

Flying Kiwis – musical adventures in France

It was, on the face of it, a highly unlikely proposition: three musicians from far-apart places, gathering almost unrehearsed to play for SCD in Lyon, France. So we – Sharlene Penman from Auckland, Lynne Scott from Wellington and John Roxburgh, an ex-pat Kiwi fiddler from Pennsylvania – called ourselves the Flying Kiwis (though I'm not sure the French saw the joke) and launched into the Lyon SCD Club's 30th Anniversary Dance Weekend.

And what a weekend it was! Unusually, it started on Friday with a fun evening of Ceilidh dancing, called in French. Saturday was a day for dance and music classes, plus some sightseeing, followed by a French dinner (all those yummy cheeses!) and a formal Ball, with 150 people on the floor. The SCD community in Europe has a much lower average age, so the dancing glowed with energy and enthusiasm, as well as beautiful technique. My class of 8 musicians acquitted themselves well alongside the band, playing for four dances. The Flying Kiwis were very well received ("did you bring any CDs?") and we thoroughly enjoyed the synergy of playing as a Band. It was a real joy!

The SCD tutors were Fred de Marse (San Francisco) and Roberta Gotfried (Los Angeles). Fred especially impressed with his clarity, energy and experience. After his Sunday Highland class, the weekend's dancing finished with a final Combined Class and lunch. The Musicians Class met again to go into technical points in more detail and discuss playing for class.

Wrapping up the Lyon weekend did not mark the end of playing for SCD in France. While John and his wife Piers took a week to tour Italy, Sharlene, my husband James and I headed south to Grenoble in the French Alps – think Swiss-style chalets and massive mountains. We played at two small clubs at Grenoble and La Mure and enjoyed a trip to the Chartreuse distillery.

A break in the playing schedule gave time for a brief trip to Marseille. Sited on the Mediterranean coast, it has a multicultural population and a long history of conflict and trade since Ancient Greek times. It was a fascinating city.

From Marseille we headed north again to the hinterland of Avignon, in Provence. After a long French lunch on the patio beside a vineyard, we played for an afternoon workshop and mini-ball at Vaucluse. I was impressed with how the dancers and Sharlene's piano-playing coped with a sloping floor! These small local events demonstrated the lack of experience that tutors there have with live music, and I was continually reminded of how a well-utilised musician can add to a class.

After Provence it was time to put the music away and – finally – take a good look around Lyon. It could be thought of as a mini-Paris: just as much history and architecture, built around river traffic, but much more compact and accessible. I can't wait to go back.

Lynne Scott