminal 'fire-raising', and his idea has been stillborn in the post-devolution world.

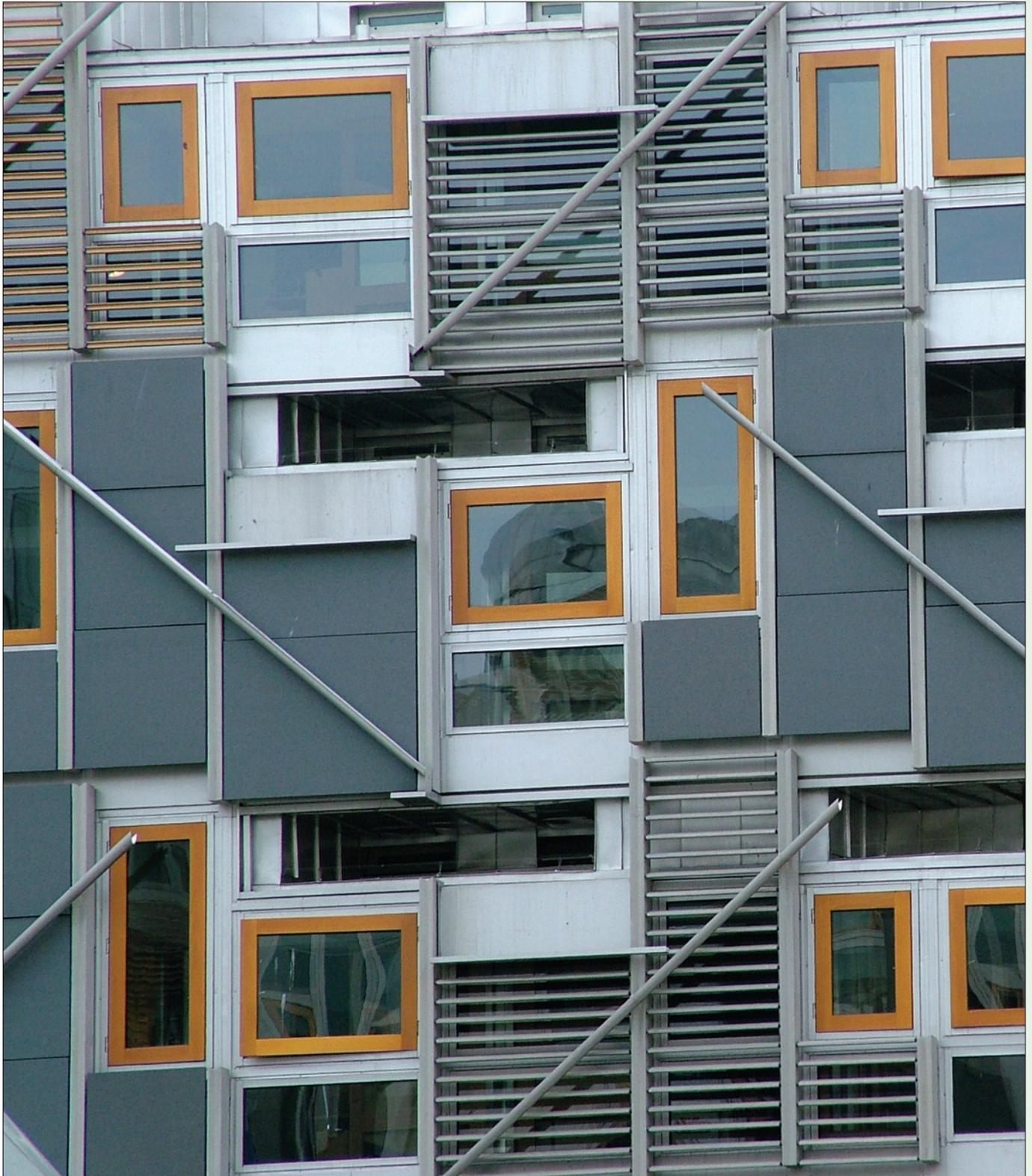
An unstable, crash-and-burn quango cannot again be trusted with lead responsibility for the precious creativity of a whole society.

