



Scottish music at its Best.

Last Saturday, the Ardrishaig Hall was packed for the last MAAA concert of the season, a Fiddle/Piano Duo, featuring Anna –Wendy Stevenson and James Ross. And two hours later, their audience left the Hall, having relished a feast of Scottish traditional music, played in a stylish and unique manner by the two musicians.

Since 2003, their last appearance in Mid Argyll, Anna-Wendy, currently at the Highland Music College in Benbecula, and James, based in Edinburgh and at the RSAMD, have been playing and recording together to great acclaim. In their generous programme of two halves, totalling well over 90 minutes, they presented and commented upon 14 sets in total – marches, strathspeys, reels, jigs, slow airs etc. Their choice of music could in no way be described as routine and predictable – some, the product of careful research into past collections; some, tunes garnered from fellow musicians and some, actually composed by themselves – for example the Balamory Reel, written by Anna Wendy when she appeared on the children’s TV show.

Some fiddlers can be very demonstrative, indulging in dramatic flourishes and body swaying. Anna –Wendy is not of that ilk! Rather she leaves it to the music to say it all – firm, rhythmical, with exemplary intonation and immaculate timing. The beguiling sound of her eighteenth century fiddle was in turn moving, exciting, poignant and her pianist responded accordingly.

Over the last ten years, James has developed a truly unique style of playing the music of Scotland on the piano; it is not for nothing his recent CD is called “James Ross, an original mind at work”. In solo passages, his fingers flawlessly match the speed of the violin, whilst his questing accompaniment style creates a fascinating palette of sound with his partner. It looks improvised but has in reality been carefully planned and committed to memory and his solo piece in the second half served to illustrate this.

The evening had some surprises also. In each half, Inveraray accordionist, Allan McIntosh, was invited on stage to present his own choice of music as a contrast to the violin duo, and his selections were most warmly received.

As the first item in the second half, young Lochgilphead fiddler, Marie Voinot, was invited to play, and, showing great confidence, she performed a slow air alone, before being joined by Anna-Wendy in a lively set of jigs to great acclaim.

Finally, just before the interval, the “Sheila MacCallum Reel” was expertly played by the Duo to celebrate the Chairman’s birthday that very day.

To sum up, two consummate musicians combining perfectly together to perform a lovely selection of Scottish music to a most receptive audience. A fine evening enjoyed by all.