

Claire Sawers

GOING HOME

Live Music Now Scotland Musicians Return to Their Roots and Bring Live Performances to the Rural Areas That Encouraged Their Early Love of Music

Live Music Now Scotland was established on Yebudi Menuhin's vision that all members of society, whatever their circumstances, should have access to the enriching experience of live music. At the same time, the music charity offers invaluable performing opportunities, as well as training and support to emerging artists from across Scotland at the outset of their professional careers. The musicians who belong to the scheme are selected through auditions, and apart from outstanding musical and technical abilities, they must have excellent communication skills and an ability to engage with a wide range of audiences from a diversity of backgrounds.

Typical audiences include children with additional support needs, older people in residential and day care centres, often with dementia-related illnesses, young offenders, hospice patients and those living in remote, rural and island areas with little or no access to high-quality music. The programmes are tailored to suit each venue on a bespoke basis, and the resulting interactive performances prove time after time that connecting with people through music can stimulate responses that have a deeply profound and lasting transformative effect.

In 2018, Live Music Now Scotland was fortunate to receive a grant from Tasgadh, the Traditional Arts Small Grants Fund, for *Going Home*, a project that invited musicians to return to their roots and the communities, heritage and culture which shaped the foundation of their performing practices.

Going Home 2018

The music charity aims to work in every local authority area in Scotland each year. Needless to say, some of these areas are more accessible than others. For a musician based in Glasgow, it isn't difficult to jump on a train to the Borders,

Perth, or even Inverness to conduct a few workshops or performances and still be home in time for dinner. It can be harder however to programme concerts in the far north and island regions when travel is expensive. Musicians need accommodation when they get there, and the unpredictable whims of the weather mean a performer can even be stranded on the wrong side of the sea!

Fortunately, these areas are a hotbed of musical talent, and the organisation is fortunate to have several traditional musicians on their books from the farthest-flung areas of Scotland. It's from this knowledge that the idea of *Going Home* was born.

The musicians that Live Music Now Scotland works with tend to be living and building their careers in the Central Belt (the area with the highest population density, roughly between Edinburgh and Glasgow) due to the necessity of remaining within reach of performance and study opportunities, especially in Glasgow. Yet, their musical influences often stem from where they grew up. The *Going Home* grant gave three groups of artists the chance to visit the areas they were raised in and give back to the communities that nurtured, educated and encouraged them by performing in a variety of community settings.

The initial grant from Tasgadh covered performance fees and travel expenses that allowed music to be taken to three areas:

- Stornoway: Traditional singer/songwriter and guitarist, and former Gaelic Singer of the Year, Norrie MacIver performed at the Blar Buidhe and Bethesda care homes during a trip back home to the Isle of Lewis in April 2018. Stornoway is the largest town in Lewis, which is part of the Outer Hebrides of Scotland. With a population of just under 19 000, the island is steeped in history, and the Scots Gaelic language is spoken there, alongside English.

- Stranraer: Scottish traditional singer Robyn Stapleton took her duo partner Claire Hastings home to her hometown of Stranraer in Dumfries and



© Photo by Louise Bichan

Claire Hastings and Robyn Stapleton

Galloway. The duo performed interactive music workshops with the ukulele and singing in both Belmont and Park Primary Schools as well as the Thorney Croft residential care home. Stranraer is a busy ferry port in southwest Scotland, with regular crossings to Northern Ireland. The cultural influence and exchange between Northern Ireland and Scotland can be heard in traditional music as well as the local accents.

■ Orkney: Graham Rorie and Aidan Moodie are a fiddle and guitar duo originally from Orkney, an archipelago of 70 islands situated off the north coast of Scotland. The duo performed lively concerts at various care homes, day care centres and primary schools in Orkney last summer, and again at Christmas time. The *Going Home* project also allowed them to take part in the St Magnus Festival, an annual week-long arts festival which takes place at midsummer on Orkney, performing at The Sound Archive within Orkney Library.



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Aidan and Graham

The artists spoke about their experiences performing back home:

“Getting to perform at home always feels special. Orkney’s a community the two of us grew up playing music in, so sharing what we do now with that same community is a real privilege. There’s a personal element to performing somewhere you feel you ‘belong’, somewhere you feel truly part of” Aidan Moodie.

“It was very special to be able to return to Thorneycroft Care Home, a residential care home that I have a personal and family connection with. I enjoyed speaking to the residents in my



© Photo by Live Music Now

Norrie Maciver Kilda

local dialect and sharing the traditional folk songs from our own area. It was very encouraging to see such a positive change in many of the residents during the performance, seeing people looking, engaging, singing, moving to the rhythm and smiling. There was a noticeable excitement amongst staff too, stopping in their tracks to take in the music or sitting down to experience the concert with the other residents.” Robyn Stapleton

“Getting the chance to go home to play in local care homes and schools has always been something I look forward to and never say no to. Getting to play in a care home where 90% of the residents speak Gaelic is brilliant because I sometimes feel that the Gaelic content gets lost in care homes in the Central Belt, and it also gives you the chance to sing songs from the Isle of Lewis to people who know them well. It’s always great to be able to go back and share the skills I have learned and sing the songs I love singing to an audience who really appreciate them.” Norrie MacIver

Live Music Now Scotland’s Green Goals

Live Music Now Scotland operates on the basis that musicians should be paid fairly for their work and that performances should be available at the venues that most need them, regardless of their ability to pay. With that in mind, the charity spends much of the year in fundraising to ensure the effective execution of its vast programme of work across Scotland. Often, the funding will be restricted to a certain geographical area, and unrestricted funds need to be used efficiently to ensure the most possible amount is spent on the performances themselves, rather than the associated travel. By taking *Going Home* as a model for future work, Live Music Now Scotland engages actively with artists to ensure that performances can be combined not just with their trips home but also with any other travels across the country.

The benefits include

- Reducing the charity’s carbon footprint by combining performances with trips that would have been made anyway;
- Ensuring that a high percentage of the charity’s income goes in performances rather than travel;
- Allowing musicians to perform in areas that might prove prohibitively expensive otherwise; and
- Providing high-quality live music opportunities for audiences in a wider range of locations.

The next challenge for the charity is to raise awareness across their roster of musicians and encourage them to get in touch when they are touring or travelling in the target regions so that performances can be programmed accordingly. The charity is fortunate in the unique flexibility of its programme of work, and the need for high-quality music in venues across the country, such that it is able to operate in this responsive manner without compromising the value of the work. For Live Music Now Scotland, making the most of the wealth of regional diversity among our musicians makes good business sense, environmental sense, and also helps bring live music to the broadest possible range of audiences.