



Northern Nashville Country Music Club

April 2008 Newsletter

I can hardly believe that this time last week we were in the throes of dismantling the riding centre after the festival. It's a bit like a wedding, months of planning then it's over in a flash, now it's an anticlimax and once the adrenalin stops you're exhausted.

We knew the weather wasn't going to be kind to us - everyone kept saying have you heard the forecast. Maybe we thought 'they always get it wrong here' but unfortunately this time they got it right!

I was thinking about the Irish acts struggling to get here, but Kenny really made my day on Wednesday when he said he had been speaking to his sister in Nashville, who said that weather was so snowy and stormy over there that they were thinking of closing the airport down, but thankfully that didn't happen.

However panic set in for a wee while on Friday morning when the phone went and we discovered there were no ferries sailing from Shetland or Ireland. After a few frantic phone calls we got things sorted and managed to get May & Mackie here by plane rather than boat - they flew to Inverness and we got transport to take them to Halkirk on time.

Luckily the Irish acts had all crossed the day before and were heading north our visitors from across the water had also arrived earlier in the week.

The festival opened with our European act Cash on Delivery; well they certainly delivered the goods and impressed the crowd. Lead vocals shared between Jacqueline and Wim were spot on and, in addition to their own songs, they covered a variety of classic country tracks. For me Wim all six foot five of him had the voice of the weekend particularly when belting out a ballad.

In total contrast the Indians were next on they went down a bomb and it was evident why they have remained one of Ireland's top Showbands for almost four decades. With their colourful stage wear and face paint they created a big visual impact and were certainly on form and couldn't fail to please the crowd.

Finishing Friday night was Moe Bandy who undoubtedly was one of the highlights of the weekend, not just for me but for everyone. Two hours of pure country music he had the crowd spellbound with his songs about life, cheating, drinking and divorcing as Moe said 'if I'd done all the things I sing about in my songs I'd be dead'. Moe was very relaxed and friendly came across as a genuinely nice guy - he was delighted with the reaction he got from the crowd stayed behind chatting.

Our headliner on both Saturday and Sunday nights was our next American act Ronnie McDowell and his band. Some folk loved him others felt he was not country enough and was too loud; the young ones certainly appeared to be dancing around to his music. Ronnie's band, which included his son, was brilliant and all had the opportunity to display their individual talents including the drummer who did one of the best drum solos I've heard for a long time. Ronnie certainly had an Elvis type voice so it's not surprising that he tours with Elvis's original sidemen staging a tribute to the king. I was most surprised that he didn't sing his self penned tribute song 'The King is Gone' which launched his career - when he didn't do it on Saturday I was waiting patiently on Sunday but no. Ronnie had our own Davie Oag on stage duetting with him - don't think he offered him a place in the band but Davie might want to do a spot in his own right next year!!!

Danni Leigh a young lady originally from Virginia (ask any of the men) definitely added glamour to the stage on Sunday night. She was a joy to watch her voice and choice of songs conveys the kind of pain and joy that can only come from real life experiences. Danni has been called the female Dwight Yokam and after watching her I can see why - she looked, sounded and performed like a true country star with nothing false about her. She was in no hurry to leave the venue, posing for photos; and had a No. 1 fan in Jock Campbell - he was like the cat who got the cream!

Our Irish act for Saturday was Joe Moore, a laid back guy from County Derry who sings pure country songs the way they should be sung. Joe was very popular with the crowd and his CDs were in great demand. Unfortunately Joe is planning a permanent move down under so we might not see him visiting Scotland again.

Visiting from Shetland were May & Mackie & the M&M Band. Mackie of course is a local guy who served his apprenticeship with the Dynamos before leaving the area to set up home in Shetland with wife May. He is a brilliant guitarist, and May has a great country voice - I thought their live performance was excellent. They included some new country but also plenty to keep the old school happy. Joining them in the band was young Gemma Donald - she has been awarded the title of Scottish Fiddle Champion, and watching her play she certainly deserved it.

The festival welcomed back Nickels and Dimes this year who did a tremendous country spot in their own right - disappointingly our local steel player Brian Coghill was missing due to work commitments. Poor Pete Nicoll, lead singer, was having eye problems and was wearing a patch I'm not going to make any comments like some were doing about parrots etc. but given that Pete is usually the joker in the pack he took revenge in good sport, we wish him all the best for a speedy recovery.

Something different this year was a two hour Country Legend Show, cover versions of country classics performed by an all star cast complete with costume changes. The show went down well particularly with some of the

older members of the audience as they knew all the songs and could sing along.

