**CONFERENCE SCHEDULE**

***‘BIG Music Begins in Small Ways’***

**A Conference on Early-Years Traditional Musicality**

**1**st **March 2024**

**Alex Green Tin Whistle Festival and Education Project**







**Room MR055, MacRobert Building, King's College, University of Aberdeen, AB24 5UA**

**1:00pm – 4:30pm**

**Order of Presentations**

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|  | Conference: Big Music Begins in Small Ways 1 March 2024 | | |
|  | Order of Presentation | | |
|  | Tom McKean | Welcome /Intro | 1:00-1:05pm |
| 1 | Dougie Pincock | Keynote | 1:05- 1:50 pm |
| 2 | Eleanor Tout | Paper | 1:50-2:10pm |
| 3 | Lorna McLaren | Paper | 2:10 –2:30pm |
| 4 | Cameron Clark | 10min Presentation | 2:30-2:40pm |
| 5 | Owen O’Connor | 5min Poster Presentation | 2:40-2:45pm |
|  | Break | Refreshments | 2:45-3:00pm |
| 7 | Ian Russell | Paper | 3:00-3:20pm |
|  | Aya Akiyama | Paper | 3:20-3:40pm |
| 8 | Sara Reith | Paper | 3:40-4:00pm |
| 9 | Laura Simpson | 5 min Conversational Presentation | 4:00-4:05pm |
| 10 | Alex Green | Paper | 4:05-4:25pm |
| 11 | Tom McKean | Closing/ Thanks | 4:25-4:30pm |

**Presentation Abstracts**

# Tom McKean, Director, Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen

Director of the Elphinstone Institute, Dr Thomas McKean will introduce the conference and lead concluding discussion on the themes presented.

# Dougie Pincock (Keynote Presentation), National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music at Plockton High School

**Abstract: The Tin Whistle – Toy or Tradition Bearer?**

## Dougie Pincock has a wealth of experience at all levels of Scottish education dating back over 30 years. In this talk, he will look at the place of the whistle specifically, and traditional music generally, in the Scottish formal education system at primary, secondary and tertiary levels – where we’ve been, where we are, and where we might be going.

# Eleanor Tout, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Glasgow

**Abstract:** **Tin Whistle in Further Education - Developing Upon Traditions and Discovering New Capabilities.**

The tin whistle is often regarded as a simple instrument, with many traditional musicians beginning their musical journey on the whistle. However, degree-level study holds the potential to explore greater range and versatility. Through my study at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, I have developed a new approach to my whistle playing, allowing me to create a unique musical voice, and discover a place for the instrument within the wider traditional music scene.I would like to present ideas for furthering whistle playing, without losing the core tradition that remains important for all learners, such as the first influential players and key repertoire. Through an explanation of my performance degree course, from the point of view of a whistle player, I will explain key points of development, towards the possibility of a full musical career using the whistle. This focuses on ensemble work, lesson structure and a discussion of teaching styles, opportunities within the university, and composition with the whistle in the forefront.

# Lorna McLaren, Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen

**Abstract: Learning by Lug: A Traditional Music Project in Primary Schools in Aberdeenshire.**

In the early 2000s, Aberdeenshire Arts Development Officer, Sheila Waterhouse, gained funding to do a traditional music project with primary school children. The project I devised was named ‘Learning by Lug’; ‘lug’ meaning ear in the local dialect. The title, which was quite memorable, expressed having fun with music and music learning by ear. The small instruments chosen were comb and paper, and the spoons, traditional instruments, at one time played in the home and at parties, being readily available, and with a bit of exploration, easy to play. Teachers took part as well as primary pupils of all ages. Age was no barrier! In fact, we found that a handy Primary 1 was often ahead of a, maybe, less dexterous Primary 7 in picking up and passing on the skills. A trio of us, playing melodeon, fiddle, and double bass visited primary schools delivering a structured morning or afternoon of mass music making for the pupils and teachers. This involved everyone listening, feeling the beat, marching, clapping, diddling, playing comb and paper, the spoons, hearing about our differing routes into music and a Q&A time. We visited small rural schools with, for example, 20 pupils in total, medium with maybe 50-100 and large schools where we needed more than one visit. It worked equally well with small or large numbers. The largest number we tackled at once was 110 pupils in the hall at Port Elphinstone. Overall, we delivered to over 2000 pupils and it was always the most amazingly good fun, full of music and laughter! In my talk I’ll explain how it was done and you are welcome to make use of the format or parts of it yourself!

