

SCOTTISH OPERA'S new season | Explore the CRINAN CANAL

THE Scots MAGAZINE

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WILD LAND

Nov 2016

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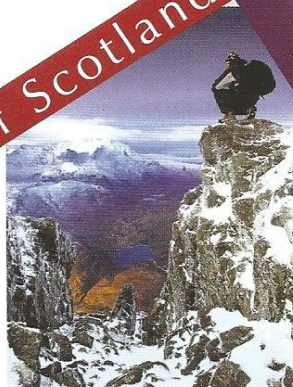
EVE MUIRHEAD
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ORKNEY ODYSSEY
Cameron McNeish heads
for the Northern Isles

places culture people

celebrate the best of Scotland

COVER PIC:
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the Black Cuillin, from
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Striking A Chord

Julia Horton finds many positive effects flowing from the ongoing Glasgow Piano City project



GAUN YERSEL' – that old familiar shout in the Scots vernacular has become a slogan for the Glaswegian take on the global public piano phenomenon, *Play Me, I'm Yours*.

Launched as an interactive installation by British artist Luke Jerram in 2008, the original scheme has toured more than 50 cities worldwide from London to New York, setting up hundreds of street pianos bearing the project's eponymous invitation to have a go.

The Glasgow version was launched as part of the Commonwealth Games cultural celebrations in 2014 and has expanded ever since, the "gaun yersel" invitation writ large on more than 20 brightly decorated pianos across

the city, in public spaces from shopping centres and cafés to museums and hospitals.

As well as giving anyone of any ability an opportunity to sit and play, the project also runs a growing programme of free lessons.

Dubbed Pianos on Prescription, it promotes the benefits to people's health and has received increasing numbers of requests and informal referrals from GP surgeries to help patients whose problems are more mental or social.

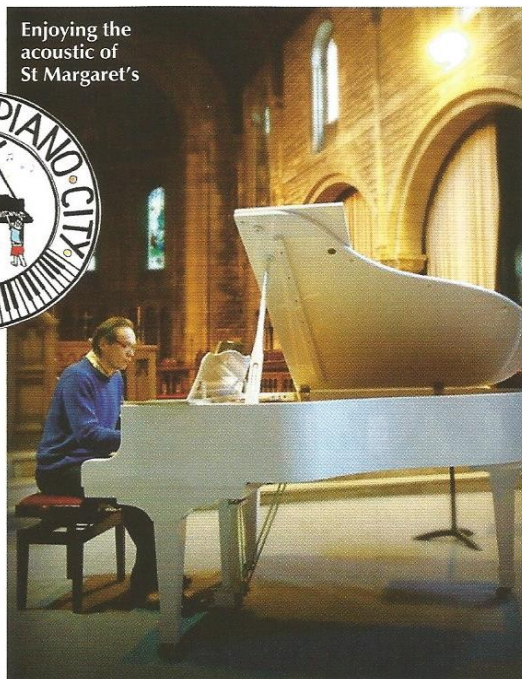
Sitting playing a baby grand at Govanhill Baths, a swimming pool turned community hub, project founder and musician Tom Binns says Glasgow is a natural home for the scheme. "Every tenement here used to have a



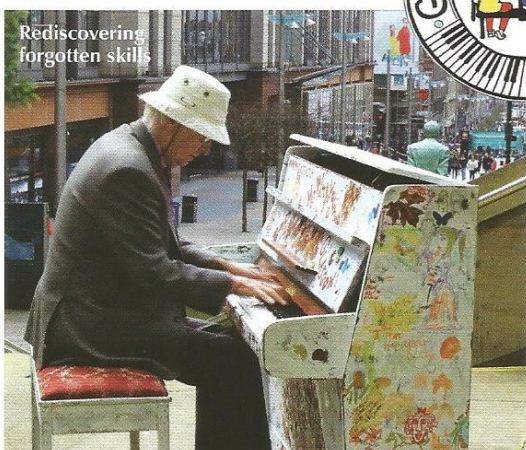
Tutor Gráinne
and student
Parisa



Which finger
goes where?



Enjoying the
acoustic of
St Margaret's



Rediscovering
forgotten skills



piano. I'm continually surprised by how many people donate good pianos and help with the removal costs."