Creative Scotland should be tasked with project funding, while the artform experts should work with the Scottish Government to sort out an evolving but stable framework for culture, aligned to a clear strategy that everyone can debate, recognise, and continuously develop through the same processes as every other area of public policy and investment.

This requires no complex legal changes - the Scottish Government is empowered to lead.

Despite the impression given by Creative Scotland, people who work in arts and culture are grown-ups, and can cope without nannying.

*Image © wamgraphics*



# FOUND IN TRANSLATION?

by Anne Pitcher

I've always liked a storytelling challenge. So I said "Yes!" when asked to do storytelling in French and English with a flavour of Scots, for 213 Early Years pupils at Kirklandneuk Primary School in Renfrew as part of UNESCO Day of Cultural Diversity, Dialogue & Development on May 10th. Kirklandneuk is a pilot school in Renfrewshire where French and Spanish are woven into the daily routine of the school day. Principal Emma Wallace explained "We want the children to have fun and engage with these languages, through storytelling, inspiring them to see how enjoyable and relevant learning other languages can be"

I love the French language - its beautiful sound and flow - it's richness of timbre. I love the way the French use their whole bodies when they speak - their use of facial expressions and hand gestures are so eloquent. So how do you convey this to young children so that they enjoy the language and want to join in?

First I thought - translate the Scottish stories into French, look at the English/Scots, decide how much French P1-3 children could cope with, then create a combination which would flow in telling. I had translated stories from English to French before, but never had to create a blend of the two - I hasten to add NOT "Franglais". So what I needed was "blended" stories.

From past experience I knew it is best to keep phrases simple in another language, empowering children to join in. How do you keep both the spirit of the story and the feel of the words and not lose their meaning in translation? For example the title "The Wee Bannock" - how do you even translate that into French? "Le biscuit d'avoine" doesn't have the same ring or meaning! So I translated the stories and felt they weren't snappy enough - the language didn't flow - the words didn't reflect their true meaning. Who could help?

Then I remembered hearing about Tania Czajka of "Le Petit Monde", a native French speaker, storyteller and puppeteer. I wondered if she would be kind enough to give some advice - thankfully she was.



Tania confirmed what I knew and added to my understanding of this task. Firstly - convey the spirit of the word, not a literal translation. Secondly, explore the rhythm of the translated word which helps with repetition and joining in. Enjoy using alliteration and sometimes rhyme eg "Je suis le petit bannock qui roule, boule vite, vite, vite" "I'm the wee bannock who whirls and birls, quick, quick, quick!"

Thirdly when you translate and adapt, retain the unique storyline but

re-imagine the characters with a background explaining why they speak French, in your mind and imagination, giving a natural flow to the story. I'd been tying myself in knots trying to do this, but it felt strained and manufactured. I'd reconnoitred Renfrew to find French connections for the "Wee Bannock" to whirl and birl past and found "Paris" hairdressers. But was struggling to find a reason for other characters to speak French. It was so liberating when Tania said "Find a logic in the storyline,

as to why characters are speaking French. Ask "Do they come from France?" "Are they visiting/on holiday?" "Have they married a Scottish person?" So now the bannock-making little old lady was a Frenchwoman, married to a Scot who lived in Renfrew, the wee bannock was bi-lingual, the dog chasing the bannock was a French Poodle, Mademoiselle Caniche, and so on.

Fourthly, having repeat phrases spoken in both English and French by different characters doesn't break the flow but enhances understanding eg "Stop wee bannock I want to eat you!" "Arrête petit bannock, je veux te manger!"

Fifthly by using short, well known words, you create confidence to join in, such as "Yes", "No" "Oui" "Non" and basic numbers - "Un, deux, trois". Also have fun with English words which originate from French eg "What's the French for gâteau?"

