



Northern Nashville Country Music Club

August 2009 Newsletter

It is with much sadness and regret that I have to start this month's newsletter with the very sad news that Sandy Swanson one of our long standing committee members passed away recently.

Sandy was involved with the club from the beginning, first as a regular and loyal club member he later joined the committee and served as treasurer until last year when he stepped down, but he remained as a committee member.

Sandy never moaned - he just got on with things in his own quiet way, despite not feeling the best he worked away at the festival, and at our club nights. It happened so quickly it's very hard to accept. We will miss him at Nashville and want to extend our sympathy to all his family and friends.

On a happier note the other Sandy, our compere, and his long-term partner Isobel went away and very quietly, without telling anyone, got married. I guess by now Isobel knows what she's letting herself in for - they have been together for 19 years - we wish them many more happy years together.

As you all know we missed the last show, however, although it wasn't a full house, feedback was positive. Everything went well despite being tinged with sadness. We knew that there were two wedding receptions on, that it was peak holiday time, and of course a few of us were in Ireland, but to compensate for that we had a fair sized contingent from Wick joining us and several visitors.

Norman Borland was joined on stage by Steve James and I am told they delivered a great country spot, while Elaine Boyle supported by Broken Wing went down very well - she has a great singing voice and is making a name for herself over here and in her native Ireland.

Anyway on Friday, a after not-very-smooth flight from Inverness and an even rockier landing (even the frequent fliers amongst us were getting a bit twitchy) we arrived at a very wet and dreach Belfast. On the flight with us were our regular club members Jenny and Darren, Lesley and Nicolle, Jimmy and Catherine Nicolson (who of course are our main festival sponsors), the Golden Girls three ladies from the Muir of Ord, and Beulay Vivien and John Steven from Inverness all of whom have been at our festival. On arrival at our hotel the first faces we saw were Jim Pearson and Co from Shetland also Ruth from London and her friend Anne.

That night we headed to The Blazing Saddles Club and were made very welcome by Jim Faulkner, Laureen and their club members. I would like to thank them for their hospitality - we hope we didn't take anyone's seat and weren't too rowdy - we were on our best behaviour! We were joined by Darren, Jenny, Lesley, Nicole, John, Vivien, Drew Taylor and Claire from Aberdeen. Drew is the father half of the father and son duo Double Trouble. The Shetland squad were also there so you can imagine it wasn't a quiet night. However we didn't let ourselves down and Jenny took her flag duties very seriously at the end of the night.

The entertainment for the night was provided by The Steve Farlow Duo - an excellent local singer and songwriter who has recorded several CD's and just released his first DVD. During the course of the night he invited people up to do a turn - there were some fine singers amongst them including our own Drew. Needless to say instead of going straight to bed when we got back we ended up drinking in the bar with the Shetlanders until the barman stopped serving us, I knew that Angus would be a bad influence.

Now you know I'm not one for telling tales but I never thought I would see the day that a Shetlander would go to bed when the bar was open! Well they did on Saturday night!!!! We wondered where the Golden Girls had gone as we had expected them to join us - they kind of lost direction, however landed lucky when they went along to another club and managed to get free drinks all night!

As I explained last month due to the torrential rain (apparently the ground still hasn't recovered) at last year's festival in Dungannon they decided to hold this year's event in the Kings Hall Belfast. Well this place is massive on a par with the SECC, I couldn't hazard a guess at how many were there - the TV said 17,000 - I guess that would be over the two days, but still didn't look like that amount, however really hard to judge.

Now I don't want to sound negative, we had a great weekend, the crack was good, and we were nice and dry, but something was missing - it certainly didn't have the same atmosphere as last year. This seemed to be the opinion of most of the people I spoke to, not sure why - perhaps the venue was just too big and spaced out but it definitely lacked the wow factor. My other moan was regarding the sound, it was very poor - particular in the main stage area. It wasn't so bad if you stood at the side of the stage, but moving nearer the back or up to the seating area it was much too loud and muffled, you couldn't hear anything the artists were saying. It was a poor show for the big American stars although they probably weren't aware of it.

Anyway that out of the way over the course of the weekend there were over 60 acts, performing on 4 stages, offering all types of country music. It was impossible to see them all, so you had to plan your two days to catch those you wanted to hear. American acts included Charlie Allen, Hal Ketchum, Connie Smith, Doug Stone, Leona Williams, Georgette Jones, Randy Travis and Martina McBride, all of whom appeared on the main stage.

The U105 stage included some of the more well known Irish acts such as Stephen Smyth, Jimmy Buckley, Eamon McCann, Philomena Begley, Thomas Maguire & Fiona Ennis, Mike Denver, Robert Mizzell and Aiden Quinn.

