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Border fiddler to join top band for tour

ONE of the top bands on the Appalachian old-time and bluegrass circuit, The Stairwell Sisters, arrives in Scotland next month for an eleven-date tour that will take the five-piece all over the country, thanks to support from the Scottish Arts Council's National Lottery-funded, Tune Up, programme.

And the show will be coming to the Borders with performances scheduled for the Eastgate Theatre in Peebles and Buccleuch Centre in Langholm.

Widely regarded as one of America's most influential string bands, and drawing inspiration from the mountain music of Kentucky, south-west Virginia, Tennessee and western North Carolina, the band will be teaming up with Scots step dancer John Sikorski and renowned Borders traditional fiddler, Wattie Robson, in a special collaboration to examine the rich musical heritage between those States and Scotland.

The Stairwell Sisters were one of the outstanding successes at Glasgow's Celtic Connections event in 2007, winning rave reviews.

Their reputation was further enhanced on the release of their fourth album, produced by Lloyd Maines, famed for his success with The Dixie Chicks, which won them even more attention.

The Appalachian old-time dance styles, which originated in

Scotland, have developed down the generations to become much more flamboyant than they were when Scots first settled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

John Sikorski (originally from Skye), while having an understanding and love of the Appalachian music and dance traditions, has mastered the original Scots step-dance style and joins Evie to illustrate the subtle differences that now exist, and show why he is at the forefront of the revival that is underway.

Hawick-born master fiddler Wattie Robson, one of Scotland's leading traditional musicians, who will accompany John, says he is an admirer of the band's music and all set for the tour.

It opens in Inverness then we are heading for Stornoway," he said. "There are 11 shows in total and it's fair to say that we will cover most of Scotland in the space of two weeks.

"I was delighted to get the invitation to participate and even happier when I learned there were two dates in The Borders."

The tour has been co-ordinated by another Borderer, Selkirk-born Loudon Temple whose Brookfield-Knights music agency brings leading Americana and roots music acts to the UK.

The Stairwell Sisters will be at the Eastgate on May 19 and at the Buccleuch Centre, Langholm, on May 21.