Small Town Audio George Payling, along with sons George Jnr. and Simon, did the honours again and made a fantastic job of our sound and - lighting they were very helpful and a great bunch to work with. Aside from that, this year they also did as spot as Texas Gun - a name which will be familiar to country fans. The trio have been singing together for 25 years and on the country scene for 18. It's been a long time since I've heard them but boy was it worth the wait, and yes young George can still belt them out.

Our local bands as usual never let us down and were up there with the best of them this year we had two 'firsts'.

Kate Bain and the New Kate Bain Band were making their festival debut. They are now a four piece band being joined by two local musicians. One is Gordie Davidson whom you will remember from the days of Colorado, these guys enhanced and added variety to the bands programme.

Another first was for local band Slange Ava they played a varied country spot and received a great reception from the crowd; again these guys have all played in and around the country music scene for some time. Keith, on lead vocals, we saw on stage earlier with Manson Grant & The Dynamos, and Donnie Matheson, drums and vocals, will be familiar to you who remember Silver. I did recognise some of the numbers from Silver days - all in all an enjoyable spot and some thing a bit different.

What can be said about Manson Grant and the Dynamos that we haven't already said? The band has a faithful following in the north and we know what to expect from them - they continue to be one of the most professional outfits on the scene. Robert was with us all weekend and said how much he enjoyed the whole event, adding that he thought the American bands were just spot on. The band are due to release a 14 track album, featuring all Buck Owens songs, expected in the shops soon so must look out for that.

Our nearly local band The Jacks put on one of the best performances of the weekend. They introduced Nicola, Geordies daughter, on stage with them. Apart from being the best looking 'Jack' she is a very talented young lady - great to see something new.

Following last years festival 'Eyes of the North' the young band with a huge talent, who represented the Wick Youth Media Link Programme, have gone on to play at many local events and functions also played gigs in Golspie and Inverness. It was great seeing them back this year clearly enjoying themselves this time - they played a more modern spot which went down very well with both young and old alike.

This years band from the Media Link Project were called 'The Dusty Harrisons'. I asked the youngsters if they were nervous about playing in front of such a

large crowd and they said no just excited.

These young people alongside the Thurso High School Band gave it their all and did very well. They need our encouragement and support for country music to survive in the future.

Sadly this will be the last time we will have our compere Gerry Ford with us, he did a great job as usual and held the whole weekend together for the third year running. Gerry and wife Joan are retiring at the end of the year also emigrating to Australia. We presented them with a keepsake on behalf of the Northern Nashville in recognition of what he has done for country music over his 30 years in the business. Gerry will be a hard act to follow.

Another couple who were with us over the weekend were Jim and Debbie Duncan, who were paying their first visit to the festival and were also on their honeymoon, so we thought it appropriate they got something to mark the occasion. Jim is the editor of Cross Country magazine from Sheffield lets hope this wont be their last visit to Caithness.

Feedback has been positive with people saying that last year's event was great but this one even better. We did realise it was cold in the venue on Friday night but did what we could to rectify that for the rest of the weekend. Most people now realise that it is a draughty old arc of a place and come prepared with plenty layers to take off.

Lots of you took the time to complete our feedback questionnaire. We do take the comments on board and hopefully they will go on to improve future festivals.

One thing which many do pass comment on is the keeping and reserving of block booking seats in the venue. This is common practise at festivals when clubs and parties book large numbers of tickets altogether or sponsor us in return for block seating then we reserve seats for them. If a crowd are together for the weekend many travelling some distance then it's understandable that they want to sit together.

Toilets are another bone of contention and we hope to try and resolve them for next time also, but because finances are so tight it's not easy unless we get some backing.

As usual our merry tribe of helpers all turned up to help us set up and dismantle the venue once again. Can I just say a big thanks to every last one of them - I know I keep going on about it but it would seriously be impossible for us to manage without their help and support.

I had forgotten about the club on Friday night until someone asked me over the weekend to keep tickets for them. It was a thought getting ready to go and it was probably worse because it was only a dance and a later start. I had

time to sit after my tea which made it worse getting up again. However once we got there we were fine we had a good turn out. I thought it might have been quieter than it was but it was a good night and good atmosphere.

The Barry Doyle Duo were on form and things took off from the start. They did a very varied programme with lots of country, a little bit of Irish, and some Farmer Dan thrown in for good measure!

Next month sees the return of another Irish Favourite Paddy O'Brian supported by Jolene & Barry. I won't be there myself as I am at a wedding in Glasgow but I'm sure you will all have a good night and for goodness keep an eye on those boys for me.

That's it for now

Keep it Country

Christine

Christine Gray
Chairperson NNCCMC