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
What can we learn in common from the Traditional Arts? Apart that is from all the creative skills involved in music, dance, storytelling, folk drama, crafts and seasonal customs?

They show how people have gone on through times of crisis - environmental and political - by connecting with sources of change and continuity. Could that work for us now as the planet heats up and competition for resources leads to wall building, river damming and fear of ‘the other’?

Well, possibly, because planet earth is our shared home. There is only one for us, and it functions as one integrated, dynamic organism. Tradition tells us this, but so does science and spiritual intuition. Everything is held together in common.

So what is the cultural parallel? You can read all about it in a great wee book called Making Common Cause (ISBN 978-1-5272-3199-3), published by Voluntary Arts. Our own David Francis is a contributor, and for me its like an autobiographical journey through decades of community arts activism. But the key idea is ‘Cultural Commoning’. That is moving away from individualism, consumerism and media stereotyping, in order to connect with people, place and seasonal rhythms - all expressed through shared creative actions.

In 2019 and beyond, TRACS will foreground these connections. We will advocate for local cultural experiences and value; promote the people’s parish methodology, apply to UNESCO for recognition as an international supporter of Intangible Cultural Heritage, and launch a Global Storytelling Lab in association with The Earth Charter Initiative. This will involve all the arts of Tradition, reflection the Scottish International Storytelling Festival’s 2019 theme of ‘Beyond Words’.

Across Scotland artists, community activists, ecologists, educators and aware citizens are joining together to make the changes that we all need. In doing that we are connecting in turn with a worldwide struggle to take down the walls, unblock the energy flows, and recognise the stranger as our guest and friend.

It’s time for us collectively to be active, creative and committed to transformational change.

Be part of it!
Although we often talk about ‘Scottish traditional music’ it is easy to forget that every local area has its own tradition of music and song, some of which has become part of the canon, and some of which stays closer to home.

The Heritage Lottery Fund seemed to offer a tantalising opportunity to explore some of that local repertoire, so in partnership with ten festival members of the Traditional Music Forum across Scotland we devised a project to take advantage of that opportunity. The idea was that a ‘flying squad’, named ‘The Wayfarers’ and comprising the finalists in the 2017 Young Traditional Musician of the Year, would research music from the areas where the festivals are held, while the local festivals identified young musicians who would be interested in taking part in the project. The Wayfarers would then visit the area, workshop the material with the young people, and work it up, ready for performance at their local festival.

Heritage Lottery didn’t go for it unfortunately, but, after piloting the scheme in Innerleithen in the Borders, we had a good grasp of how it might work, which stood us in good stead when the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo offered grants for traditional arts development work. This time we restricted our partners to two, Kimemuir Music Festival, which takes place in September, and the Islay Sessions, which happens in November. This time we were successful, and our wayfaring team of fiddler Sally Simpson, guitarist Calum Morrison and singer Josie Duncan set to work digging out material for the forthcoming workshops, using resources such as Tobar an Dualchais.

Co-ordinating three busy, early-career musicians was never going to be the easiest of tasks but we finally managed to integrate the workshop dates with their gigging and teaching schedule. For Kirrie, Josie chose a song that is undeniably part of the canon, ‘Busk, Busk’, a great traveller favourite which references the Angus glens of Glen Isla and Glen Shee. As well as teaching the song, the group also worked with the youngsters on ways of arranging it for fiddles, guitar and bass, and the whole group performed it, along with some local fiddle tunes selected by Sally, at the evening concert in the Airlie Arms.

With the help of Fèis Ile as well as the Islay Sessions festival, the Wayfarers worked with the young people on a Gaelic song this time, Ceann Tráigh Ghruinneart, and a selection of tunes from the local piping tradition. Again the fruits of their efforts were heard by a wider audience at an Islay Sessions concert in Bruichladdich Hall.

The Wayfarers group showed immense skill and sensitivity in their work with the young people. While we should never neglect the contribution of older tradition bearers there is undoubtedly a place for the transmission of traditional material to younger people by skilled young musicians. Despite their relative youth the Wayfarers have amassed a great deal of experience in performing and teaching. The combination of those skills and the potency of local material referencing stories and landmarks familiar to young participants is one means of ensuring the continuity of traditions in place.

