

SOS (Save Our School) : NZ Musicians Step Up.

More and more, NZ's dancers are dancing to the music of NZ's musicians. But I wonder how many dancers are aware of what goes on behind the scenes? The recent Summer School in Christchurch proved an opportunity for local musicians to step up and show their worth.

Warning bells began to ring when on 6 December the Scottish musician who had been engaged to play for the School, communicated that a close family member had died suddenly. Although at that point there was a continued expectation that the engagement would continue, David Williamson (the School Director) and I thought that having a Plan B in place could be handy – just in case!

We began by examining the size of the gap that would be left if the axe fell. The two most experienced classes would be without a musician for half the school; three evening dances, including the two major events of Hogmanay and the President's Ball, would be without a band; and the Musicians Class would be teacher-less and leader-less when playing for the Final Night.

To resolve the problem of Bands for three nights, it was agreed with all affected musicians that Balmoral (which had been engaged to play for two Social nights only) would if necessary be "promoted" to play the Opening Night and the two major events. Wild Heather would play the two Social nights.

It was on 11 December that the axe fell, and Plan B – albeit somewhat incomplete – was swung into action. That was when the action began in earnest.

Wild Heather's involvement had brought Mary McDonald into the School, so with the additional unexpected presence of Natalie Scott we were able to fill the gaps in the schedule of dance class musicians. Iain McKenzie of Balmoral was asked to play for the most experienced classes, and Mary and Natalie were slotted into the remaining gaps. This is not as straightforward as it sounds: class musicians usually prepare their music well in advance, so Iain had to begin again, with completely new class programmes for all six mornings. Mary had two weeks to prepare and learn her music (this was by now just before Christmas); and Natalie took over one of Lynne's classes, so while the music was ready it was all new to her and had to be learned and rehearsed with pianist Clare Simpson. Dances taught at Summer Schools are invariably less well-known, so music preparation for a dance often involves considerable research to find and learn the lead tunes. NZ's musicians help each other a lot.

Balmoral and Wild Heather had just two weeks to prepare three and two new evening dance programmes, respectively. The small head start gained by making a start on these when Plan B was being mooted, meant that having them ready in time was possible - just.

Planning for the Musicians Class was perhaps the most urgent and challenging task. Musicians who had registered for the class had been eagerly awaiting the Final Night music so that they could begin practising it, but none had arrived. So Anne-Marie Forsyth and I shared the task of constructing music for yet another night's dancing, additionally bearing in mind the level of experience and technical ability of the participants. We completed this in three days of intense activity, including an

epic all-nighter by Anne-Marie, who then proceeded to draw up a teaching and rehearsal plan for the Class.

So Christmas came and went, earthquakes continued, everyone descended on Christchurch - some via the Lewis Pass - and the School got under way. Have you spotted what had *not* yet been possible? That's right – band rehearsals for all this new music. So as well as playing for morning classes, conducting the afternoon Musicians Class and playing for the evenings (with Sharlene and Anne-Marie playing in BOTH bands), we had to find time to rehearse five new programmes. Somehow we also managed to party in the evenings, grab a few hours' sleep, and start again each morning in your classes. Did we look tired after eight days?

After all the effort of last-minute preparation, Balmoral, Wild Heather and Natalie and Clare thoroughly enjoyed playing for your classes and evening dancing, and your company. We hope you enjoyed our music too!

Some statistics:

Opening Night	12 dances, 47 tunes plus another three dances and 11 more tunes
Fancy Dress Night	14 dances, 46 tunes
Social Night	13 dances, 49 tunes
Hogmanay	18 dances, 66 tunes
President's Ball	20 dances, 75 tunes
Final Night	14 Dances, 53 tunes

Lynne Scott

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