

# THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

**Report by – ADAM HARDCASTLE – 2017 Churchill Fellow**

**To learn how music-oriented regional festivals  
can be authentic, community-inclusive and sustainable**

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Signed: Adam Christopher Hardcastle

Dated: 24 October 2018

## Index

Keywords .....	1
Fellow details .....	2
Highlights .....	3
Major lessons and conclusions .....	4
Program .....	5
Report .....	7
Disseminating findings .....	31
Conclusion .....	33

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**Fellow details**

Adam Christopher Hardcastle

B.Mus. [University of Adelaide], B.A. [Flinders University], B.Teach. (Primary and Secondary),  
[Deakin University], M.Ed. (Music Education), [Monash University], Ph.D. [Monash University]

Residential address:

34 Carba Rd, Wye SA 5291

Postal address:

PO Box 486, Port MacDonnell SA 5291

Professional positions:

Primary school teacher, Portland North Primary School, Portland Victoria

Artistic Director, Upwelling Festival Parade, Portland, Victoria

Director, Cockatoo Valley Song Group

Telephone:

03 55231482 (work)

08 87384347 (after hours)

## Highlights

The purpose of this Fellowship was to learn, by examining and experiencing a series of music-oriented festivals in regional and remote Scotland, whether and how music-oriented regional festivals can be authentic, community-inclusive and sustainable.

My personal and professional background has included involvement, as performer, organiser and community member, in events in my Green Triangle region which traverses south-eastern South Australia and south-western Victoria. Green Triangle regional events have faced challenges of financial, logistical and leadership sustainability, genuine regional inclusiveness and coherent artistic definition. Now I wanted to learn about the authenticity, inclusivity and sustainability of what seemed to be successful music-oriented region-based events in a comparable (relatively remote, maritime and cool-climate) location: regional and remote Scotland.

My program was organised around a sequence of festivals spaced from late May to mid-July. My itinerary began in late May with the **Orkney Folk Festival** held in the remote Orkney archipelago. Passing through Ullapool on Scotland's north-eastern coast, I took the opportunity to investigate the local music festival **Loopallu**. Early June saw me at the **Oban Live Festival** held on Scotland's west coast and intended as a celebration of regional music traditions. Mid-June offered the strange experience of New Orleans/Dixieland jazz through the **Kirkcudbright Jazz Festival** in the far south-west of the country, followed by the somewhat eccentric **Kelburn Garden Festival** west of Glasgow. I returned to the Orkneys in late June for the annual **St Magnus Festival** of classical and chamber music, and then headed in early July to the **Ceòlas Festival** of Celtic music and arts located on the Isle of South Uist off Scotland's west coast. Traversing across to the east coast, I was able to see how the **Stonehaven Festival** engaged a small town in managing a memorable music event. Two extraordinary western island festivals in mid-July – the **Tiree Music Festival** on the Isle of Tiree and the **Hebridean Celtic Festival** on the Isle of Lewis – completed my wonderful itinerary.

Each of these Scottish local and regional festivals had its own idiosyncratic features and highlights, reflecting the unique physical geography, social character, history and degree of isolation of each locality. The always-interesting and varied musical experience aside, it was a privilege to witness the dedication and inspiration of local organisers, volunteers, musical performers and loyal festival attendees. Many of these people shared their perspectives, lessons and stories with me.

## Major lessons and conclusions

The diversity of Scottish festivals gives me some confidence that any reasonable event held in any locality necessarily absorbs some of the character of the locality and, in turn, adds to the character of the locality. Spin-off economic effects from looking after the visitors and performers who are accommodated, fed and perambulating locally can only be positive.