TRACs thanks to Ellie Logan, Aly Skidmore, Iona Fyfe, Scott Gardiner, Gráinne Brady and Ciara MacTaggart for their help with this project, which was funded by the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo Traditional Arts Development Fund, to which grateful thanks is also due, and to TRACs who provided the back-up admin. You can see a short film about the project here: https://bit.ly/2H3znrU
A STORY TO EVERY DANCE

Mats Melin reflects on his new book about the lore that enhances the Scottish solo dance tradition

The Scottish solo dance tradition is peppered with stories attached to specific dances which appear in Highland Games and performance programmes, and today commonly also on the internet. These, range in content from:

- The sword dance appearing in the eleventh-century with Scottish King Malcolm Canmore dancing it;
- Wilt thou go to the Barracks, Johnnie? being used as a dance to recruit soldiers for the Scottish regiments;
- The Highland Fling as imitating the strength and agility of a leaping or ‘curvetting’ stag;
- Various dances with connections with the 1745-1746 Jacobite Rising and its aftermath;
- The Seann Triubhas being linked to 1746 Dress Act prohibiting the wearing of tartan; and
- Flora MacDonald’s Fancy devised in honour of the Jacobite heroine Flora MacDonald.

Most of these stories suggest an origin for a dance anchored in a distant past, but they may also form some level of meaning-making. Are they even true? In many cases not at all. It could be that they were created to help dancers perform certain dances with particular images in mind.

This work questions whether there is any actual truth to the stories by taking some of the facts apart. The main questions are: What function did the story have for dance teachers and dancers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Why was it necessary to validate the dances by setting them in antiquity? Are there still purposes served by these stories if and when they are applied today? Also, is it now, or even, was it ever, necessary for dancers to have a certain image, or story, in mind to help them perform these dances in character? By outlining and deliberating on historical references on some of the best-known Scottish solo dances, this overview places these associated stories against a contextual and historical framework. The analysis set out equally to investigate what was, and is currently, the meaning-making behind these stories.

We first take a detailed look at several stories of suggested meaning-making related to the three main dances of the Highland dancing repertoire of today—Highland Fling, the Seann Triubhas and the Sword dance. Each of these has at least one story, that on some level, has lived on into common knowledge among practitioners of Highland dancing today. Three dances with stories relating to the Jacobite rising of 1745-1746 are discussed next, where we ask if they have any real connection with this historical event. After that, I explore ten ‘miscellaneous’ dances (including Blue Bonnets, Highland Laddie and Wilt thou go to the Barracks, Johnnie?) each of which have stories unrelated to each other, but which are in some way used to explain the purpose of the dance or the step pattern or style in which the dances are thought to have been danced. Next, I discuss two Character Dances found in the Scottish solo dance repertoire, the Irish Jig and the Sailors’ Hornpipe, which, both have particular sets of storylines associated with them. Lastly, it is also worth examining one group dance, the Reel of Tulloch, closely associated with the competitive solo dance scene in the last 100 years or so. The Highland Reel, in its many manifestations[1], was at one time the most common dance of Scots and does not seem to have any stories attached to it at all, with the exception of the later and specifically named form, the Reel of Tulloch, mentioned above.

Soft cover book and downloadable pdf available. Prices and shipping costs for softcover book: €12.00 plus shipping €5.00 - see Shop tab. Please email info@lorg-press.com for softcover orders.
For nearly 18 months now there have been weekly sessions teaching ceilidh dancing as an exercise class in three fitness centres (Perth, Dunfermline and Cowdenbeath). These classes are proving a good way to get people moving, and are popular in that they actively encourage social interaction. All classes use live music, and the dances taught are by and large those that can be expected at weddings and similar occasions (Gay Gordons, St Bernard’s Waltz, Strip the Willow, Dashing White Sergeant) and others taken from the repertoire taught to traditional music students at the Conservatoire in Glasgow.

A few other "fun" dances are also included, but the emphasis is on exercise and movement, usually in sets (to encourage teamwork) and the social interactions that generates, rather than footwork and exact formations. The only techniques taught are those necessary for safety, for example correct handholds in rapid turns. Dances where partners change frequently (e.g. the Canadian Barn Dance) are also used to enhance the general sense of fun and sociability which quickly develops in each class. Participation always takes precedence over performance. Light-hearted comments are often made about the frequent mistakes (and recovery from them), all adding to the sense of fun.

