

by **Paul Warren**, DIRECTOR  
THE NATIONAL YOUTH PIPE BAND OF SCOTLAND



# On the road to Armagh



From Paul Warren's  
mail box:

*Dear Sir,*

*I was member of the audience at the concert that the NPYBoS performed at last Thursday night (in Armagh) and I would just like to say that the NYP-BoS are really something to be proud of. Their musical skills are outstanding and my only regret was when they actually stopped performing because I could have listened to them all night.*

*These young people are a credit to the Pipe Band fraternity and I would like to wish you and the members of the NYPBoS all the best for the future!*

*Regards*

*Philip Mackey*

## **THE WILLIAM Kennedy International Piping Festival in Armagh, 16 November — what a show, what a performance.**

I want to say a huge thank you to Brian and Caoimhin Vallely for organising such a great festival, for their invitation to us and their hospitality.

And, what a scramble we had. We hadn't performed as a band since the *Fest'n'Furious* festival in Dundee in September; and we'd had no time for rehearsals. This situation is one of the downsides of life with the NYPBoS but that's just the way it is.

Some of our members stayed overnight on the Wednesday at the National Piping Centre as the bus was leaving at 6.45 a.m. the next morning. We were all a bit sleepy but, with a very good coach driver by the name of Angus, we were on the road.

After the weary ones had a chance to catch a little sleep, I started calling the senior members together: Ben Duncan, Keith Bowes, Kyle Warren, Calum MacCrimmon and Davey Henderson who, in the absence of Davey Ross who had a university exam that day, was our lead tip. Davey Henderson stepped in and did extremely well, as you'd expect of someone who played

with Shotts and Dykehead and studies at RSAMD.

We confirmed a running order of what we would do and how it would all happen, and basically produced the show on the bus, on the way to the ferry.

When we got to the ferry terminal, we were able to get all the pipers together to run through the tunes on the practice chanter, Davey Henderson did the same with the side drums, and Marie got the tenor drummers and bass drummer together, while Kyle went away with the backing band and pulled a TNT set together. So everyone was working fairly hard en route but it did mean that, by the time we got to Armagh, we knew what we were doing for the concert that night.

We'd missed lunch but we booked into the hotel, got into our rooms and went straight down to the performance space. The soundman was setting up, so we couldn't get on stage and actually do anything. And, as there was a conference in the hotel that afternoon, we were told we couldn't play pipes.

I was desperate to utilise the time we had and was getting a bit tense. We tried setting some of the chanters as quietly as possible.

At 4 p.m., we were allowed to start work. We got onto the stage and started rehearsing — we had an hour. It was a very driven rehearsal. But it went well, we got a bite to eat, got changed, got back down, tuned up and were on stage for 7.30 p.m.

This is why these youngsters in the NYPBoS have to be as good as they are. It's not just about playing ability. To work at that pace and cram so much into short spaces of time like that... I have a huge amount of respect for them, even if they don't think that when I'm shouting at them at rehearsals; I'm the one who's aware of the time, watching the clock all the time. But, when I think about what they do having had no previous exposure to this sort of situation, it's incredible.

They come, of course, well prepared. The rehearsals are often about things like sound, because our members are not playing together regularly, and I can be giving people new chanters and new reeds on the day of a concert. And they all have different bags and reeds. The other big issue is pulling the show together: the choreography and logistics and so on.

In Armagh, we were first up in front of a full house:



a very happy, receptive and appreciative Northern Irish audience.

Joining us again on stage — he played with the NYPBoS for our *Piping Live!* concert in August — was Graham Harris from Northern Ireland. He also plays with the Ulster Youth Ensemble, North Ireland's equivalent to the NYPBoS, is run by the Northern Ireland branch of the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association. They include older members than we do, some into their mid-20s. Graham Harris' mother, Kim, is one of the ensemble's organisers and she very hospitably got 40 or so ensemble members to come and see the show and then organised a reception where we could get together. It was a nice experience and it would be great to have a closer relationship them.