The inevitable local variation aside, some themes, lessons or dilemmas also emerged which were common across a number of, and perhaps all, of the festivals. My report identifies and discusses six such matters:

- ***How is the festival managed?***  
Based on my observations, three models emerged: successful festivals with a remunerated Director, successful festivals run by a community-based committee and successful festivals dependent on a key individual.
- ***What is the role of volunteers?***  
Each of the festivals depended, to varying degrees, on voluntary labour. It was striking to observe the number of festivals where dedicated volunteers return to perform the same role year after year.
- ***How does the festival envisage its social/cultural relationship to its host community?***  
Is a local festival to be conceived primarily as a celebration for the local community or is it designed primarily to attract outsiders? While these need not be mutually exclusive, my observations suggest that a generic event with little social connection to the community needs other factors in order for a community to fully support the festival.
- ***Does a successful music-oriented festival need a headlining musical act?***  
Festival organisers' decisions on whether or not to feature a well-known headlining musical act stimulated a range of opinions across the range of stakeholders: organisers, performing musicians, local community members, and audience members.
- ***Does the festival utilise existing infrastructure for venues or does it need a festival-specific site?***  
The Scottish festivals varied in the extent to which they relied exclusively on existing facilities such as local halls or erected their own independent but temporary tents and stages. The latter required contingency planning to adjust for the difficult weather events which can occur in maritime Scotland (as indeed they can in my own Green Triangle region).
- ***Is the festival actively pursuing long term sustainability through multi-generational engagement or an educational dimension?***  
Cross-generational engagement in music festivals emerged as an unanticipated area of interest as I encountered inspirational examples. Some Scottish festivals seemed to have ingrained trans-generational strategies which have positive and long-term cultural implications for sustainability. This engagement, encouragement and education of younger people is not just integral to traditional and folk music and its associated festivals; there seems to be a pride or even obligation in Scotland in considering these things.

## Program

26-29 May 2018

**Orkney Folk Festival**, Stromness, Orkney Islands, Scotland

Activities, contacts and interviews:

- Informal conversations with Festival committee members, volunteers, Stromness locals, selected performers such as Ian and Fraser Bruce from music group *Auld Hats New Heids*; online contact Jenny and Hazel Wrigley (Orkney musicians and business owners), Bob Gibbons (Festival Director).
- Attended various Festival events.

3-4 June 2018

**Organisers, Loopallu Festival**, Ullapool, Scotland

Activities, contacts and interviews:

- Formally interviewed Kevin Peach (harbourmaster and Festival organiser).
- Informal conversations with Jock and Effie (the Ceilidh Place), caravan park owner, staff at the Arch Inn.
- Online contact with Robert Hicks (Loopallu founder and director).

8-9 June 2018

**Oban Live Festival**, Oban, Argyll, Scotland

Activities, contacts and interviews:

- Formally interviewed Alan Scobie (Festival organiser and member of 'Celtic rock' group Skerryvore).
- Informal conversations with John McLaughlan (stage and equipment manager), volunteers, stallholders, selected performers, local community members.
- Email contact with Naomi Hoolahan (organising committee), Mike Rushby (journalist).
- Attended various Festival events.

14-17 June 2018

**Kirkcudbright Jazz Festival**, Kirkcudbright, Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland

Activities, contacts and interviews:

- Formally interviewed Leon McCaig (Festival Director).
- Informal conversations with organising committee members, volunteers, selected performers, local business owners.
- Attended various Festival events.

18-19 June 2018

**Kelburn Garden Festival**, North Ayrshire, Scotland

Activities, contacts and interviews:

- Informal conversations onsite with Frodo and Luka (festival organisers).
- Discussion with Largs shopkeepers and locals.
- Attended various Festival events and activities.

22-26 June 2018

**St Magnus Festival**, Kirkwall, Orkney Islands, Scotland

Activities, contacts and interviews:

- Formally interviewed Festival Director Alasdair Nicolson and Chair of Festival Committee Leslie Burgher.
- Informal conversations with volunteers, selected performers and local business owners.
- Online contact with Festival performers 'the Wrigley Sisters' (Jenny and Hazel Wrigley).
- Attended various Festival events.

2-4 July 2018

**Ceòlas Festival**, Daliburgh, Isle of South Uist, Scotland

Activities, contacts and interviews:

- Visited site and observed Festival-associated workshops.
- Informal conversations with festival organisers, musicians and locals
- Online contact with local music identities Iain MacDonald and Paul MacCallum.
- Visited University of Highlands and Islands campus and the Kildonan Folk Museum and Cultural Centre.

6-8 July 2018

**Stonehaven Music Festival**, Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire, Scotland

Activities, contacts and interviews:

- Informal conversations with organising committee chair Charlie West and committee members, volunteers, selected performers.
- Online contact with committee secretary Meg Findlay.
- Attended various Festival events.