From an exercise viewpoint, the great advantage of these classes (apart from everyone having so much fun that they forget they are exercising) is that everyone can work at an intensity level that suits their own needs (and wants).

Classes last at the most one hour and there are frequent breaks to allow people to get their breath back after two or three dances. This exercise meets the Scottish Government’s definition of "vigorous" (results in sweating and shortness of breath) which is maintained for a few minutes, five or six times in each class. There is also at least one slower dance.

People obviously enjoy the classes, and for a few months were invited to record their "wellbeing" scores (on a scale of 1-10) before and after every class. The results have been aggregated into the charts shown below, and the shift from "before" to "after" is quite striking. Further work is being planned to refine these results, and perhaps get some indication backed up by hard evidence of why this significant shift in mood takes place.

The bottom line though, is that ceilidh dancing is fun, easily accessible to all, requires no special equipment or training and is a great way to enjoy genuine Scottish traditional music. What is sad in many ways is that there are only limited efforts being made across the whole of Scotland to practice and preserve it; it is in danger of becoming, for most people, little more than an excuse for an unruly knees-up at other social events. Encouraging more people to get up and take part in what is a very traditional form of Scottish dance is vital.
I have just arrived back in Scotland after an amazing adventure in India. I was fortunate to be awarded Professional Development funding from Creative Scotland to attend the Chennai Storytelling festival as principal artist and to undertake research in traditional forms of storytelling and music in India.

SOME TALES OF MY TRAVELS

Marion Kenny reflects on an epic journey in India

I began my journey in the remote westernmost corner of Rajasthan. The golden forted city of Jaisalmer rises like a giant sandcastle out of the arid Thar Desert close to the Pakistan border like a scene from Arabian nights.

Jaisalmer holds many stories of the countless merchants passing through as they transported fine materials, cotton, silks, spices, camels and opium amongst other goods. Its position on the overland route between Delhi and Central Asia—which ultimately led to the vast markets of the Middle East, North Africa and Europe—meant the city grew rich on the proceeds, as the magnificent palaces and havelis of merchants bear witness.

The city is also hugely important to Hindus, as it is closely associated with Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna has always been one of my favourite Indian Gods as he of course plays the flute as I do, although I am sure he would naturally have been a far finer player with his Godly skills.

According to ancient mythology Krishna and Bhima had come to this location for a ceremony, where Krishna had prophesised that a descendent of his Yaduranshi clan would one day establish a kingdom here. Lord Krishna created a spring by casting a spear, which is still in existence and his prophecy carved in rock. This tale was told to Rawal Jaisel, a descendant of the Yaduranshi clan by a sage called Eesul in the 12th century. Encouraged by the meeting he moved his capital to the location on the rock where the present city stands and named it after himself.

The people of the city took me to their hearts when they heard me practicing flute, and I was invited to the palace to give a performance of
flute music to Rani [Queen] Meghna Kumari Singh alongside her husband Maharaj [King] Vikram Singh Ji Bhati and their special guest the Crowned Prince of Uidapur amongst other invited guests.

The House of Nachana in Jaisalmer is a 300-year old sandstone haveli, which belongs to the descendants of the erstwhile ruling dynasty of Jaisalmer. The Nachana family are Bhatis and they belong to the Lunar clan. The family traces their birth line lineage to Lord Krishna and way back before him to Rishi Attri from where the Lunar clan is known to have begun.

Sure enough being part of Lord Krishna's family music and dance plays a very integral part of their lifestyle, traditions, rituals, customs and festivities. The family has given patronage and full support to its artists and musicians and always entwined relationships between the two, which continue to this day. The Nachana family is very involved in promoting the Jaisalmer singers, musicians, storytellers and all kinds of local artists to reach their full potential.

Meghna Kumari Singh with her non-profit organisation called Uttistna Foundation [which means Arise, Awaken and perform conscious action] is working with these artist communities to promote them and also to involve the women and girls of these families so they too can carry on their family traditions forward and be on a world stage.