With young children it is good to have action songs, providing a reason to move between stories and helping recall French words. Previously I'd used a tune that children knew and put French words to it, but that is tricky especially when dealing with rhyme. Generally, songs don't translate well eg "Twinkle, twinkle" loses its rhyme and rhythm, but slightly tweaked "Head, shoulders, knees & toes" does work, becoming "Tête, épaules, genoux et pieds" In the end I did translate some songs, creating a small repertoire.

Finally, it was a joy to see it all coming together successfully on the day at Kirklandneuk - a big challenge and an achievement too. In November 2017, I applied these principles when doing Scottish storytelling to a whole primary school in Thailand with an interpreter and it worked extremely effectively... but that is another story!

*I'd love to hear any tips you have for translating tales - contact [annepitcherstoryteller@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:annepitcherstoryteller@hotmail.co.uk). Thanks go to Tania: [www.lepetitmonde.co.uk](http://www.lepetitmonde.co.uk)*

## HOW OLD ARE STORIES?

by Stuart McHardy

Recently there was a news story that university researchers had determined that some traditional stories are a least 5,000 years old. A surprise? Hardly. Much was made in the media about the use of quantitative phylogenetic methods, a form of analysis that has been used in languages and anthropological studies.

However if you stop to think about it there is no surprise here. Humans have been around for a very long time indeed and story is an absolutely integral part of all human cultures, at all times. Too many academics tend to forget that writing is a relatively recent invention in the human story and that for the vast majority of our species' time on this planet people could only learn through listening and watching.

The listening part is of great importance and the very idea of religion is rooted in original mythology. The purpose of mythology was to create an understandable model of the known world. In addition to specific mythology the education of children was a significant part of the storytelling process. Whether we consider the more grisly aspects of many traditional stories or the obvious moral direction of others it is clear that there is clear didactic purpose in many of our tales. The fact that they are also entertaining is hardly accidental - a memorable story will be remembered. This is matched by the reality that stories from a pre-literate time are rooted in specific locales - the known environment of the audience.

This explains why we have so many variants of what are the same story - and each place they were/are located is just as relevant and important as all the others. This localisation is very important because we know that in Scotland as in many other parts of the globe people occupied the same places for millennia.

Stories attached to such places will survive as just as long as they are



relevant to the experience of the audience -and how much has human nature changed over the past 5,000 years/?. What was relevant to our ancestors in terms of letting coming generations know how to survive, and how to behave, remains relevant to us today.

So even cursory examination of the process of story makes it pretty obvious that stories can continue to be told for a very long time indeed. The 5,000 years trumpeted by the media - ever eager to get a good headline - actually pales into insignificance alongside research done in Australia back in the 1990s. In a remarkable book *Australian Dreaming ; 40,000 Years of Aboriginal History*, Jennifer Isaacs pointed out there was proof that indigenous storytelling traditions are tens of millennia old. The proof was that the giant marsupials of the Dreamtime, so central in native Australian storytelling - dismissed by the Western-educated incomers as fantasy - did actually exist.

In the second half of the 20th century bones of giant marsupials began to be found. One example, from Keilor near Melbourne, shows the bones of giant marsupials at an Aboriginal campsite dated to 31,000 year ago. The giant marsupials have been given the name Diprotodontia - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diprotodontia>.

The intriguing question is just how old some of our own stories are. As I have been using story to discover previously unknown archaeological sites and landscape interpretations a part of Geomythography, I think we should ask - what more can our stories tell us.