# Cameron Clark, Department of Music, University of Aberdeen

**Abstract: How the Tin Whistle Can Make Music Work for Young People: Observations on Teaching Early-Years Traditional Musicality**

Big music begins in small ways. In honour of Alex Green’s musical legacy, a varied circle of presentations and papers will be presented today. I will offer a lightning presentation on my observations on tutoring tin whistle as part of this project, and what it means for early traditional musicality. This research seeks to answer questions on socio-economic issues, accessibility, resource, and tradition. For me this poses a question on how the tin whistle can bring a sense of belonging to young people. I hope this presentation will conclude that early traditional musicality can serve communities and enrich young people’s lives.

# Owen O’Connor, Young Traditional Musician

**Abstract: How Music Became My Big Thing' - An Aspiring Folk Musician Tells His Story**

Owen plays the whistle, bagpipes, Uilleann pipes, melodeon, piano and bodhrán. He has told his story in posters for this conference. They emphasize the support he has received along the way from school, charities like SC&T, The Gaitherin and TMSA, but also, unexpectedly, some of his favourite musicians.

**Professor Ian Russell**, **Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen**

**Abstract: Humble Harmonicas and Homely Spaces: Understanding the Performance Role of Mouth Organs in North-East Scotland**

In North-East Scotland the performance of traditional music on mouth organs, melodeons, whistles, and Jews harps has been a distinctive feature of local vernacular culture throughout the twentieth century up until the present day. The playing of such small affordable instruments gained popularity in the latter part of the nineteenth century in agricultural communities as a direct result of the 'bothy' system, whereby farmworkers (single men) were accommodated on farms in bothies (bunkhouses) or in 'chaumers (typically a stable loft) for six-monthly periods and as a consequence created and developed their own forms of entertainment, not only on these low-status instruments, but in song, story, recitation, and humour. In this paper I will examine the changing social context and function for such performances, the nature of the evolving repertoire, the characteristics of performance styles, and the emergence of virtuosity. I will focus on individual performers, in order to understand how their North-East identity is expressed through their music. The relationship of these comparatively intimate forms of music-making to other more public expressions will also be explored. Ultimately, I will attempt to answer the question: why does the practice of playing small instruments continue to matter in North-East Scotland?

## Aya Akiyama, Scottish Heritage, University of Aberdeen

**Abstract: Traditional Music as a Resource in Early Childhood**

Music in childhood has a great influence on life and can be considered an important personal and social resource. Traditional music is rooted in specific places and plays a vital role in communities. For example, the Japanese drum team in my village, made up of local farmers, has been working for the community for 50 years. They perform at local festivals and began teaching at a local primary school. The children have also performed at local festivals for 40 years. Some graduates eventually join adult drumming teams, local traditional lion dance teams, or work as volunteers in their communities. County Clare, Ireland, is the place that traditional music is very much alive. Farmers play music in local styles and repertoires that have been passed down by ear for hundreds of years. I learned tin whistle and concertina in my teenage years and witnessed many young children learning from local performers and teenagers taking part in pub music sessions. Twenty years later, some have now become well-known musicians, performing in their towns and throughout Ireland, and even touring Japan. Music is also a tourist attraction, with summer schools and music festivals held there. Scotland has a rich cultural heritage of folk music, and the Northeast has a tin whistle tradition fostered by Alex Green with his unique character and style. Teaching traditional music to young children is crucial, and the tin whistle is the perfect instrument for young children: easy to blow, easy to use for little hands, convenient to carry, and affordable.