Upstairs was the acoustic stage and also the Wild Horse Saloon where the solo acts played, both of which were very hot and busy. However we did manage to get a seat and relax with a dram to catch who we wanted to see, including Tony Kerr and, of course, Joe Moore. Tony made a big impression and gained many fans when he played at our festival this year, we managed to have blether with him and he gave us a copy of his newly released CD, another winner for Tony. Joe of course is very popular, and Nashville's three time Band of the Year winner. He gave the club a mention saying he was delighted to see all his fans from NNCMC there, we had all gone to catch his set including Nicky, Catherine, Derek and Jean. Of course the groupies (no names mentioned) were there wearing tee shirts with photos of themselves posing with Joe printed on them. I burst their bubble when I told him they had a suitcase of them featuring other stars such as Eamon McCann and Robert Mizzell, and they do a quick change in the toilet before going to see the relevant acts!

For some reason or other we didn't catch a lot of the Irish acts on the U105 stage. Jason McGurk appears to be one of the new up and coming ones - he has a modern country voice and is getting lots of TV exposure in Ireland, ensuring the future looks bright for him. He put on a good show along with his 6 piece band. Although on the look out for new acts for the club, we felt he was a bit too modern and rocky for us.

Judging by the crowds every time we went through the Irish acts are as popular there as they are here - Stephen Smyth, Mike Denver Robert Mizzell and Eamon had the place bouncing and the crowds dancing in every available space, and by the reception she got, Philomena is still the Queen of Country.

Despite the sound spoiling some of the American acts they certainly all put on a tremendous spots.

A first and a very enjoyable act for me was Charlie Allen. When he's not singing he's a police officer, and I tell you he can put the hand cuffs on me and arrest me for the night any time he likes! Charlie says his first love is country music - he was influenced by the likes of Hank Williams, Keith Whitley and Alan Jackson - I like his tastes and liked his music.

Georgette Jones - well she really couldn't fail with Tammy Wynette and George Jones, the King and Queen of country music for parents, she just has to be the Princess. Georgette is a registered nurse and, at 38, left it late to come into country music - the main reason being that she wanted to wait until her family were older, knowing herself what it was like growing up without her parents around. She is a fine songwriter as well as a singer, and one of her proudest moments was when she wrote a song called *You and Me and Time* for her dad and he recorded it. Her look and sound is so much like her mum it's uncanny. We met her last time we were in Nashville when her dad supported her as she made her debut on the Grand Ole Opry, this time one of her band members sang the George bits and she did the Tammy bits as they sang some of their classic duets.

I didn't catch a lot of either of Doug Stone's sets but I certainly enjoyed what I saw. I remember seeing him once years ago and used to quite like him on CMT. Life hasn't been that kind to Doug over the past few years - he's been hit by series of illnesses and accidents including heart surgery, a cancer scare, truck and motorbike accidents, and even a plane crash! Coming from a musical background he started young when, at the age of 7, he sang with Loretta Lynn, he then went on to chart 33 singles, 6 of which reached number 1.

We had a specific interest for wanting to see the next lady, Leona Williams, as hopefully she will be part of our festival next year. Listening to her I know she will go down a storm as she was brilliant. We managed to get the chance to speak to her and she is hoping that things work out and she'll be able to come over to play in Scotland. Following a move to Nashville from Missouri, Leona played bass and sang harmonies for Loretta Lynn, later teaming up with Merle Haggard to record a duet album. They married in 1978 and, before their divorce in 1984, she wrote some of his biggest hits. Since then Leona has been part of the Grand Ladies of Country Music show in Branson, and has recorded duets with many of country music greats.

Another country music veteran on the show was Connie Smith - widely recognised for her big hit *Once A Day Also*, and for being married to fellow country star Marty Stuart. Connie was brought to Nashville by Bill Anderson when she won a singing contest in 1963. She was a regular feature on the country charts during the 70's, and remains busy touring the USA and playing frequently on the Grand Ole Opry. I didn't really know what to expect from her but she surprised me and played a good spot. Connie appears regularly with Marty on his show which is broadcast on Rural TV Sky Channel 279 and Freesat 403, and goes out Wednesday night at 5.00pm, repeated at 11.00pm. When I'm on that subject they are currently carrying out a survey to find out what kind of country music programmes fans would like to see on TV, so if you have a few moments go into the site at www.ruraltv.tv and complete it, you will also find out who will be appearing on the programmes.

Now Hal Ketchum really hasn't done much for me over the years, although he has had a very successful career with big hits such as *Past The Point Of Rescue*. Hal is a frequent visitor to Ireland and this year has recorded a duet with Mike Denver called *Tonight We Might Just Fall In Love Again*. I didn't enjoy his spot at the festival at all, in fact he made me want to go to sleep, however he was part of the Martina McBride show in Letterkenny and I thoroughly enjoyed him there. When he first came on stage he had trouble with his guitar so he just sang without music. He then continued and did an acoustic spot, adlibbing and relating to the audience playing whatever they wanted. I defiantly saw him in a different light and can see why he continues to have a very successful career.