12-14 July 2018

**Tiree Music Festival, Isle of Tiree, Scotland**

Activities, contacts and interviews:

- Formal interview with Daniel Gillespie (Festival organiser and member of Skerryvore).
- Informal conversations with Stewart MacLennan and others from organising committee, volunteers, police officers, selected performers such as Martyn Joseph and music group Elephant Sessions.
- Attended various Festival events.

17 July 2018

**Hebridean Celtic Festival**, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, Scotland

Activities, contacts and interviews:

- Formal Interviews with Festival Board of Directors member Gayle Findlay and Festival media officer Stacey Ma'har.
- Informal conversations with Festival Director Caroline McLennan, site manager, stage manager, volunteers, selected performers, local community members.
- Email exchange with Festival media manager John Ross.
- Attended various Festival events.

## **Report**

The purpose of this Fellowship was to learn, by examining and experiencing a series of music-oriented festivals in regional and remote Scotland, whether and how music-oriented regional festivals can be authentic, community-inclusive and sustainable. It was my surmise that, particularly for regions facing uncertainty, community-based music-oriented festivals could provide a force for resilience and renewal. My Scottish itinerary was planned and shaped to examine this supposition and to learn from the experience of Scotland's remarkable range of local and regional music-oriented festival events.

My personal and professional background has included involvement, as performer, organiser and community member, in events in my Green Triangle region. The Green Triangle is an identity adopted by the cross-border forestry, fishing, dairying and tourism region which stretches along the coast from Mount Gambier SA to Portland Victoria and inland to Hamilton. As it happens, I live on one side of the border, in south-eastern South Australia, and mostly work on the other side, in south-western Victoria.

In my observation, Green Triangle regional events have faced challenges of financial, logistical and leadership sustainability, genuine regional inclusiveness and coherent artistic definition. In a Monash University doctoral thesis, I had explored community music and festivals in the region, documenting the region's needs, its festival/event potential and impediments that needed to be addressed. I had reviewed earlier Australian work on local festivals and regional music.

Now I wanted to learn about the authenticity, inclusivity and sustainability of what seemed to be successful music-oriented region-based events in a comparable (relatively remote, maritime and cool-climate) location: regional and remote Scotland. My program was organised around a sequence of festivals spaced, across this wonderful landscape of islands, ports and highlands, from late May to mid-July 2018.

26-29 May 2018

### **Orkney Folk Festival**

My itinerary began with the Orkney Folk Festival held in Stromness, located in the remote Orkney archipelago. The four-day Festival promised to be a particularly relevant model for my interest in sustainable events in relatively remote coastal regional towns. Based on folk music and folk dance, the event has been sustained successfully for about thirty-five years despite its fairly remote location. It was created at a time when regional economic and social decline coincided with a diminution of interest in traditional regional music. The success of the Festival has evidently reflected, and contributed to, a revival in both dimensions.

Stromness, the site of the Festival, is an historic fishing port with a permanent population of about 2,200 people. Its most famous artistic offspring is poet George MacKay Brown; I came to appreciate Brown's spatially-aware use of language and evocative imagery as indicative of the sort of place Stromness is. The town is also known for being close to celebrated Neolithic sites such as Skara Brae.

Facilitating access to relatively remote places is one of the challenges facing festival organisers and potential attendees. I took advantage of the 1½-hour ferry ride from Scotland's northern port of Thurso to survey and talk to people who were travelling to the Festival from the mainland. There seemed to be two main cohorts: a cohort of folk musicians aged 20–30 (some from as far south as England) who were staying for the Festival and were looking forward to 'the sessions' (informal music jams), plus a cohort of good-natured people aged 40–60 from just

across the water in mainland Scotland. The latter were coming to absorb the atmosphere for the day, intending to pub-crawl but not attend Festival events. Both cohorts obviously would contribute to the local economy in their own ways, and they intermingled due to the free folk music in the pubs.

