

Southern Reporter  
14 May 2009

(18)

# The grass is bluer on this side of the pond

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THEY may be a five-piece, all-female bluegrass group from the USA, but The Stairwell Sisters' tour of Scotland certainly has a Borders feel to it.

The band from San Francisco will arrive in the Borders for gigs at Peebles and Langholm next week, accompanied by Hawick-born fiddler Wattie Robson.

Robson's presence will see the musical heritage between the US and Scotland examined on the tour, starting today in Inverness, which is taking place thanks to support from the Scottish Arts Council's National Lottery-funded project Tune Up.

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

Temple and Robson had previously been in 1960s Hawick R'n'B band The Diamonds.

Temple said: "We've stayed in touch and I was well aware that these days he is recognised as one of the best Scottish traditional fiddlers in the country, and I was delighted when I found out he was going to be able to join the tour.

"He always impresses with the depth of his expressive playing and was the perfect man to be accompanying John Sikorski, from the Isle of Skye, for his solo spots.

"The Stairwell Sisters have played to a full house once before at the Eastgate Theatre in Peebles when they were last in Scotland, so Caroline Adams, the venue's general manager, was keen to invite them back."

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

"We start off in Inverness then head to Stornoway. 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."

Regarded as one of America's most influential string bands, the Stairwell Sisters claim to draw inspiration from the mountains of Kentucky, south-west Virginia, Tennessee and



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North Carolina. The Scottish presence is strong, however, with their Appalachian musical influence originating from the Scots who first settled in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

For the tour they have included Sikorski, whose love of the Appalachian traditions will see him perform step dancing.

The Stairwell Sisters won rave reviews for their performances at Glasgow's Celtic Connections event in 2007, which was followed by their

last appearance in Scotland at the Eastgate.

Their reputation was further enhanced on the release of their fourth album in December last year. Entitled *Get Off Your Money*, it was produced by Lloyd Maines, who has enjoyed success with *The Dixie Chicks*.

Scottish Arts Council music officer Stuart Thomas said that the tour is a great example of what the Tune Up project is all about.

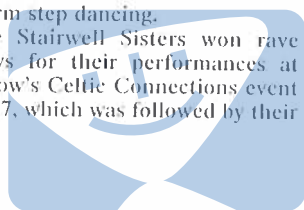
He added: "Appalachia's musical

**The Stairwell Sisters will be visiting Peebles and Langholm**

roots are thoroughly Scottish and this will be a chance for audiences here to be wowed by one of the finest American exports."

The Stairwell Sisters perform at Peebles' Eastgate Theatre on Tuesday and Langholm's Buccleuch Centre next Thursday.

Tickets for both gigs are priced £12 (£10 conc), and tickets are available from both venues' ticket offices.



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## THE SCENE

BIG news this week is the Hebridean Celtic Festival announcement of the launch of their own theme tune - 'Blue on Green'.

Thought to be the first of its kind in Great Britain, the track was written by **Calum Martin**, a pioneer of contemporary Gaelic rock music and inspired by the big blue tent, which hosts the main gigs on the Lews Castle green.

'Blue on Green' is available on the HebCelt media player or as a free download. You can check it out at [www.hebcelt-fest.com/backstage/downloads](http://www.hebcelt-fest.com/backstage/downloads).

And while we're on the subject of recordings and tune-age... You can now find the **Dun Ringles**, 2005 Best of album - 'Re Dun' - on iTunes: that's fourteen songs originally recorded between the years of 1992 and 1997, but re-recorded using proper equipment and slightly more skilled musical ability!

Check 'em out, check 'em out now!

And keep your eyes and ears peeled for the **Dun Ringles'** brand new album, tentatively titled 'Tales from the Minch', due out in the not too distant future.

Also expect exciting a summer release from **Our Lunar Activities** whose debut album, recorded and produced by **Mark Hoppus** (of **Blink182** fame), will be hitting the record/CD racks and accompanied by a world tour.

More releases come in the form of the debut Country Punk/Geffen Records release from **The Boy Who Trapped The Sun**, backed with a handful of festival dates, and the recording sessions for the long awaited debut album from **Our Small Capital** have commenced at **Paul Matheson's** studio so keep a look out for that one as well!

Moving on to the what's on for the weekend: tomorrow night, Friday May 15, in the Woodlands Centre, Martin's Memorial are putting on an acoustic café featuring Mr **Willie Campbell** and Mr **Ian Mackinnon** - doors are at 7:30pm and tickets are £3 on the door.

Also on Friday, in the An Lanntair, the five-piece female Americana/Bluegrass/Roots music band **The Stairwell Sisters** ([www.myspace.com/thestairwellsisters](http://www.myspace.com/thestairwellsisters)), all the way from San Francisco, California, will be touching down in Stornoway - just one of the many dates on their UK Tune-up Tour.

One of America's most popular old-time Appalachian string bands, they draw inspiration from the mountain music of Kentucky, south-west Virginia, Tennessee and western North Carolina.

The band took part in Celtic Connections

2007 and won rave reviews with **The Scotsman** describing them as 'the find of the festival'.

In America they are renowned for an ability to re-interpret the authentic style of 'source' old-time material, much of which has its roots in Scotland and Ireland.

Another strength is the quality of the original compositions. You cannot tell the old from the new. And a strong feature of the 'live' performance is the clogging and step-dancing of banjo player **Evie Ladin**.

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 crossed the Atlantic to settle in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The plaudits continue for this band: "A brilliant band" - Mike Harding, BBC Radio 2; "Just fantastic" - Bob Harris, BBC Radio 2. Catch them while you can in Stornoway.

There was some rather interesting stuff on last weekend as well - Friday, May 8, in Pointers Youth Café when **Sean Harrison** was previewing his solo acoustic set for **goNORTH** with some absolute classics: 'More Than An Angel', 'You Stand Apart', 'Hollow' and 'In Adam's Eye' from his debut album 'A Silent Ovation' - plus two excellent new tunes 'Somewhere New' and 'This Whisper'.

And that was followed by the duo **Technocelt** - Jane Hepburn on fiddle and **Keith Morrison** on keytar and samples - with an even more expansive show than their debut at Era a few weeks ago!

A whole lot more tunes, running the full gamut from all out funky to Folky ethnic world-music to Jazzy, spacey workouts - all propelled by stonking big beats that are just begging to be played on the big stages of the festival circuit.

Pretty cool light and smoke show as well!

And Saturday, May 9, it was a steaming hot Blues, Rock n' Soul stew in the Clachan with **Ball And Chain**.

Oh yeah, and tickets for the **Neil Young/Bruce Springsteen Tribute** night in the Woodlands Centre - the second in the series being presented by the WIN (Western Isles Nu-music) Trust - are totally sold-out!

Fear not though, there's going to be a second show (still to be scheduled) in the Hotel Hebrides, Tarbert - Way hey!

And away we go...until next week...weekend...whenever...

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