The project has received more than £25,000 from the National Lottery and the city council, plus donations of pianos and cash from supporters. But even heavily-discounted weekly lessons would cost the voluntary group around £500 a year per person.

Meanwhile, with pianos also being installed in Paisley, Helensburgh and Edinburgh, the Glasgow musical movement is becoming a nationwide phenomenon.

The Unexpected Artist is an apt name for a gallery where customers are likely to find someone having a piano lesson in the middle of the room.

The St Enoch Centre shop, selling a colourful array of paintings, is one of the more unusual Piano City locations offering free classes.

In jeans and a woolly hat, Parisa seems oblivious to the occasional person browsing the artwork surrounding her as she traces her left finger along a piece of sheet music to help pick out a melody with her right hand on the keys.

The unmistakable theme from *Moon River* emerges,

followed by a grin as the delighted 25-year-old science student says simply, "Amazing." After just four half-hour lessons she is showing a talent she didn't know she had.

As an asylum seeker, joining the scheme is also helping Parisa cope and get to know more people in Glasgow after moving here with her family from Iran two years ago.

She says, "I love listening to music, especially piano. >>





Project founder Tom Binns

Sometimes you need to forget everything. Last year I wanted to learn piano so much but I couldn't afford it. This is a great experience. The lessons are fun and I have met lots of great Glaswegians."

Piano tutor Gráinne Rooney has given free weekly lessons to people aged five to over 60 since last summer, when the limit was four classes per person. This year it is being extended where possible, with Parisa among those set to receive a dozen lessons if funding is available.

Gráinne says, "It gives me an opportunity to teach people who thought it wouldn't be possible for them to learn music for a range of reasons, including financial and cognitive, such as people with learning disabilities. I really believe everyone can and should be able to play."

Gallery manager Stuart Ford says the piano, which anyone can play in between lessons, is a welcome addition. "It's brilliant. It brings so many people in. It makes the place come alive." 🎹



Therapy for players and listeners

Calming And Healing

IT'S impossible to visit Gartnavel Royal Hospital without passing a piano, which stands just inside the entrance doors. A dragonfly is painted on its frame, but touching the keys produces such a rich tone it's clear that the instrument is not here just for decoration. It is helping psychiatric patients, visitors and staff cope with the stresses of life by giving them chance to play and listen to others.

Retired teacher Frank Allen, from Milngavie, whose wife is being treated here, comes in every day to see her. Sitting in the hospital café near the piano, he says, "My wife is not normally musical but she thoroughly enjoys listening to other people play. It's an excellent way of cheering people up."

Regular concerts are also noticeably

therapeutic for patients in the intensive care psychiatric unit who suffer from conditions like schizophrenia and find concentrating and controlling their aggression hard. Senior charge nurse at the unit, Derek Toland, says there is a "remarkable" improvement in those patients after seeing a performance. They become calmer, allowing staff to make more progress with other areas of treatment.

He adds, "The good thing about music is that most people can benefit from it, either by playing or listening. We have a few patients who can play and they will join a session or have an ad-hoc go at the piano with a member of staff. These are the kinds of things that people would normally do in life to de-stress, or for enjoyment. It helps everyone."

www.glasgowpianocity.org

Picture: CRAIG FLEMING, LIBBY WALKER

With thanks to . . .

*All members of the Glasgow Piano City Board
past and present.*

Marsha Burke ~ for all her Art Work on numerous pianos
including: Ming, Mack, Yogi, NikNak, Libby's rear screen,
Spot, Bumble . . . and a few as yet unnamed pianos too.

Gráinne Rooney ~ for all her efforts as a piano tutor that
people enjoy working with & occasionally practising for !

Parisa - for sharing her story
Libby Walker - for her logo design.
Craig Fleming - Robert Dawson Scott
and **Jonathan Metzstein**
for their images.

Ronnie, Liz, Robert, Caroline . . . & Lorraine's nails
for appearing on camera.

Fiona Sinclair - and all the staff at Gartnavel Royal Hospital
Jim Monaghan - and everyone at Govanhill Baths
Stuart Duffy - at the Unexpected Artist
Colin Hynd - at Glasgow Music
Ian Elder - at the Lighthouse

Julia Horton - for writing the article

*All the other people and venues around Glasgow
who have supported the project in many ways
and hosted our pianos over the last 3 years*

and . . . last but not least

Alan Kenny

