

New Zealand – a Summer School world leader

New Zealand's Scottish Country dancers have led the way in several initiatives over the past twenty years. An early "first" was the formal inclusion of junior dancers in our summer schools, since about 2000 - this has only happened at St Andrews very recently. But this article is really about our music.

We can't claim to have invented the Musicians Course at Summer School: this was first run at St Andrews in 2000, was repeated in 2002 and to my knowledge has taken place every year since then. Musicians from New Zealand have attended several St Andrews Musicians courses. It's a well-organised, wide-ranging course, with a strong band focus.

New Zealand ran the world's first non-St Andrews Summer School Musicians Course in Hamilton in 2003/4, with Scottish musicians Mo Rutherford and Neil Copland as Music tutors. The pattern has been repeated every year (I think) since then. Our tutors have played a variety of instruments but have always been well chosen: very experienced, knowledgeable and supportive. The usual pattern for these classes has been to run them as a "Band" class, with class members taking the stage with the official band to play for the dancing on the final night. In such a group, small glitches in the individual playing are hidden behind the big overall sound, so it's a wonderful way to explore playing for dancing.

But playing in a big group doesn't prepare musicians with the skills and knowledge required to play for SCD classes. So, in 2005 Andy Nichol asked me to prepare a course for the six mornings of the Akoranga Summer School, to teach Playing for Class. This was a world first. The class numbered 8 musicians, playing fiddle, accordion and piano – some of whom had never danced! Andy's foresight paved the way for a series of versions of the course in subsequent years, and it has provided many musicians with the background knowledge and skills to play for SCD classes.

Then in Auckland in 2015, another kiwi brainwave was born: the Teachers and Musicians class. This brought together experienced teachers and musicians, under the guidance of tutors Debbie Roxburgh and the experienced class musicians from Reel of Seven. The goal was to help both tutors and musicians gain skills in working together. This innovative approach was resoundingly successful, building skills and confidence on all sides. It was repeated, albeit in a slightly different format, at the recent Masterton Summer School, and again was well conceived and taught. I look forward to its repetition in future years.

What's coming up? Well, this year's Summer School in Nelson will not have the usual Musicians Course. Instead, another innovation: there will be a series of individual workshops exploring some of the less heard styles of Scottish music: the minuets, polkas, two-steps.... And through the year wherever I can, regional workshops to encourage more people into the pleasures of that most rewarding of pastimes: playing for Scottish Country Dancing.

Lynne Scott

Music Adviser

music@dancescottish.org.nz