



Northern Nashville Country Music Club

May 2009 Newsletter

Here I am all out of sync with the newsletter - think I missed a month again but that all seems such a long time ago now.

Don't have a lot of time this month either but will do a quick catch up, and by next time things will have settled down and will get back to my regular routine - I promise!

March show and I said it would be a cracker, Buzzard Creek a duo who played some great cover versions all night ranging from good old country standards to modern American country.

The star of our show was undoubtedly your own old favourite Brendan Quinn, who was very capably supported on stage by Nickels and Dimes. For his cabaret set Brendan did a solo spot which took me back many moons ago to the first time we had Brendan in the Viewfirth, and he sang The Town I Loved So Well - you could have heard a pin drop in the hall. Well it was the same all the way through his solo set - the place was silent and everyone just sat and listened and boy was it worth listening to - he hasn't lost any of the Brendan magic. During his dance spots he had the place bouncing, and of course he just had to finish the night off in true Brendan style with his Neil Diamond spot.

Since then of course we had the Festival which was most certainly another winner. I thought that we would be stressed out and under more pressure due to the TV cameras being there, but things just seemed to fall into place and the whole weekend went with a bang. The weather was very kind to us and allowed the visitors to see Caithness at its best, and also made life easier for us trying to keep the venue heated. There were even times when people were saying "It's too hot" - I never thought I would hear that being said in the Riding Centre. Ticket sales were up on last year with each show including the afternoons being exceptionally well attended.

MNE media crew who did the filming of the event were with us all week - they literally filmed the horses in it on the Saturday afternoon, and then followed the transformation all week. They were amazed at just how much work went into it, and also the amount of willing hands that turned up each day, many taking time off their work to help. I am sure it will shock many people when they see it on TV as folk have just no idea the amount of hours involved - good job it doesn't take that long to take it all down on Monday! Therefore I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the people friends, family, committee and club members who were willing helpers, without them all we just couldn't do it - their help is immeasurable.

It was nice to see many of the shops and businesses in Thurso had entered into the spirit of the weekend by dressing themselves, their shop windows, or playing country music. I was on the street on Friday morning with Tony Kerr (one of our Irish acts) who judged the shop windows - there was a real party atmosphere and buzz about the town, with many people saying they were down purely to see the windows. We also heard comments from the visitors that it was great that the town was involved with the festival, keeping the country theme going through their shops - it certainly looked as if we had something going on in the town. Talking of shop windows Tony had a very difficult job judging - he hummed and hawed over lunch and eventually decided that Cairngorm Windows were the worthy winners, and a close second was the Hydro Board.

Tony also took the time out on Friday afternoon to go along and entertain the people in Achvarasdale and, just to make sure they didn't miss out on the fun, some Bayview residents joined us in Halkirk on Sunday afternoon.

During the course of the weekend we were also entertained by some of the local youths - people now very much look forward to this part of the event. First on were a very young bunch of guys from Wick High School calling themselves 'The Chicken Pickers'. They did a brilliant spot and it was obvious that they genuinely enjoy country music.

The Wick Media Youth Band this year were called 'Sunny Books' and, like the Thurso High School Band the following day, got a brilliant reception from the audience. Both received sponsorship for their music departments.

Hopefully its youngsters like these that will keep country music alive in the future.

All the artistes did a great job. We had something in the programme for everyone this year including a couple of acts that weren't so well known, but they all went down a storm and gained many fans.

Michelle Wright, Canada's award winning artist, gave a very polished performance which was worthy of gracing any stage including the Grand Ole Opry. She sang her self-penned numbers with the emotion that she has experienced in her life.

Billy Yates - a super nice guy - was on stage at three different times during the weekend. Its easy to see why all the country stars want to record his numbers, and why George Jones is his number one fan.

Heather Myles probably the best known of the American acts, and a true country performer. She has a haunting voice which gets straight into the nuts and bolts of a good country song, and gives fans what they are looking for.

Mike Bella was a new name to many and for me one of the most enjoyable acts of the weekend - another great bunch of guys who thoroughly enjoyed themselves. His voice lent itself to the hard core honky tonk songs of his heroes George Jones and Buck Owens, and they also put on very visually entertaining stage act. Their drummer ended up in hospital with eye problems on the way to the airport, so Robert Cameron stepped in and played drums with them so thanks to Robert for that.

The next young lady was one of the most popular acts with the crowd Becky Hobbs, who of course, played at our first festival. Beckaroo as she is affectionately known is a captivating entertainer who certainly enjoys herself on stage. Her voice is unique and gravelly, and she pounds the piano on stage like no other female - she also plays the accordion and acoustic guitar. Becky was delighted to be back playing for us and judging by the reception she received I am sure it won't be her last visit.

