

New Zealand's SCD Musicians' Convention

New Zealand's Scottish country dance musicians are relatively small in number, and due to the geography of the country we find ourselves well spread out. Social contact between the musicians can be hard to come by, and when we *are* in the same room, it's usually because some of us are on stage. Opportunities to share our knowledge, experiences and woes are few and far between.

So, when a rare "free" weekend (that is, free of SCD activity) emerged in October 2018, it was too good a chance to let go. I booked the Matangi Hall near Hamilton (relatively central for most musicians) and emailed NZ's active SCD musicians with suggestions for a convention. Their responses - with enthusiasm and offers of help - convinced me that it was worth making it happen.

The basic plan was to run conference-style sessions, led by individuals with expertise in their subjects, but with opportunity for discussion and sharing throughout. A social Tea Dance was arranged for the Sunday afternoon, and with the help of local musicians and dancers, a programme was devised and well publicised.

About 15 musicians attended the weekend. Throughout Saturday and Sunday we had sessions covering: using different instruments effectively in a band; expanding pianists' repertoire; sound checking; getting that "Scottish accent"; managing our music libraries; a quick trip through Dance Database; managing our gigs; and promoting live music in NZ's SCD community. Information and experiences were shared in a friendly and co-operative fashion. We rehearsed as a big band for the Tea Dance, and on Saturday evening watched a whisky-themed movie.

Sunday's Tea Dance was well attended and was greatly enjoyed by everyone. Some of NZ's top bands played two or three dances each: Wild Heather, Rose and Thistle, Bourach Mor and Kiwi Kilties provided a wide variety of timbre and musical arrangement. Following afternoon tea, all the musicians played as a big band. This was enormous fun for all, and the sound in the hall was fantastic. The dancers went home well satisfied.

So, by all accounts, did the musicians, who had enjoyed a collegial and social time with the leisure to explore common interests, share a gripe or two, and expand horizons in unexpected ways. It was well worth the effort.

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