

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN CONCERT SERIES 2018 – 2019

ELPHINSTONE FIDDLERS

FRASER BORLAND: Leader: Fiddle and Bodhrán

SHANNON STEVENSON: Fiddle Soloist

LAURA REA: Flute, PATRICK GRAY: Piano, RACHEL COLBECK: Fiddle

EMMA HASTINGS & SAOIRSE McINTEE: Concertinas

CALLUM YOUNG: Double Bass

KING'S COLLEGE CHAPEL

Thursday 22nd November, 2018

There was a good turnout to King's College Chapel for this year's thoroughly entertaining concert by the Elphinstone Fiddlers. There were seventeen players listed in the programme: six fiddle players plus two more doubling on other instruments, such as Fraser Borland doubling on Bodhrán. There were two whistle players, one flautist, two pianists, two concertina players, two cellists, and one double bass player. With the entire ensemble playing together, the fiddles came through most strongly with whistles and flute managing to just float on top, giving the music an extra sheen. At the head of my review I have listed those who either played as soloists (Shannon Stevenson) or in small ensembles, trio or duos.

The performance began with one of the most famous traditional fiddle tunes, Timour the Tartar, first mentioned in the nineteenth century. It was both played and recorded early on by J. Scott Skinner though certainly not composed by him. Today's version was an arrangement by J. M. Hunter who I believe worked for BBC Scotland. It began with leader Fraser Borland playing the melody as a solo while the rest of the ensemble processed from the rear of the Chapel up to the front with those who were able having joined in the music. Obviously, cellists, piano and double bassist had to wait till they got hold of their instruments. Still it was an animated start to the programme.

There followed a set of three traditional jigs. The fiddles dominated the first two but flutes and whistles came through more strongly in the third.

Shannon Stevenson introduced her set of tunes in North East Style. There were to be many other styles later in the programme, Irish, American and Norwegian to name but a few.

Shannon's opening Slow Air was beautifully played with a fine clear fiddle tone. Later on, in the Strathspey for instance, her playing gave the music its special rhythmic lilt. You could almost feel the lift in the feet of the dancers.

Flute and whistles came through clearly again in Sonny's Mazurka and in the minor key, Michael's Mazurka. I believe these are Irish tunes and as far as I know have nothing to do with characters of the same name who appear in The Godfather?

A splendid trio of flute, (Laura Rea), Fiddle (Rachel Colbeck) and Piano (Patrick Gray) were well balanced and I particularly enjoyed Rachel's fiddle playing where she took the lead part. Rachel also led the ensemble in another J. M. Hunter arrangement of one of the best known of all Scottish tunes, The Flower of the Quern. It was indeed composed by J. Scott Skinner, a very attractive tune which in this performance was quite moving.

Three more traditional jigs for the full ensemble were followed by The Sourgrass and Granite and Lover's Waltz (an American tune) which had some interesting piano playing from Patrick Gray. It had just a touch of American country style to it reminding me of the first record I ever bought at the age of thirteen. This was piano music by Floyd Cramer who was Elvis Presley's pianist but who had a country style piano career of his own in the 1960s.

Emma Hastings and Saoirse McIntee gave a short interlude on concertinas, then came a set of reels including The Pigeon on the Gate which one lecturer, thinking no doubt of the University car parks, once suggested should have been renamed The Seagull on the Car.

Fraser Borland teamed up with bassist Callum Young in a duet of music in the Norwegian style.

Three Strathspeys included one dedicated by its composer Adam Sutherland to the memory of a famous piper who died in 2015. It was entitled Memories of Fraser Shaw. This set ended with The Quiet Man. There is a film of that title starring John Wayne. It was also the nickname of Ian Duncan Smith – I really hope it wasn't him!

All too soon we were on the final item. For this piece the whistles and flute were brought right up front so we were able to enjoy their playing. The rest of the ensemble joined in, giving us a fine conclusion to this most entertaining concert.