The first of our acts from Europe was one of the hardest working of the weekend. Dutch band Savannah, joined by their manager Cor Sanne, did two spots on their own, then supported Billy Yates on stage, and even squeezed in an extra spot for us on Sunday. This was their first trip to Scotland and they were really impressed - they loved the country and couldn't get over how friendly the people were. They were equally friendly and down to earth and, after hearing their performance, it's no wonder they have won so many awards in their native Holland. I am sure we will see them again also.

Next from Europe and also Holland was Frank Jansen & Band. Frank and the boys have been at two of our past festivals and also in the club so they are no strangers. However unfortunately Frank has decided to come off the road at the end of the year so this might be his last visit - perhaps we can coax him to do a 10th reunion! I think you all know by now that Frank is one of my favourite acts and a lovely person so I thought his spot tremendous. I just love the songs from his albums and, in particular, 'You're A Phone Call That I Need to Make'. The band has been auditioning for a new lead singer so we might see them back with their new line up.

The three Irish acts this time were all very different. Tony Kerr was a solo artist who was backed on stage by Nickels and Dimes. Once again he was one of the lesser known acts but turned out to be a firm favourite. Tony has a unique vocal style, and he delivered all the good

old country standards made famous by legends like Haggard, Marty Robbins and Slim Whitman.

Eamon McCann, Ireland's voice of country music, is a popular artist in these parts and has won our Band Of The Year Award in the club twice and continues to win awards at home. Eamon, along with his band, had the crowd shouting for more when he closed the show for us on Saturday night.

Robert Mizzell, originally from Louisiana now resident in Ireland, is one of Ireland's top country acts, and after watching his stage show in Halkirk I am sure he will be one of the top here also. He certainly put on a top notch high energy show brimming with country flavour.

What can I say about our local bands as usual they didn't let us down, and were up there with the best of them - the crowd, particularly the visitors, are always full of praise for them. Sadly we the locals tend to take them for granted but we do have a wealth of local talent.

Thanks to Nickels and Dimes for their own superb country spot, but all for doing such a great job of backing Tony Kerr and Becky Hobbs.

Last years bands making their debuts - the New Kate Bain Band and Slange Ava - just keep on getting better and better with their new line up, and they both justly deserved the reception they got from the crowd.

What can I say about our own Manson Grant & the Dynamos - no wonder they continue to have a large fan base following from all over Scotland, and their CD's are receiving top ten success in the top European Country Music Association's airplay charts.

Last, but by no means least, The Jacks - who better to finish our weekend, they took the place by storm last year and did the same again and had the place absolutely bouncing. They themselves love a good atmosphere and always leave the audience happy and shouting for more.

Following Gerry Ford's retirement last year left us without a compere, but George Snr from Texas Gunn offered his services and we were happy to accept! Aside from that he joined his two sons on stage to do a Texas Gun spot which always goes down well with the audience. George Jnr has something very special about his voice, lending itself to a big ballad. These guys play another major part of the event as Small Town Audio, who provide our sound and lighting system. They put in many hours of hard work and made a fantastic job of the stage - it definitely looked the part and I am sure will come over very effectively on TV. They were very helpful all week and are a great bunch to work with.

Anyway, enough about the festival and on to the sell out show last night with Mick Flavin supported by Slange Ava. We knew it would be busy and warned folk to book their tickets, but lo and behold they were coming from all over the country on the off chance of getting in.

Its procedure that we sell to our members first and then the general public but it's very difficult to do that when some of our members just turn up. I am sure that there were people disappointed that they couldn't get in, and to them I am sorry, but please just give us a phone. It's not fair that folk turn up once a year for a big show and they get in before the people who support us regularly but that's the only way we can do it.

Anyway last night was fantastic! Slange Ava did an absolutely brilliant spot for us - they just keep getting better and better they had the dance floor heaving. Well done to the lads superb!!! Keith had his new CD on sale last night, hot of the press so to speak. It had only arrived earlier in the day and Robert Cameron brought them for him and sold an amazing amount. It is a solo album by Keith with the songs being written by his Dad David Macleod. Not had time to listen to it yet but I know my favourite number Dirty Ashtrays is on it.

It's been almost eight years since Mick Flavin was up our way yet he was as good as ever. He

also had a new CD on sale which was going like hot cakes. I am sure the people who travelled to hear Mick would not have been disappointed – a real showman.

Next month will be busy also with your twice Band of the Year Winner Joe Moore, and another firm favourite Mary B so don't just assume. May will also see the Band of the Year Award Winner for last year being announced, and those people who haven't paid their memberships will be removed from the snowball list and could lose the chance of winning at least £50.

Anyway I'd better get going - I was only going to write a few lines which has turned into War and Peace. We are going on holiday tomorrow and it's now nearly 8pm and I still have ironing to do and not packed. Might just pour a glass of wine may get through things quicker.

I will be coming home with an older man than I am going away with as Ally will be 60 next week. If he thought he could hide it by going away then he is sadly mistaken!!!

Until next time

Keep it Country

Christine

Christine Gray
Chairperson NNCCM