Traditional music can give young musicians a sense of belonging and pride in their family or community, and the bonds between people can support children. Music can also develop young players creatively, allowing them to play in their own styles. Playing traditional music is a significant benefit for children.

# Sara Reith, Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen

**Abstract: Alex Green; The Whistle Case and the Case for Whistles**

In tribute to the musical legacy of well-loved North-East tin whistle virtuoso, Alex Green (1930-2019), this paper draws upon aspects of his identity as a respected traditional performer and encouraging musical mentor, considering, in particular, how his musical values and expressive ideas, were represented through the unmistakable sound of his self-created Spit-Staccato Style. Revisiting Alex’s perspectives, formative musical environments, and musical moments of inspiration, creativity and learning through my dissertation fieldwork, my focus upon key life events, performance contexts and personal narratives show a musical character driven by personal tenacity, inventiveness and imagination and a deeply informed consideration of the North-East musical context. Often regarded as a simplistic instrument, in Alex’s hands, the small, understated tin whistle, became an extension of his own magnanimous personality, expressing ‘big ideas’ and producing the ‘big music’ he exemplified with character, definition, warmth, and joyful embellishment. Unpacking Alex’s colourful, self-made tin whistle case, I consider how the so called ‘limitations’ of the tin whistle, are in fact part of its flexibility, unique sound and expressive versatility; characteristics which Alex not only enhanced, but turned into distinct stylistic features. Having adopted the tin whistle following an early childhood accident, this event in turn shaped Alex’s love of sharing music as an enduring expression of personal creativity, and a generator of cultural confidence, social connectivity, and shared enjoyment. Alex’s commitment to encouraging young players drew heavily upon his early experiences, shaping his encouragement of younger players and his dedicated efforts to ensure that no-one need be excluded from participating in music making.

# Laura Simpson, Traditional Musician

**Abstract: Alex Green my Whistle Tutor: The Importance of Tin Whistle Throughout My Musical Journey and Life**

From an Alex Green tutored tin whistle course I attended aged 8, and the joy of playing traditional music in the company of the 10-20 ither kids, small moments of wonder became brush strokes to a far greater picture of musical engagement. An extremely talented tin whistle player and a kind man; Alex Green taught me mair aboot life than possibly he, and definitely my 8 year old self could have realised. The tin whistle was, and to some extent still is, my ticket into folk & traditional music. From a young age, through my tin whistle course, I learned the importance of practice and the excitement of improvement. I learned the importance of listening and fostered a deep love for listening to an individual’s sound and trying to incorporate that into my playing. All the while Alex’s early teaching gave my playing backbone and a distinctive style. The tin whistle may be relatively small in size but seeing Alex hold his own in sessions at folk festivals meant, for me, that it was always large and mighty. The importance of accessibility of such instruments is massive. Affordable, relatively easy to learn but pretty difficult to master to the level of the late great Alex Green. An honour and a pleasure to have known him.

# Alex Green, Scottish Heritage, University of Aberdeen

**Abstract: Meal Mills and Mechanics: A Social Locus of Alex Green’s Musical Practice**

This paper explores multi-faceted social contexts that profoundly influenced the development of Alex Green's musical practice. Born into the family of a rural meal miller, Alex Green's upbringing absorbed him into a rich and socially dynamic environment where music, mills and technology overlapped. In 1935, at the age of five, he suffered a life-changing injuries when he lost half of his right index and forefingers in a mill machinery accident at his father’s meal mill at Minnes, Foveran. Despite this setback, the loss of dexterity failed to dissuade him from embarking on a lifelong journey to become a highly talented /n whistle player. Equally remarkably perhaps, he also forged a successful technological career firstly as a skilled motor mechanic and later as a motor-engineering college lecturer. His diverse achievements may suggest determina/on and ability to use adversity as a stimulant for both musical and professional engineering fulfilment. Expanding upon the thematic foundations laid out in Sara Reith's 2005 MLitt dissertation, this paper will delve deeper into the connections between his formative experiences within a milling family and the nuanced relationships with musical proficiency, social identity and a passion for science and technology. The exploration of sub-themes in this presentation includes an examination of his family background, particularly in the context of two meal millers: his fiddle playing father Adam Green, a merchant naval telegraphist during World War One, and his uncle, Fred Green, miller at Foresterhill, Oldmeldrum, and founding member and long-time secretary of Oldmeldrum Sports. Ultimately, this paper aims to unify interwoven social factors, specifically focusing on the intersection of meal mills and technology as a social locus shaping Alex Green's musical practice. Although it may not prove the connections between music and engine-knocking rhythms, this paper will aim to reveal how some unique life experiences and diverse influences converged to help create a distinctive musical narrative.

