

NAFCo 2006 Success!

The North Atlantic Fiddle Convention, Aberdeen, 26-30 July 2006, was the biggest and most high profile undertaking the Elphinstone Institute has organised. In fact, in its composition, scope and range, it was the largest international event of its kind ever held in the UK. It was based on firm foundations with an excellent partner in SCaT (Scottish Culture and Traditions Association of Aberdeen) and a sound funding base, with support from the University, the City of Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, the Scottish Arts Council, Scottish Enterprise Grampian, EventScotland, the MacRobert Trust, Culture Ireland, plus several other smaller funders.

The Convention included formal and informal performances, workshops, open jamming sessions, an academic conference, and community events. During the five days there were/was:

- 7 high profile evening concerts in major city centre and shire venues;
- 12 free lunchtime/afternoon concerts in the Lemon Tree and the Cowdray Hall;
- 3 late night 'soirees';
- 8 lunchtime busking trails around the city centre;
- 72 workshops on the fiddle and other associated instruments;
- 18 dance workshops (from solo stepping to couple dance and dancing in sets);
- 5 dances held, each with a different international focus;
- 3 pubs hosted informal jamming sessions;
- visits to the Children's Hospital and an old people's home in Inverurie;
- 8 conversations with noted fiddle players, dancers, and technicians;
- 2 formal receptions – one from the University, the other from the Lord Provost;
- an academic conference with 4 eminent keynote speakers and 33 academic papers attended by 90 delegates.

The quality of the line-up of artists was on an unprecedented scale and included Alasdair Fraser & Natalie Haas, Aonghas Grant, Paul Anderson, Catriona Macdonald, Jerry Holland, Matt Cranitch, Séamus Creagh, Liz Doherty, Göran Premberg, Annbjørg Lien, Alan Jabbour, Ken Perlman, plus many others. There were also four outstanding keynote speakers – Dr Peter Cooke (SOAS), Professor Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin (University of Limerick), Professor Colin Quigley (University of California at Los Angeles), and Dr Alan Jabbour (formerly Library of Congress). An edited selection of peer reviewed papers is planned for 2008.

A book was launched to mark the Convention, representing the cream of the scholarship from the first NAFCo in 2001 – *Play It Like It Is: Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic*, eds Ian Russell & Mary Anne Alburger (Aberdeen: Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, 2006).

The target audience was reached and there was a clear sense of the NAFCo identity. This effort was rewarded with consistently high turn-outs at all events. Not only did we attract many fiddle scholars and aficionados from all over the world but also a general audience who have a deep love of fiddle music, plus many new audience members who were drawn in by the busking, the free concerts, and informal jam sessions. In this respect, Aberdeen with all its fiddle connections was the ideal

venue. Our total audience figure is a stunning 13,111, of which 6,711 attended formal events and an estimated 6,400 were reached through informal activities, such as busking.

In general, responses to the NAFCo 2006 events surpassed our own and our advisory committee's highest expectations. The venture in all its scale and scope drew much goodwill from all who participated, which contributed greatly to its success. The future of the Convention is now firmly established with the next NAFCo to be held in St John's, Newfoundland, Canada, hosted by Memorial University, 24-27 July 2008. A call for papers will be announced in the next few months.

Ian Russell