In the days that followed I visited many times while they shared tales of the regions fed me lots of food, and I in turn shared stories and tunes from Scotland and Ireland. The family had on a previous visit to the region introduced me to a flute player I had been searching for but who had been proving elusive.

Hailing from the Bheel community in Rajasthan, Taga Ram Bheel is one of the most famous Algoza players in the region. Coming from a family of labourers and shepherds Taga Ram self taught himself the Algoza. As a child he would watch his father playing and intrigued by the magical instrument he would steal his father's well-hidden flute and run away to play with it while his sheep and goats grazed around him. He would start to play along with any song that he would hear on the radio or in the Temples around. He now performs all around the world and is president of the Algoza Society, recipient of many prestigious awards, as well as being a skilled instrument maker.

The moment I met Taga Ram Bheel and began playing together, we clicked. We effortlessly improvised and couldn't stop laughing in between tunes. Celtic music and the music of this region of Rajasthan have huge similarities.

He invited me to his village Moolsager where a group of musicians where waiting to greet me with welcoming songs.

His mother and father in their 80's along with his wife, many children and grandchildren all treated me like a family member. I was invited to stay with Taga Ram and his family in their village of Moolsager. They live in conical shaped houses, which have thatched roofs and are painted with traditional artwork of the region. We spent our days playing flutes together. At night we would sit around a flickering campfire beneath the twinkling stars sharing tales and tunes.

To read on and continue with Marion on her journey see www.scottishstorytellingforum.co.uk
"Let’s meet for a wee blether" has a friendly ring to it, and folk can get a lot out of a blether. Though blethering may not meet with approval in the office or workplace, or (heaven forbid) the world of academia, I was delighted to find it in Henry Glassie’s scholarly work, The Stars of Balymenone. Like Scotland’s Hamish Henderson and Calum Maclean, Glassie is ranked among America’s world-class folklorists. Passionate about collecting and recording ‘ordinary folk’, his publications reflect unstinting devotion to the traditions he records.

As an ‘early career’ academic with a PhD in Folklore and a young family, in 1972 Glassie left a comfortable American life-style to find out how people in Northern Ireland coped during the ‘Troubles’. He chose a community which didn’t yet have electricity or modern plumbing, but had wealth beyond measure in stories, songs and music - Ballymenone. Using a battery-powered reel-to-reel tape-recorder he recorded the likes of Cathal McConnell’s flute teacher, Peter Flanigan, and other ‘stars’ of the fireside gathering and the pub. Day after day he wrote notes, detailing everything he heard, saw and learned. Then, one night, without warning, his house was raided by the police. The children were petrified, and Glassie watched the cops seize all his notebooks - a nightmare for anyone nearing the end of a project. Eventually, Glassie is told he can have them back because they’re just a load of “idle blatherers”. Out of those notebooks and fieldwork tapes, in 1982 Glassie published a monumental book, Passing the Time in Ballymenone, a treasure-trove of stories, songs, local history and folklore.

So why write another one over thirty years later? In returning, he knows the old folk have passed away, there are no thatched houses now, and life is easier with electricity, plumbing, better roads and transport. But what of the house-visits, the ceilis, where he sat around the turf fire and heard all those stories? There is heart-ache in accepting they are completely gone. Glassie reflects that “the hardship of the old days drove people together in conversational exchange, but the comfort of the present pulls them apart into the isolation of silence”. The Stars of Balymenone is a masterpiece throughout, in which we hear the voices of the fireside and can reflect on the importance of having a blether - or a blather, for that matter.

Glassie’s other motive for writing was that he “wanted to teach, sharing how fieldwork ought to be done while adding what folklorists ought to do … interpreted in the community’s own terms”. In teaching Folklore, there is always the hope, the prayer, that some student will take on the mantle of inspiring the next generation to enjoy the richness of traditional culture, the languages, dialects, stories, songs, tunes, and distinctive voice and character of the people.

This year’s summer of sunshine and festivals also brought me a gift of The South West Scotland Collection: 5 volumes of bagpipe tunes, each with its own story, all told in the Scots leid. The books are the work of Karen McCrindle Warren - forgive me for boasting she was a student in my Folklore class and also my Fieldwork instructor, while collaborating with her fellow-piper and husband Paul to produce a series of 36 tuition books for pipers and drummers. This year, to address the absence of music teaching in schools in Ayrshire, they set up EPIC East Ayrshire Pipe Band Academy, and now tutor over 200 children in Scotland’s national instrument.

