

# NYPBoS – stronger than



NATIONAL Youth Pipe Band of Scotland members join Ian Duncan (left), Ross Ainslie and others for the launch of the new *Just For Gordon* CD and the book, *Gordon Duncan's Tunes*, at the *Piping Live!* Street Café in August.

Photo: Derek Maxwell

**P**RESS time finds a group of nine National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland members packed and ready to depart for Mexico to play a couple of concerts in the cities of Chihuahua and Juarez with star Galician piper Carlos Nuñez.

It's a nice gig for Keith Bowes, Kyle Warren, Emma Buchan, Jonathan Graham, Scott Giffin, Chris MacDonald, David Ross, David Henderson and Kirsten Sharpe — and it was a hard call for me. Selecting just nine names from the NYPBoS membership is neither an easy nor a pleasant chore.

These things are never fair, and it's never nice when you can only take some of the band.

I chose people on the basis of their length of service, and the contribution they've made.

But I want to assure all of our members and their parents that when the next good gig comes up, and there will be more, I will share things out as best I can.

MY time, leading up to the Mexico trip, was very much taken up with financial year-end reporting and getting information together for next year's funding, writing my annual report and submitting all the paperwork for our application to the Scottish Arts Council.

Taking this overall look at the past year is more rewarding than it might sound. It's been a good year: a different year, with changing personnel, which I think has made the band stronger. I'd thought we'd take a dip after losing some experienced members and bringing a lot of new players in. But that hasn't been the case at all. It quite surprised me.

The new people, not only face the difficulties that go with starting something different and challenging, but also they had to come in at a higher level than previous tranchés.

When the players who are now our senior members first joined the NYPBoS, the material we were playing was a little less demanding than it is now. New members now have to jump into what we've rehearsed and into our working style, which we've all become familiar with, and, as well as all that, they face a higher level of playing.

I'm really impressed that the band has actually taken a step forward and is stronger now. The musical performance is better than it's ever been, and the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall show to launch *Piping Live!* back in May was by far our best performance

**Warren, DIRECTOR**  
NATIONAL YOUTH PIPE BAND OF SCOTLAND



ever



to date.

Over the year, we kept up our run of courses and rehearsal days. Courses will continue to be a strong part of what we do, and we have been keeping the numbers up with the courses.

From the courses, we've managed to get a really good intake of new members. Even those who didn't get in were good players and good, characterful young people who all showed great promise and potential. I was very impressed with all of the young pipers and drummers who came on our courses and I and I hope they'll be able to come back for another try.

Rehearsal days are held pretty much as needed, but during the early part of the year, we had quite a lot of rehearsal days and smaller group days, pulling material together, working with Y Dance and backing

musicians, then bringing the full band together.

Rehearsal days depend on what the demands the band is facing.

WE'VE had a run of concerts, starting with Aberdeen. That was a bit scary because it was all new material, but it was great to get out of the central belt and spread the word around Scotland.

What I've found very nice has been being able to win over a bit more support. A project like this is always likely to be treated suspiciously in some sectors, but going out further afield and showing people what we actually do and what the obvious benefits are draws interest in. Our argument is our performance and being able to win people over through that has been great for me and great for our members.

It is great too to get members back into their local communities with the NYPBoS and let people there see what they do with us.

I'm hoping we can go back to Aberdeen next year. John Sharpe, who organised our concert there, has been very keen. He found it hard work, organising the event, but he did a wonderful job and I think he's been under pressure to bring us back from people who really enjoyed their night with us. So he's looking into doing that next year and that'd be great.

We also went to Dunoon and Campbeltown, of course, and that was great, going into such strong centres of piping. The band performed extremely well in Campbeltown on the Friday night and even better in Dunoon the following night.

It was good for us to be able to fly the flag there for the project as well we did, and we're getting more interest from these areas.

THE big concert of our year was in May, to launch *Piping Live!*: very slick, very professional, very enjoyable – the best show we've ever done. It was great having Y Dance with us. They gave a new cutting edge for the whole show.

If there was a disappointment at all, it lay in the less than hoped for response to our efforts to give out free tickets to school students. A lot of young people took up the offer, but not as many as you might have expected. It was a bit frustrating; you're giving schools the opportunity to introduce children to this kind of thing and they're not taking it up. I understand the difficulties that are in schools but there was an opportunity there to be taken up.

I'd felt that doing our show to launch *Piping Live!* during the school term, might help us to get school children along, as opposed to doing it during the school holidays. And it's getting difficult to run a concert during the week of *Piping Live!* because all of our senior members who, when they joined the NYPBoS, were playing in juvenile or grade 4 bands; are now up there in grade 1 and 2 corps — which is a sign maybe of what the NYPBoS has helped them to achieve — but it means that the demands on them that week are so great it's difficult for us to get a band together for a concert.

But I think I'd re-visit that. As much as it's pressure for us to be in our own bands and play at the Worlds, we all missed not being in the Concert Hall that week, so it's something we should look at.

AS it was, a good turnout of NYPBoS members responded to Ian Duncan's invitation to help launch his late brother Gordon's new CD and tunes book

that week.

Gordon Duncan composed the 98 Jig that we've been opening our concert with this year, and that's quite significant.

Ian Duncan is a well-respected and prominent member of the piping world, and he's always been very supportive and had a keen interest in the NYPBoS, probably even more so more now since his son, Alex, has joined the band, and it great to have him.

And Gordon Duncan was obviously a great inspiration to young pipers because he was a cutting edge musician. So, even though there's an age gap there between Gordon and the young players in the NYPBoS, they all know of him, they all respect him and they've all been inspired by him and his music. And the young people we have in our band, and the kind of things we do, fit very well with Gordon. So when Ian was launching the book and CD at *Piping Live!*, he'd asked if some of the NYPBoS guys would come along and have a tune.

And it was great to see our players there in the marquee with Ian and Ross Ainslie and these guys. I was really pleased with that — and the follow-on is that is that a section of the NYPBoS will be taking part in the Gordon Duncan tribute concert on 29 September.

WE also did a gig for the Soroptimists' International Convention. This was a repeat of our first ever gig, so it was a nice thing to do.

The Soroptimists are all about supporting young people and they love the professionalism of our youngsters. They were quite surprised to see so many polite, professional young people on stage and off-stage. It was all good.

At the time we did our first gig for them, we were not officially the NYPBoS. It was at the time we were setting up the band all we had was people who had been on courses; we hadn't actually selected the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland members.

So this time it was nice to be back with the formally established National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland. Even so, I had some course members there and used the booking in conjunction with a training course. I had course members who were vying for a place in the band, and got them involved with it.

That was the first day of their course. They had to come in on the Sunday and leap into rehearsals with members of the NYPBoS and then actually go on stage and perform. It was a great test for them and an eye-opener, and the course continued on the Monday and Tuesday.

I WAS in Canada at the time our last edition of *Youngstars* went to print and our pipe major, Keith Bowes, stole my slot in the magazine. But he did such a great job of it that it's clear he should be doing it more often.

He has done a great job in his first year as pipe major and it'd be great for him to take care of the next *Youngstars'* column.

Meanwhile, we've been pencilled in for *Celtic Connections* next year, and I have some ideas forming about doing something special for it, something a bit different, so once I get my report and funding application all sorted out, and we're back from Mexico, we'll start working towards *Celtic Connections*, probably with some form of Band Camp or rehearsal weekend ... just as soon as we can schedule it. ●