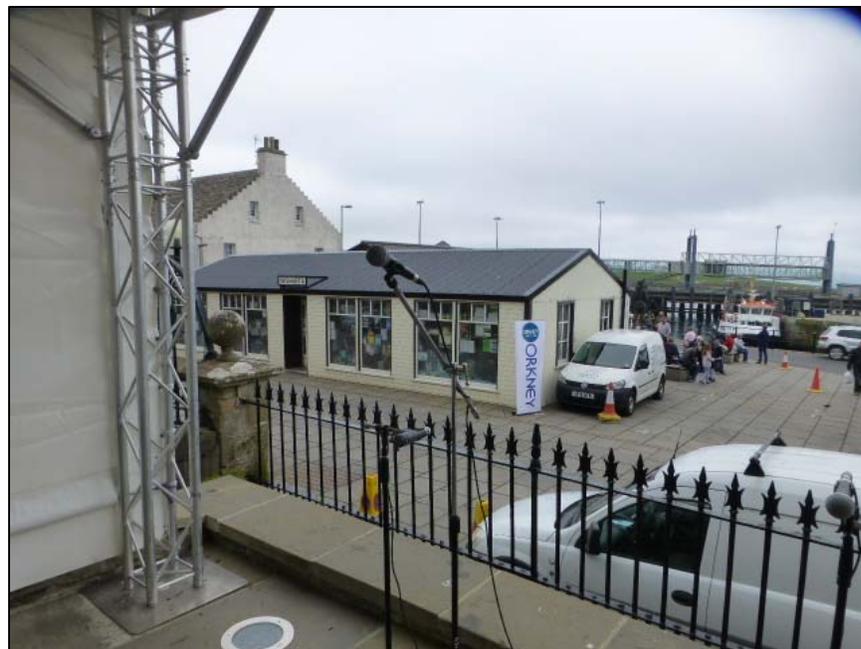
Because Stromness is a quirky, stone-built town with alarmingly narrow, cobbled higgledy-piggledy streets, the whole town is full of pedestrians through the Festival period. The town seems accustomed to this and has several such events spread throughout the calendar. I was interested that 'shopping week' held earlier in the year was of just as much interest to the locals as the Festival itself; it reminded me of the similarly popular 'July midnight sales' shopping event in Portland Victoria where the Upwelling Festival is held in November. This enthusiasm is perhaps indicative of a community interested in events directly relevant to them as distinct from higher-profile events catering to 'outsiders'. This being said, the town of Stromness seemed very proud of its Folk Festival; it does not suffer from the degree of local indifference characterising some Festivals on my itinerary (most notably in Kirkcudbright as discussed later in this report).



*Orkney Folk Festival information board*

The Orkney Folk Festival advertised more than fifty acts. Of these, a clear majority (around thirty) were local Orkney performers. The remainder were mostly based elsewhere in Scotland and the Shetlands, with five from elsewhere in Britain and three from overseas. This breakdown reflects the structure and appeal of the Festival; first and foremost, it is a celebration of local ('Orkadian') folk music.

This well-curated line-up of small-scale, quality acts attracted people from afar, as did the Festival's strong reputation. Other musicians who 'came across' for the camaraderie without a formal association with the Festival program were providing free entertainment through various unscheduled sessions (a phenomenon which I was to learn is quite common with western Scottish events such as in my later exposure to the Hebridean Celtic Festival). Impromptu events included 'the gathering' (a celebration of Orcadian musicians on Saturday afternoon) and 'the stomp' (a loud and energetic dance and music session open to all on Saturday night). They seemed to gel the whole festival together and to provide a sense of inclusion for everyone.



*Two views of the trial outdoor ('outdoor') stage, Orkney Folk Festival*

For the 2018 Festival, organisers were trialling a small outdoor venue, a risky venture given the Orkneys' notorious wind and weather unpredictability. This venue was advertised as 'brand new', to be utilised 'weather permitting', having 'sign-ups, pipe band parades' and 'local groups, and having a *peedie* (meaning 'little') program through the weekend. It was to bring people into the town square by the docks where organisers had organised food vans. (In previous years, keeping up food supplies in the pubs and cafes had apparently been an issue; rushes at lunch and dinner had stretched capacity and staff.) This outdoor stage was not relied upon; it was more a bonus space. And the food vendors bore the brunt of any weather risks. So if the weather deteriorated, the Festival would tick along in the pubs and halls. As it transpired, the weather was fine and the small outdoor stage was a success. It will be interesting to see if, in the future, the Festival organisers begin to have increased reliance on this hub, taking risks with inclement weather.