Now once again I am going to be negative and say how disappointed I was with the performance by the two big stars Randy Travis and Martina McBride. I don't think it was anything to do with them - we were tired and the sound was awful. We left early both nights and it sounded much better outside when we were waiting for a taxi. I thought I would have trouble dragging Ally away from ogling Martina - she has been his all time favourite for many years, got to admit she's beautiful.

On Monday we had a pleasant drive through beautiful countryside to Letterkenny, where we stayed in a traditional Irish hotel on the main street. That night we went for a meal then a few drams in a pub which had some very lively singers performing. On Tuesday and Wednesday we did the tourist bits through the day taking in the Giants Causeway etc.

Tuesday night with some trepidation we set off to see the Martina McBride show, we were lucky to get seats 4 rows from the front so got a great view. An unexpected bonus for us was that Georgette Jones opened the show. Poor girl was full of the cold, suffering dreadfully, and she couldn't be more apologetic. She struggled a bit with the high notes, and cut her programme short, however it didn't spoil our enjoyment. Next on the bill was Hal Ketchum and as I said he was also great entertainment.

On to the star of the show and that's exactly what she was. Awesome - the only word to describe her flawless performance, I have seen many live shows but this one took some beating.

Martina began her career touring with Garth Brooks helping out selling programmes and T-shirts. Garth later offered her the chance to be his opening act on his 1992 tour, provided she got a recording deal - she did and the rest is history. To date Martina has sold over 18 million albums, and chalked up 22 top ten hits - the biggest being *Independence Day*. She has just released a new album called *Shine* and that's certainly what she did in Letterkenny.

Back again the next night with mixed feelings, well how to top last night. I wouldn't say they topped it but it certainly came close another fantastic night. Robert Mizzell opened for Randy and was accompanied by only two members of his band so he sat and sang an acoustic spot, it clearly this wasn't really his thing - certainly not the usual lively performance we expect from Robert.

Randy then strolled on stage accompanied by his 8 piece band. I was never big time into Randy Travis but he is a professional showman and we certainly got our money's worth. For over two hours he just sang hit after hit, and until I heard them I had forgotten just how many he'd had. We were obviously expecting *Storms of Life* and *Forever and Ever Amen* but in total he's had 22 number one hits, and 6 number one albums. He was obviously relaxed and at ease with the audience, clearly enjoying being back in Ireland after 15 years. Lets hope he doesn't wait that long until he returns again.

Must be something about compere's: Pio McCann, one of the presenters over the weekend, and compere for the shows in Letterkenny, has just returned from Nashville where he received an award for being a top presenter. Well when he introduced Connie Smith on stage he said that she was married to Travis Tritt, not Marty Stuart, and when introducing Randy he made another boob saying he had sold over 25 thousand records, when of course he meant 25 million. Come back Sandy Gordon all is forgiven!

On Thursday we headed back to Belfast for our last night, we started off with something to eat and a few drams in the famous Crown Bar, that was fine, no problem, until we went into the pub next door. Got speaking to the bar man who questioned where we came from. When we told him he turned a bit funny with us advised Kenny and Ally to keep their hands in their pockets! Apparently we were at the scene of the crime - Lesley had been a naughty boy and had touched the waitress on the bum ----- so I guess we were all being tarred with the same brush -----! However it get's worse, his mate Darren - complete with tight shirt - was accosted by a male for the second time over the weekend - there's no smoke without fire! So that's it one got thrown out and one came out!!! Trust Northern Nashville members girls and boys watch your bums next Friday night!

Any way I think I've gone on for long enough at the moment. Next weekend, and the club will be here before we know it, should be another good night. Top of the bill will be Paddy O'Brien - I missed him last time he was with us (can't remember why) so am looking forward to seeing him this time. Supporting Paddy will be The Brothers and we know from experience we'll be in for a lively night.

We also have a guest appearance from the young band from the Wick Youth Media Link, The Chicken Pickers, who made a huge impression on everyone at the festival. That line up certainly guarantees a great nights entertainment with all types of country music being played.

Have just had confirmation from BBC ALBA that the transmission of footage from the NNCCMC festival will be on BBC ALBA, which is available on the Sky Channel 186 and Freesat Channel 110. The programmes will go out on Tuesday 20th, 27th October, & 3rd November at 21.00 hrs with repeats the following Sunday evenings at 21.00hrs. Don't miss it - dates for your diary - if it looks as good as the promo they sent it's certainly not to be missed.

Until next time

Keep it Country

Christine

Christine Gray
Chairperson NNCCMC