# BOOK BLEETHERS

## SPRING INTO FOCUS

It's been another vintage year for storytellers in book form. Marie-Louise Cochrane, Tim Porteous, Michael Kerins and Lea Taylor are among the Scottish storytellers featured through single tales or new collections. And in all cases, they have teamed up with fine illustrators. Tim and Megs MacFarlane do *East Lothian Folk Tales* for History Press, while Lea and Sylvia Troon combine for *Midlothian Folk Tales*, with the same Publisher. Hilary Macaulay illustrates Marie-Louise's *Cake for the Fairies*, while Elaine Davis does the honours for Michael's Hooray, *It's Meeeeeee Birthday!* A galaxy of talent in word and image!

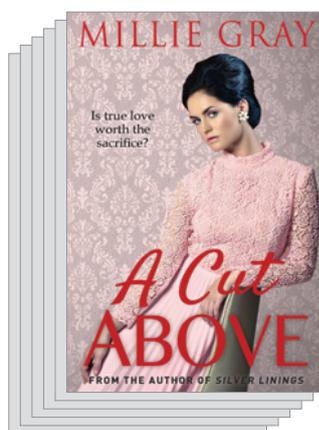
Other collections published last year provide distinctive harvestings. The evergreen Taffy Thomas gathers 'Riddling Stories' for History Press's *The Riddle in the Tale*. Susan Perrow offers *An A-Z Collection of Behaviour Tales* through Hawthorn Press. If that sounds a bit ominous, it goes from, 'Angry Ant to Zestless Zebra', so there's plenty of storytelling fun. Katie Munnik gathers stories for the season in *The Pieces We Keep*, appealing to both personal experiences and religious reflection.

In *Songbook* the Scots Music Group's INSPIRE project brings together 35 new compositions written through workshops with people facing life challenges.

*Love is just a little number  
It's hard to find but it might find you  
Deep down in my soul I know it's there  
I'll keep on searching till it's found*

Georgiana Keable's *The Natural Storyteller* is a bumper international compendium of 48 wildlife tales, along with useful commentary and suggested activities.

'When you open the book and read a story you plant it in yourself', says the introduction, and then of course you have to spread it by telling, just as a song has to be sung.



Moving away from live storytelling, Millie Gray continues her popular novels of Leith and Edinburgh life with *A Cut Above*, which is sure to keep her readers turning the pages with its mixture of tough-hearted realism and humour. Another storyteller in print is Scottish journalist Peter Ross whose *The Passion of Harry Bingo* continues a journey through 'unreported Scotland', which he began in *Daunderlust*.

Finally, Gallus Publishing continues to foreground local culture, with *Ceilidhmakers* which presents songs created for the Tay Landscape Partnership, and *Dingwall on the Waters* which is a fascinating account of the town's Norse origins. In every locality, every 'People's Parish', there is a rich subsoil of history and lore, as Ewan McVicar demonstrates. That same conviction animates Stuart McHardy's *Scotland's Future Culture* which extends the arguments and illustrations from *Scotland's Future Histories*.

**Donald Smith**

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### BEHAVIOUR TALES

by Susan Perrow  
Hawthorn Press  
ISBN 978-1-907359-86-6

### CAKE FOR THE FAIRIES

by Marie Louise Cochrane  
Mrs Mash  
ISBN 978-1-9997911-0-0

### CEILIDHMAKERS

by Ewan McVicar and Christine Kydd  
Gallus Publishing for Tay Landscape Partnership

### A CUT ABOVE

by Millie Gray  
Black & White  
ISBN 978-1-78530-152-0

### DINGWALL ON THE WATERS

by Ewan McVicar  
Gallus Publishing/Highflight Books

### EAST LOTHIAN FOLK TALES

by Tim Porteous  
The History Press  
ISBN 978-0-7509-8004-3

### HOORAY ITS MEEEEEE

BIRTHSDAY by Michael Kerins  
Big Pants Ltd  
ISBN 978-0-9934823-2-8

### MIDLOTHIAN FOLK TALES

by Lea Taylor  
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### THE NATURAL STORYTELLER

by Georgiana Keable  
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CULTURE by Stuart McHardy  
Luath Press  
ISBN 978-1-910745-98-4

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