

SHETLAND FOLK FESTIVAL 2008

Chance to sample a little bit of everything

Sunday, Clickimin Centre

THE BEST thing about the foy concept is that you get to hear a sample of all the visiting artists.

The downside, of course, is that 12 to 15 minutes is just not enough of some of them.

That was the case with at least six of the names this year, but thankfully I'd already experienced sets by The Martin Harley Band, Andy McKee, Lissa Schneckenburger and Le Vent du Nord.

The remaining stand-outs for me were singer-songwriter Rory Ellis, all the way from South Australia, and Scottish firebrands Breabach - pipes at last and two of them for good measure!

Ellis, accompanied by Tim Hackett on slide guitar, was superb. As MC Mairi Pottinger told us, "what a voice". And he was also funny.

"How many of you have ever been in love?" he asked the audience. Not surprisingly very few hands went up. "Well I was in love

once, and I thought I'd write a song about it."

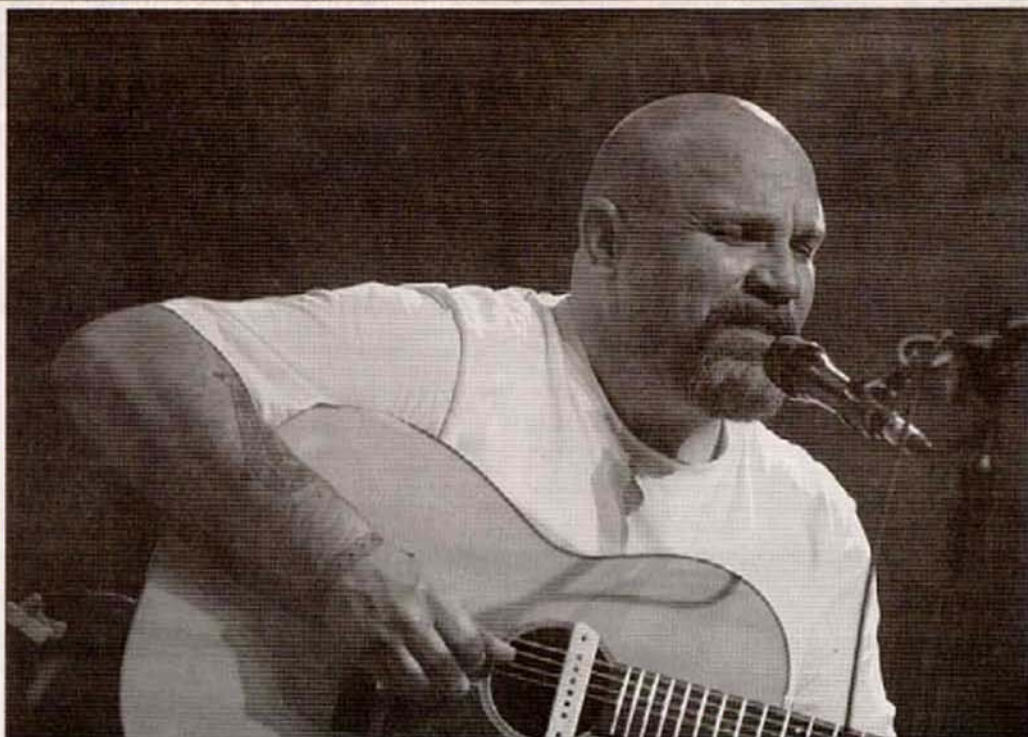
All fairly predictable, you think, but what followed was one of the most commanding vocal performances of the festival. Deep, rich and passionate.

No festival would be complete without some proper, traditional Scottish folk music, and Breabach, with their pipes, whistles, fiddle and guitar, provided it.

"It's great to experience the community support you have up here," said guitarist Ewan Robertson. "We were taken to Feltar and Yell by the bus drivers and had mince and tatties!"

Sandwiched between a couple of fine sets of tunes was the Matt McGinn song *Rolling Hills of the Borders*, excellently sung by Robertson.

The evening had kicked off at 7pm with Quinteto Mambo Jambo. According to this year's programme, they would be serving up a mix of Latin styles including salsa, samba and rumba with Congolese and other African sounds adding to an infectious mix.



Australian singer-songwriter Rory Ellis.

What the programme didn't tell us was the fact they are actually from deepest Yorkshire!

That may seem something of a disappointment but they didn't let the side down, particularly with their third offering, straight out of the Buena Vista Social Club scene, with powerful stuff from the female sax player Frankie.

The excellent trio Brother Mule, from the US, burst on with *Kary Bar the Door* and they quickly endeared themselves to the audience.

"You are the best fans anywhere in the world. It's great to come to a place where its hip for kids to play fiddle music," said Ben Winship.

"When fiddle players die they go to Shetland," he added to much applause.

I'd heard a bit of Andy McKee on Thursday night at the Legion, but he was even better at the foy. What can you say about his incredible acoustic version of the Toto rock classic *Africa*.

Much will have been written by other reviewers about the Mongolian band Hanggai. The deep throat singing was something completely different and *The Drinking Song* went down a treat [pun not intended]. As MC Michael Coultis pointed out, they had given the festival yet another new anthem.

It is to the great credit of the festival committee that every couple of years or so they manage to locate something rare and exceptional from the other side of the world, and Hanggai are perhaps the furthest travelled so far.

Festival stalwart Terry Leith told me earlier that the Henrik Jansberg Band were the best band this year, and he wasn't far wrong. It was yet more stomping stuff by the talented Danish fiddler. The only surprise for me was that they didn't get to

finish off one of the other concerts.

The David Mannely Band have been described as "the Irish band to see" in the music media. I'm not sure I'd go that far but what they did have in Shauna Mullin was the best female singer of the festival.

Afon, from Croatia, didn't really light my fire but others liked them. Tastes will always differ, that's for sure.

The penultimate act, the English-based Martin Harley Band, apparently contained the "sexiest guy in any band this year". That

comment, strangely, came from a male member of our newsroom.

What there was no doubt about, however, was that Harley and his blend of old time blues and country were very, very popular.

He told of his time living in Australia, where he slept in the back of his car and, bizarrely, got a job as a pancake maker in a nursery!

The former Lazy Boy Choir, from Orkney, have been receiving much acclaim, particularly since they shortened their name to just The Chair. They were back, rather

unusually, for the second year in a row.

Fiddler Douglas Montgomerie opened the proceedings on *Lily & Diane's* and gradually the seven other members of the band joined in, ending in a frenzied crescendo. They also got a deserved encore.

And so, around 12.30am, three quarters of an hour later than the scheduled finish, roughly 800 punters tumbled out of the Clickimin. Most of them were surely happy that, once again, the organisers had provided them with an evening to remember. *Jim Tall*



Pete Jack of Quinteto Mambo Jambo adds a touch of Latin America to the festival.



Many people come to Shetland just for the festival atmosphere. Among the visitors this year was London-based actor Graham Fellows, pictured with musician Mark Laurensen. A regular visitor to the isles, he is more commonly known as his alter ego John Shuttleworth.