Always on the lookout for tunes, Karen began to realise that apart from ‘Scots Wha Hae’ and a few Burns songs, there was scarcely to be found any pipe music from the South West of Scotland. Thus began her new collection, not only of tunes from Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway but also the stories behind them, written in the mither tongue. She gives the notation of a tune, for example, ‘The Lads o’ Lendalfit’, followed by the story: “Lendalfit wis a smuggler’s cave a’ween Girvan an’ Ballantrae. The smugglers alang the Carrick shore wur a formidable body o men. Muckle vessels wid land their cargoes in the Bay o Ballantrae, wae horsemen ermed wae pistols waitin tae pinch their load…”.

Volumes 1 and 2 of The South West Scotland Collection are devoted to the past, and include 59 Burns melodies along with tunes from 18th and 19th century collections; Volumes 3 and 4 represent the present, each with 75 tunes from today’s composers, and Volume 5, with simpler tunes for young players, is dedicated to the future and goes by the title ‘Wan fur the Weans’. The collection has 350 tunes and is as much an inspiration to storytellers as it is to pipers and, as fellow-storyteller Matthew Fitt put it, “This is a muckle project that demands a muckle roon o applause. In fact, lowp tae yer feet an gie it a staunin ovation”.


Karen McCrindle Warren, The South West Scotland Collection, 5 books, Elixir, 2018

Margaret Bennet reflects on some timely publications in this Year of Conversation.
In Scottish folklore, First Footing is the custom of the first person to enter a household on New Year’s Day, seen as a bringer of good fortune for the coming year.

Rooted in collaboration across dance and music communities, traditional and contemporary practices, the residency spans arts organisation, educational institutions and community groups to foster deeper levels of engagement, connectivity and new support for traditional dance in Scotland.

Nic Gareiss is engaging with communities through partner facilitated dialogue, dance research, high-profile and community performances, workshops, masterclasses, knowledge and pedagogical exchange. Here is his account of an inspiring Step dance day in Perth:

Sunday, I joined an intrepid contingent of artists, curators, and scholars to trundle from Edinburgh to the Perth Theatre by car for an event we called Casting a New Vision for Step Dance Education in Scotland: a Day of Conversation and Professional Development. The event was co-presented by the Traditional Dance Forum of Scotland, the University of Edinburgh’s Moray House School of Education, Fèisean nan Gàidheal, and Horsecross Arts. In scheming up the proceedings, my co-organizers and I wanted it to feel like a day of delights, fuelling inspiration, encouragement, and solidarity. The programme was packed!

The day included participatory step dance masterclasses, step dance teaching feedback sessions (in which three teachers taught short 10-minute classes and received constructive feedback from their peers), a seminar on safe and healthy dance teaching practice delivered by Wendy Timmons, director of the MSc in Dance Science and Education at the University of Edinburgh, an interview with Halifax-based step dancer Harvey Beaton via Skype, and facilitated group discussions around support and sustainability with Michelle Brady, coordinator of the Traditional Dance Forum of Scotland and Nicola Simpson, senior development officer for Fèisean nan Gàidheal.

In addition to programming designed to nourish, enrich, and continue the training needs of this unique group of traditional arts educators, step dance teachers from across Scotland also had the rare opportunity to connect with their colleagues and cast a new vision for sustainability, preservation, creativity, and community-building for traditional dance in Scotland. Delegates from Inverness, Aberdeen, Islay, South Uist, Midlothian, Skye, Perth, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dunfermline, and Fort William were in attendance. It was both incredibly exciting and immensely humbling for me to be in the presence of so many knowledgeable and devoted traditional arts educators. There were so many lively discussions, connections, and conversations around step dance education that I hope will continue!! Driving home, I felt invigorated, inspired by the rich traditions and inspiringly devoted dancers here in Scotland, and filled with hope.

