

FÈIS SPÈ

Music in the blood

The power of the landscape around us has inspired poems, songs and music since people first lived in the area. Harp-playing bards were at the heart of every village, every clan, every parish. In the modern Highlands, music remains a melting pot of different influences, enriching the lives of every generation. Gaelic was at its height as a poetic and expressive language, and keeping this culture of traditional Gaelic music, culture and language alive is the purpose of Fèis Spè, which set

The young people in the Cairngorms Ceilidh Trail Band (CCT) and the Junior Ceilidh Band gather from communities across the Park, so they get to know others from outwith their own area. And their horizons are broadened even more through touring, as they discover new places and experience the demands and delights of performing. In the last five years, 28 young musicians have played in 30 large and little-known venues across the Park, to approx. 10,000 people.

“Without the Fèis, I don’t think I’d be playing the fiddle.”

“I’ve always been involved in the Fèis since I was wee, and since turning 16 I was able to join the Cairngorms Ceilidh Trail Band. It’s great and keeps me busy working during the summer as we go touring for two weeks throughout the Park. I visit places I’d never heard of and go to bigger venues like the Old Bridge Inn in Aviemore, which has a great atmosphere and has a lot of live traditional music. The Band gives me great experience - even playing at dances where people need encouragement to dance. I play the fiddle, and singing a Gaelic song all together on the stage also gives me such a great feeling. I’d like to become a professional musician, or at least I hope that music is a big part of whatever I do in the future.”
Catriona Bullivant, age 17, fiddler.

“The Junior Ceilidh Band is helping to bring up a whole new generation of musicians.”

“The Cairngorms have produced a lot of musicians over the past 300 years - for hundreds of years this area has been an amazing place for traditional music. We’re in a living

Did you know?

- Gaelic superseded Pictish in the Cairngorms over 1,000 years ago
- Gaelic dominated until the 19th century, when many locals became bilingual in Gaelic and Scots
- Today there’s a revival of Gaelic as a spoken language in the west of the Park, and Doric - a dialect of Scots - is spoken in the east.
- Some local people still call the Park by their original Gaelic name, ‘Am Monadh Ruadh’: the Russet-coloured Mountains.
- ‘Cairngorm’ is derived from the Gaelic, ‘an Carn Gorm’: Blue Hill.

up 21 years ago. Its geographical reach has been hugely extended thanks to National Park designation: it expanded into Fèisean a’ Mhonaidh Ruaidh so that, for the first time, young people from across the whole Park have been able to take part: over two thousand young people to date, and counting.

Keeping traditions alive

The exciting diversity of cultural traditions is a distinctive aspect of our identity. Giving children from the age of five another opportunity to discover the joy of playing traditional music encourages the desire to learn – and helps to raise Scotland’s next musicians.

Contributing £2million to the economy

Economically, the Fèis contributes greatly. A report into the ‘Social and economic impact of Fèisean’ (HIE 2010) highlighted the annual £2m contribution it makes to the economy of the Highlands & Islands. Traditional music draws visitors to the region, boosting tourism revenue for venues and accommodation. The Fèis also contributes by employing one full time Development Officer and over 50 temporary tutors per year, making an ongoing contribution to the local economy.

tradition and the Junior Ceilidh Band is helping to bring up a whole new generation of musicians - a few have already progressed to becoming professional musicians. At its biggest, we have about 16 or 18 people and they come from areas as far afield as Aberlour, the Straths and Braemar. We meet up at the Music Department of Grantown Grammar School. We rehearse as a group a couple of weekends a year and have half a dozen or so sessions, and do quite a lot of performing.”

Charlie McKerron, Musician and Group Tutor of the Junior Ceilidh Band