For our first part, we did 25 minutes or so, and it went extremely well. Dàimh founding member Angus Mackenzie from Mabou, Cape Breton, played a few sets while the All-Ireland champion grade 2 Killeen Pipe Band (from just outside Armagh) got organised: they were very good, with good sound and played extremely well.

After an interval Killeen, led by Philip Boyce, was back to start the second half.

Dougie Pincock, director of the National Centre of Excellence for Traditional Music at Plockton High School, did a solo spot, then we finished off the night.

This was Ben Duncan's last official gig as pipe major. We're not exactly sure when he's off to the Army but he's hoping it's fairly soon. We hope he'll always be willing to come back and guest with us when he can.

We made a small presentation to him on stage and I'd made a collage of some photos I had of him through the years he's been with us. I have to say, it was a very baby-faced Ben who joined us. He's done a fantastic job with the NYPBoS. Chris Gibb helped us out in the early days and pipe majored the band for our first concert but, as we developed, Ben took over that pipe majoring role and he has been our first and our only pipe major to this point.

All of our players have learned a lot from Ben and I think he's learned a lot with the band. He's done an outstanding job.

Another feature of the concert worth comment was that the three TNT (The New Tradition) pipers opened the second half of our show and they went down a storm.

They have just been awarded a contract with Green-trax Recordings, which is fantastic. At their age, they don't have a public track record and they hardly have an established following. So it's great, great opportunity. Brian McNeil has had a big hand in that. He has been a major fan of TNT since *Pipe Factor* and recently had them representing the RSAMD at a function with the Malawi Dancers, and has given them great support.

That these NYPBoS alumni are now semi-professional musicians and accepted into the BA (Scottish Music — Piping) degree course is the sort of progression we've hoped for from the NYPBoS. It's great to see. And it's great that they still want to be involved with the NYPBoS and take responsible leadership roles.

ON the Wednesday before we left for Armagh, auditions were held for the BA (Scottish Music — Piping) degree programme. NYPBoS members Struan Thorpe and Emma Buchan both auditioned and performed so well that they were immediately offered unconditional places and scholarships on the course.

They deserve our warmest congratulations. There are not that many places on the course and I'm very proud of that these NYPBoS members should go in and audition so well.

We've been involving members in coming forward and take on some of the compeering of shows, and it's area in which we're still quite weak. But someone who has shown herself able to perform very ably in that role is Emma Buchan, and we will be seeing more of her at the microphone.

THIS year, we were stood down for *Celtic Connections* — we've played at the festival every year since we've been formed so we have had a really good run at it — and I've been assured we'll be back there in 2008, and I'm quite happy with that.

Coming up we have two invitations in December; one is to play again at the Partick Folk Festival on 2 December and at this moment, we're looking into that.

And on 5 December we are booked to play at the Falkirk Traditional Music Project concert at St Mungo's High School.

Stuart Cassells had been getting together a Falkirk youth pipe band with the involvement of the schools and local bands there and I am keen to forge links with this sort of initiative. It is great for us to have this happening in Falkirk and we wish their project every success.

Emma Buchan comes from Shieldhill and is a member of the Falkirk band because she's still at school.

COMING UP... we're looking at doing our *Piping Live!* concert next year in conjunction with the festival launch which is usually in May, rather than during the festival week, not least because it would then take place in term time. I would love to get the schools interested and have lots of school children in the audience, seeing what we do.

It looks as though we will have a couple of Highland bookings in June, and I will have more information about this in the next issue.

We also have had an inquiry about going down to Cornwall in July for an Interceltic Water Sports Festival, and another inquiry about going to Italy.

The Scottish Executive has invited us to take part at the opening concert of the Lorient Interceltique Festival in Brittany next year. It's a very attractive opportunity but it comes at a very difficult time of year — the start of August — and our members' availability is bound to be an issue.

AN exciting prospect in the offing — probably for April — is a concert in Aberdeen that would be organised along the lines of our concert in Forfar.