# About the Contributors:

# Aya Akiyama

Aya is a former Japanese traditional <chingdong> music performer, the current leader of Sogisho Children’s Taiko (or Japanese traditional drum group), and a primary school teacher based in her hometown in Japan teaching English and Japanese calligraphy and so on, and has performed Irish and Scottish traditional music in their authentic ways. She started playing the tin whistle in Osaka as a teenager and studied in County Clare, Ireland. She graduated from the MLitt Scottish Heritage at the University of Aberdeen in 2023.

# Camerom Clark

Cameron Clark is a Pianist and Fiddler hailing from Dundee. Having recently graduated from the University of Aberdeen, he is now working towards his ATCL. He previously worked for Big Noise Torry and currently works for the Feis Rois’ YMI projects in Aberdeenshire and as a pupil support assistant in schools. During his time at University, he won a scholarship at NESMS and has performed with various bands and Orchestras, especially the Aberdeen Early Music ensembles where he has played original period harpsichords and violins from the 18th century. Musically, Cameron is most interested in researching the history of traditional music, and still finds time to attend regular sessions wherever he is. Pianistically Cameron is influenced by basso continuo, jazz, classical, and traditional styles, enjoying accompanying and playing solo recitals where he can. Cameron loves creating encouraging and happy learning environments with attention to healthy practice and a keen understanding of all music.

# Alex Green

Alex Green was born and grew up in Aberdeen, and is the son of the late Alex Green, the tin whistle player. Professionally, he is an engineer, but has strong and active interest in Scottish history and heritage. As part of completing a Scottish Heritage MLitt at the University of Aberdeen, he conducted some research on Aberdeenshire meal mills and aspects of the Green’s family milling history. His 2023 dissertation focused on socially constructed technological systems and included exploration of the relationships between rural millwrighting and the development of coffee, sugar and rice plantation mills and machinery manufactured in nineteenth-century Aberdeen. Recently, he authored an article on the history and architecture of the Mill of Foresterhill, published in the Scottish Vernacular Buildings Journal. He works as reliability engineering manager for a global energy company and lives with his family at the Mill of Foresterhill, Oldmeldrum.

# Lorna McLaren

Born in 1953 in Aberdeen, with grandparents in Stonehaven and Rickarton, I experienced the city, the country, and the coast. I attended Aberdeen High School for Girls from Primary 1 to Secondary 6 and enjoyed an education where the arts, sports and academic subjects were equally valued. Spells at Aberdeen University, including the Elphinstone Institute, followed over the years, plus a post-graduate primary teaching certificate. An interest in folk music and dance led to playing the melodeon, often for dancing, and playing and dance calling for the popular north east ceilidh band Hallyrackit. I spent three years part time as the Traditional Music Resident for Aberdeenshire Council and as a free-lance have led many workshops over the years in traditional music and dance subjects for adults and children, including adults and children with additional needs, where I have a particular interest. Over ten years as the Youth Music Initiative Coordinator for Aberdeenshire Council allowed me insights into music education, presenting opportunities to forge far reaching creative partnerships with various individuals and organisations, ranging from the Traditional Boat Festival Portsoy to Drake Music Scotland, to the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland. The introduction of chanter into several schools, workshops for young pipers, plus the creation of Aberdeenshire Youth Pipe Band were a real pleasure. A few years on the Board of the Traditional Music Forum gave me an appreciation of the work done by this organisation at a strategic national and political level. Now retired, I still enjoy writing grant applications.