First Footing is delivered by the Traditional Dance Forum of Scotland in partnership with the University of Edinburgh - Institute for Sport, Physical Education & Health Sciences, Moray House School of Education & School of Scottish Studies, with admin back-up from Tracs. The Residency is supported by Creative Scotland.
CONFLUENCE
Anne Errington recounts a weaving of Celtic and Arabian Visions

In November 2016, Laura Hudson Mackay, a photographic artist based in Scotland was exhibiting her work in Marrakech where she met Moroccan storyteller, Mehdi El Ghali. Mehdi was enjoying Laura’s photographs and said they reminded him of stories he knew and began to tell her the tales. Laura knew at that moment she had to work with the storyteller.

Laura then met Houssain Belabbes, a Moroccan photographer. Together with Mehdi, the three of them met in Morocco to discuss ‘Confluence’, a new project that through storytelling and photography would seek to bridge cultures and highlight common links within Arabian and Celtic storytelling traditions.

On her return to Scotland, Laura approached Anne Errington, a Scottish storyteller and invited her to join the Confluence journey.

Through initial seed funding from Upland Arts Development CIC, in February 2017 Houssain came to Scotland for a week-long artistic residency. During that time Houssain and Laura visited the Scottish Storytelling Centre, driving through snow to get there. During the residency Laura, Houssain and Anne met at The Stove, Dumfries, and soon realised that the project’s possibilities were endless, so decided to narrow down the stories and photographs into themes. Following this and after an exchange of stories and ideas on social media with Mehdi included, the agreed themes emerged as Money, Silence, Old, Happiness, Water, Time and the Number 3. These became the 7 Confluence themes.

Ideas, stories and images flowed back and forth across the internet until Laura was invited to bring Confluence to the Wigtown Book Festival in September 2017 as artist in residence. Houssain managed to attend but sadly Mehdi’s visa was denied. It was a busy 10 days with workshops, events and time spent gathering research from authors and festival guests on the 7 themes.

In October 2017 Confluence travelled again to Marrakech. The team held workshops in storytelling and photography with various age groups. They hosted ‘An Evening of Confluence’ at the Heritage Museum with live storytelling performances from Anne and Mehdi and an exhibition of photography from the project.

From the residency came the idea of a Confluence book and after a lot of design work and a successful crowd funding campaign to fund and print 250 copies, The Confluence book: Celtic and Arabian Visions and Stories was launched, firstly at Wigtown, Scotland’s National Book Town, in May 2018 during the Spring Fling Open Studio’s event in Dumfries and Galloway and secondly with a book launch taking place in October 2018 in Rabat, Morocco at the British Ambassador’s residency!

A further Confluence residency in Morocco saw two storytellers from Norway join the team, Ine Mariel Solbakken and Karla Suzanne Ofjord from ‘StorySquad’ in Oslo. It was a very busy time with the launch of a three-month photography exhibition at cross-cultural venue, Café Clock and with the trained storytellers running workshops and working together with Master Moroccan storyteller Haj Ahmed Ezzarghani.

From this last residency came ideas for exploring further cultural connections, this time linking Nordic and Celtic stories and photography and therefore it is hoped that further artistic exchanges/residencies and events will take place between Scandinavia, Scotland and Morocco. Initial research has also begun into links between Australian Aboriginal and Arabian stories with new connections being forged between the two cultures.

Further reading:
www.confluencetheworld.com
All lovers of traditional storytelling have been saddened by the sudden death of Fiona MacLeod. For most of her working life Fiona provided a bridge between her Scottish, Perthshire roots and the culture of Brittany. She was involved at the very start of the Scottish Storytelling Festival and has been a mainstay of continuing Breton traditions.

Fiona was a winsome and dedicated artist, whose deep respect for tradition and its ecological values pervaded everything she did. Resisting performance fashions in storytelling, Fiona made her storytelling practice an inclusive community, working in all situations alongside children, families, those with disabilities, and older people. She radiated love and joy in her work and personal life.

It is unsurprising that Fiona’s passing has been marked by tree-plantings, blessings and music in Finistère in Brittany and Comrie Croft in Scotland. She was brought home to her beloved Perthshire and buried in Strowan Woodland. She is survived by her son Jovan and a baby grandson.

It is some comfort that Fiona was able to be a full part of the 2018 Scottish International Storytelling Festival in which she took great delight. The following words were spoken at the Brittany commemoration:

**HOMECOMING**

And the Great Mother said:

Come my child and give me all that you are.