3-4 June 2018

**Loopallu Festival, Ullapool, Scotland**

Passing through Ullapool on mainland Scotland's north-west coast after leaving the Orkney islands, I took the opportunity to investigate the town's Loopallu festival. The strange name is simply Ullapool spelt backwards.

The festival itself is held in September, beyond my itinerary period. It had piqued my interest as a boutique event in a small-ish town that had in the past attracted well-known acts such as The Stranglers, Mumford and Sons, and Franz Ferdinand. The headliners for 2018 were scheduled to be the Bluetones as well as Alabama 3 (known for the theme song from the television epic *The Sopranos*). Loopallu's organisers had commented intriguingly: 'On paper, they said it wouldn't work, a festival in late September in a remote village on the West Coast of Scotland 60 miles from the nearest town, but that was ten years ago'.<sup>1</sup> Since 2004, the music focus has been supplemented by a literary dimension coinciding with an Ullapool Book Festival, a complementarity which potentially interested me for possible Australian emulation.

I discovered that the Loopallu festival organiser/director, while not running his Ullapool pub, was an agent and manager for musical acts, and often away organising tours and gigs elsewhere in the UK. So that explained the festival's curation. But the most interesting story turned out to be the festival's venue.

The festival resided for many years in spare land attached to, and owned by, the local caravan park. Attendees in those years could stay in the town or in the caravan park. There had evidently been a deterioration in attendees' respectful treatment of the camping space over several years; firm rules such as 'no gas fires' were being flouted in an overcrowded camping space. There was also an increased number of 'young people coming to camp and to party' but not attending the festival itself. Many of these campers brought food and alcohol from home and didn't enter the town, providing minimal economic benefit to Ullapool. The final straw seems to have occurred when a gas cooker set fire to a tent and caused chaos in the campground. The festival was asked to move on and was in danger of disappearing altogether. Indeed, it seems the caravan park was so scarred by all this that it is no longer open during the festival, the owners choosing to take their holidays elsewhere that week.

Enter Kevin Peach, Ullapool's harbourmaster (and my main source for the observations above). Kevin had been a long-time fan of the festival, and he offered the use of his pier as a venue. Despite a few issues with the pier surface being damaged by the Festival's marquee poles and

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<sup>1</sup> Loopallu, 'About', <<http://www.loopallu.co.uk/about.aspx>>

some fishermen having to refuel at a smaller pier around the bay for the weekend (issues about which Kevin is very philosophical), this appears to be a serendipitous arrangement.

The festival has had to reduce its size a little, which suits the town better as there is a shortage of local accommodation during the event. Because there is no camping (though there is facility for campervans in some places) and the tickets sell out quickly, the demographic has shifted to one that spends more money in the town, mainly through accommodation and dining. The audience is also apparently 'more appreciative' in that it is much harder to attend the festival at the last minute on a whim. It has given Loopallu a somewhat iconic aspect as well: a big blue marquee jutting into the loch and emanating music would provide an impressive and memorable festival experience.

8-9 June 2018

### **Oban Live Festival**

Whereas the Orkney Folk Festival is now decades-old, the Oban Live Festival was first held as recently as 2016. Oban is located on Scotland's west coast. Oban Live, with an exclusive music focus but with a broader range of Fringe events attached to it, features local, national and occasional international folk artists working in genres representing a fusion of traditional and pop music.

I learned that Oban Live is a hugely successful event run by the members of the Argyll 'Celtic rock' band Skerryvore (one of whose members, Daniel Gillespie, turned out to also run the later Tiree Festival). It is a site-specific event set up at Oban's Mossmon Stadium which offers a vast open series of lawned sporting grounds. This year the organisers had been asked to put down protective interlocking plastic panels to protect the grass, adding a considerable expense to the festival's budget. On asking a groundsman whether the panels were effective, he explained to me that it actually gives the grass a week's rest from any summer dryness, and the grass will be better than the other fields after a week or so. This was the most weather-vulnerable of the festivals on my itinerary but again, fortunately for the festival organisers, it was mostly clear skies for the weekend of the 2018 festival.