# Owen O’Connor

Owen O'Connor (nearly 12) is a primary 7 child residing in Aberdeenshire. Over the past 18 months, traditional Scottish and Irish music has become his special area of interest, which he thinks being autistic has helped him to pursue assiduously. He has told his story in posters for this conference. They emphasize the support he has received along the way from school, charities like SC&T, The Gaitherin and TMSA, but also, unexpectedly, some of his favourite musicians. Owen plays the whistle, bagpipes, Uilleann pipes, melodeon, piano and bodhrán.

# Dougie Pincock

Dougie Pincock started his musical career as a Highland piper at primary school in Barrhead, near Glasgow, in 1970. He joined the Neilston and District Pipe Band when he went to high school, and there met Pipe Major Iain MacDonald, who was to have a huge influence on the rest of Dougie’s career. Iain was becoming involved in playing pipes with folk groups, and had worked on an album with Battlefield Band on which John Gahagan was playing whistle. When Dougie heard that, he was hooked. Iain also introduced Dougie to the music of Ireland, in particular Planxty and The Bothy Band, and Dougie was immediately captivated by Matt Molloy’s flute playing. Dougie then embarked on an informal apprenticeship on the Glasgow session scene, and became a member of the Glasgow band Kentigern, along with John Gahagan, in 1978. He joined Battlefield Band in 1983, and played Highland and small pipes, whistle and flute with them during the 1980s, before leaving in 1990. He spent the 90s teaching in various settings, playing in the ceilidh band Robbie Shepherd’s Nightmare, composing tunes, recording, and broadcasting. In 2000, he was appointed as the first Director of the National Centre. He retired from that post in July 2023 and is now combining freelance performing, teaching and recording with being a Papa.

# Sara Reith

Having completed an M.Litt in Folklore and Ethnology at the Elphinstone Institute where I am also a PhD student, my dissertation focused upon Alex Green and his identity as a musician. As a traditional musician I have played whistle and fiddle in numerous bands, including Aberdeen based trio ‘Banish Misfortune’ and Scottish Reggae fusion band, ‘Paddyrasta’. As a children’s musician and early-years performer, I currently work with young children in multiple pre and primary school educational and cultural contexts.

**Ian Russell, Emeritus Professor, MBE**

Ian Russell is the former Director of the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen (1999–2014). His current research is focused on the traditional culture of NE Scotland, including singing and instrumental traditions, and festivalisation. He edited Folk Music Journal (1980–1993). Since 1969 he has conducted extensive fieldwork into singing traditions in the English Pennines, especially Christmas carolling, and has published widely. He is the founder and Director of the Festival of Village Carols, and President of the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention.

# Eleanor Tout

Eleanor Tout is a whistle player originally from South Wales, currently based in Glasgow, and is a regular face on the city’s session scene. She draws influences from both traditional and contemporary musicians, combining them to create an individual style, with a varied repertoire that is grounded in tradition. She grew up as a keen participant in the Welsh folk scene, inspiring her to begin her whistle journey. She received support whilst attending the Gwent Music Celtic Band, under the direction of Donald Stewart and Scott McKeon.

Eleanor is currently completing her final year at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and she is the first principal study whistle player to have studied on the degree course. Through her studies, she has found a keen interest in the historical relevance of the whistle and the flute in traditional music, and has researched these topics in length over the span of her time at university. Eleanor has reached a large audience through her social media accounts, with over 1.5k followers, and has played to audiences across the UK, including Glasgow’s Royal Concert Hall and St David’s Hall in Cardiff.

# Laura Simpson

I’m Laura Simpson. I’ve been exposed to traditional music all my life as my Mam and Dad enjoy it. Initially as audience, but from the age of 8 my twin sister and I played tin whistle. I went on to add fiddle from the age of 12. These days I cannot play so well or be as involved as I used to, but even that has its up sides. I realise, on reflection, what a massive part of life, friendships, and social involvement, folk music has the potential to be, and how mega important belonging is, through small, inexpensive instruments such as the whistle or moothie.