I am not afraid of your strength and darkness, of your fear and pain.

Give me your tears. They will be my rushing rivers and roaring oceans.

Give me your rage.

It will erupt into my molten volcanoes and rolling thunder.

Give me your tired spirit. I will lay it to rest in my soft meadows.

Give me your hopes and dreams. I will plant a field of sunflowers and arch rainbows in the sky.

You are not too much for me.

My arms and heart welcome your true fullness.

There is room in my world for all of you, all that you are.

I will cradle you in the boughs of my ancient redwoods and the valleys of my gentle rolling hills. My soft winds will sing you lullabies and soothe your burdened heart.

Release your deep pain.

You are not alone and you have never been alone.

Linda Reuther
I have just returned from the wee Festival with the big heart and my word does it live up to its reputation! Heather Yule and I were the invited guests and as Heather had been a guest previously and knew what was in store she ran around the house with excitement when she heard she was to return to the festival. The festival ran from Thursday 26th to Sunday 29th October in a range of venues from a graveyard in Harray to a theatre in Hoy which was worthy of the West End.

Fran Flett Hollinrake began the festival by guiding us around the St Michael Church Cemetery in Harray. She explained that all churches of St Michael are found in elevated positions (Mont St Michel in France being the most well known) as Michael the Archangel is the defender of heaven. Fran’s tour was beautifully researched and presented. We visited the grave of Bessie Skea, known as ‘Countrywoman’ who was a friend and contemporary of George Mackay Brown and wrote in the local paper alongside him. Her granddaughter Sarah Jane Gibbon read us one of her poems and spoke in awe of her encyclopaedic knowledge of nature from the stars to the birds.

I was struck by how beautifully kept this graveyard was with not a toppled headstone on site. I had a very strong sense of connectedness and community seeing the Orkney names including Fran’s own name of Flett. Fran’s telling of the stories of those who have gone before reminded me of the late John Fee who was a local to this part of the Orkney. Tom Muir gave due warning in the programme that the Festival could not be responsible for any fairy abductions!

The venues that this little festival take place in are a huge part of what makes it so special. One of the most intimate venues is Betty’s Reading Room which is run on a voluntary basis by Jane and Craig two retired teachers originally from London. Our hosts were careful not to tell the story of Betty until we visited her room as it is best heard in situ. Until that afternoon, I had always thought that a traditional cottage with its tiny windows would be dark, but the sunlight streamed through the windows that afternoon enhancing the stories we imbibed.

One of the highlights of the Festival for me was hearing local tellers telling their stories from the heart. These stories emerged from a eight- week course facilitated by Fran last winter.

Some of the best stories are what happen to us. On the first night of the festival Chris Perry introduced herself and told me that she had been storytelling for the last eleven years and was announced by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon on a recent visit to Canada. Heather Kirkpatrick and I ran for staff working in residential units in South Lanarkshire. Kris found that Tom Muir’s collections of Orkney stories were enjoyed by the young people in the units (so much so that the books sometimes went missing!) Chris found her way to Orkney to meet Tom and, now that she is retired, splits her time between Edinburgh and the island of Shapinsay. She is the creator of the much sought after storytelling hare who is the festival mascot.

The diversity of the tellers and their themes from a Danish elven queen to a London orphan was unified by a very high calibre of storytelling. Some of the best stories are what happen to us. On the first night of the festival Chris Perry introduced herself and told me that she had been storytelling for the last eleven years and was announced by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon on a recent visit to Canada.

A massive thanks to Fran, Tom and the excellent festival committee who make this festival happen. They make it look effortless but that belies the huge amount of strategic planning and work which goes on behind the scenes!

**STORYTELLING FESTIVAL**

**Beyond Words**

The 2018 Scottish International Storytelling Festival was the most successful in its thirty years history. The Growing Stories theme seemed to work for the community events programme, and for international audiences. Also popular was the Festival’s inclusion of music and dance, showing how all these elements are involved in traditional oral storytelling.

So, appropriately, the 2019 theme is Beyond Words and Tracs will be welcoming storytellers from Canada Coast-to-Coast, in locations across Scotland, as well as the capital city. This international exchange is supported by the Scottish Government’s Festival Expo fund, and was announced by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon on a recent visit to Canada.