John Sharp, who came with us to Armagh as an adult carer, is keen to get the NYPBoS to Aberdeen for a concert, and for us to do something in schools there.

Let us hope it comes to pass: it's great for us to be getting out and about in Scotland, and putting on a show in Aberdeen, the main city of the northeast, is something I'd be very keen for us to do.

MY focus right now is on a lot of paperwork: getting the funding issues finalised and working up a new programme of courses for 2007.

Rest assured: there will be a stack of courses coming up and members will be notified as soon as they are confirmed.

FINALLY... may you all have a great Christmas and Hogmanay, and may 2007 be your best year yet! ●

# Falkirk's finding its musical roots



**STUART CASSELLS and Shotts and Dykehead Pipe Band's Steven Graham are developing a Falkirk Youth Pipe Band with an approach inspired by the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland and an affiliation being established with the national band.**

It is still in its formative stages with just eight or nine pipers and seven drummers, but the band is seen as a long-term undertaking by the Falkirk Council and more prospective band members are in the wings. Falkirk is the first area to establish such a band,

The initiative was launched as part of a wider project under the auspices of the Falkirk Traditional Music Project, set up in 2005 with funding through the Youth Music Initiative Strategic Fund, Falkirk Council Education Services and Determined to Succeed.

The project's objectives have been to establish a traditional band as well as the youth pipe band, and to raise the profile of traditional music in the Falkirk Council's central Scotland area. It offers secondary school students free lessons in traditional instruments — accordion, fiddle, pipes, whistle, bodhran, guitar pipe band drumming — and "it's getting better," said rock drummer Gayle Martin who, as "cultural co-ordinator (east)" for Falkirk Council Education Services, initiated the project

"I've always been interested in traditional music," she said. "My job covers art, music, dance and heritage, working with nursery, primary and secondary schools.

"When opportunities came about for local authorities to apply for this other funding, we looked at what was missing from the existing provision," she said. "Classical music, rock, pop and jazz were getting covered but there was no emphasis on traditional music.

"Looking to cities like Glasgow and Edinburgh, it is clear that traditional music is getting very vibrant and that's coming to central Scotland but Falkirk was missing out.

"We have pipers like 2005 *BBC Radio Scotland* Young Traditional Musician Award-winner Stuart Cassells, NYPBoS senior member Emma Buchan and Rory Campbell all from Falkirk, and this helped provide a focus that we wanted to highlight further, and we were lucky enough to get the money to go ahead with things.

"We've set up a link with the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland; allowing pupils from the Falkirk Youth Pipe Band the chance to work with staff at the National Piping Centre, take part in courses and study for traditional music piping and drumming exams."

The project's whistle tutor Marc Duff, a founding member of *Capercaillie*, has also been researching local traditional music and songs as the project's musician in residence, and looking into the area's musical history and its impact on the traditional music scene. He has already produced a collection of older locally-sourced music as a resource for the project.

And Angus Lyon, who has just received critical acclaim for his latest album, is the project's accordion tutor.

"It's been a struggle to get people interested but we've been lucky to get some of the best instructors in Scotland. It's made a big difference having these young, enthusiastic top players teaching the young people," said Gayle Martin.

"Current funding for the project runs out next summer but it's our hope that further support can be raised to continue the free music lessons, the Falkirk Schools Trad Band and the Falkirk Youth Pipe Band."

A concert on 5 December was planned as part of a campaign to the profile of traditional music locally as well as to give local people a taste of some of the best bands in Scotland.

As well as the Falkirk Schools Traditional Band, the Graeme High School Ceilidh Band, the Falkirk Youth Pipe Band and the Falkirk Fiddle Workshop, the concert headlined national-level and international-level performers including Angus Lyon and Ruaridh Campbell, Stuart Cassells' Red Hot Chillii Pipers group, Back of the Moon and the NYPBoS.

Said NYPBoS director Paul Warren: "I'm delighted that we'll be there and delighted by what they are doing in Falkirk. And, of course, I'm more than happy to forge links with this sort of initiative.

"It's great to see." ●