Should a festival have a drawcard act, or use the money that would be needed to attract it for a different purpose? It was interesting to hear different perspectives around Oban Live on this 'headliner' issue. Oban Live has had popular acts such as The Proclaimers in the past. I was fortunate that in 2018 the organisers were experimenting by having no headliner and I was therefore privy to discussions surrounding this. Some people thought not having a headliner was good; some did not.

The organisers had based their decision to not have a headliner on audience feedback indicating that there was little interest in expensive chart-toppers because Oban Live is seen fundamentally as a celebration of Argyll music. The organisers themselves say 'our vision for Oban Live is not only to celebrate that infectious "west coast" spirit and culture but to also welcome people from all over the world to experience and enjoy that with us'.<sup>2</sup> Did the absence of a chart-topper act dissuade people from coming to Oban and therefore undermine organiser objectives? Based on many conversations and anecdotal evidence from musicians, organisers, audiences and non-attendees, I would say no, not at all.

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<sup>2</sup> Oban Live program, <<http://obanlive.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2018-WEB-PROGRAMME-1.pdf>>



*Oban Live main stage*

*This image is by Mike Rushby, later to be a neighbouring camper at the Tiree Festival<sup>3</sup>*

There was praise from long-time attendees and first-time attendees for what music there was – mostly very well-known Argyll bands which in themselves have a high profile. There was some negativity from younger people complaining about ‘why pay to see bands I can see for free at community events and pubs?’. Organisers claimed that ticket sales were up but, as is common in ticketed festivals, ticket sales opened up long before the line-up was announced. Some early ticket-buyers, perhaps not surprisingly, seem to have been the most perturbed about the absence of a headliner, though this reaction seemed to be associated with a younger cohort looking forward to something ‘different’ or internationally recognisable.

The Skerryvore organisers are proud to have kept to the same budget as the previous year (approx. AUD \$1 million). By not having to pay for an internationally recognised headliner, the event was apparently able to not only pay a bit more money to each of its twelve acts and cover increased costs for infrastructure but was also able to build on a project that most agreed was more valuable: ‘Sons of Argyll’, where twenty-four traditional Scottish musicians come together to pay tribute to local songwriters and musicians who had recently passed away. This was arguably just as unifying an experience for the audience as a well-known headliner but with a much deeper and resonating purpose.

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<sup>3</sup> Rushby, M., ‘Festival Review: Oban Live 2018 – small but great!’, MNPR Magazine, 15 June 2018, <<https://mnprmagazine.com/festival-review-oban-live-2018-small-but-great/>>

14-17 June 2018

### **Kirkcudbright Jazz Festival**

The Kirkcudbright Jazz festival marked its 21st annual performance in 2018. Kirkcudbright is a relatively remote town of about 3500 people located at the mouth of the River Dee in Scotland's far south-west. While obviously specialising in jazz rather than traditional music, the way that the Festival temporarily takes over the town (including a street parade and a free concert in the Parish Church) evidently gives it some local authenticity. My own nearest town of Mount Gambier is becoming recognised as a jazz destination, anchored in the James Morrison Academy and the longstanding Generations in Jazz annual event, so understanding the persistence of the Kirkcudbright festival promised to be especially instructive.

Should local music festivals aim to bring people into the community with some sort of universal or generic musical style (such as jazz) or should they focus on celebrating something distinctive about the community itself? These are not necessarily mutually exclusive ideas: events such as Oban Live, while celebrating the Argyll and West Coast community, are nonetheless successful in attracting lots of 'outsiders'. Sometimes a local festival finds a niche that seems almost random in its choosing: the quirky Elvis Presley Festival in Forbes NSW springs to mind. Such is the Kirkcudbright Jazz Festival: it is essentially a New Orleans/Dixieland-style jazz festival held in the southwest corner of Scotland.

As if to display how effectively the whole town (rather than a prominent single site) is utilised for the event, the Festival proved a little difficult to find; at first all I found was a sandwich board in the park in the centre of town. I found live-music cafés featuring jazz bands but it turned out that they were not officially part of the Festival (though, as I later discovered, they were still organised as side shows with Festival support). Eventually I asked directions to one of the advertised venues and found a wonderful jazz ensemble in a small but elaborate church. The very mature audience was appreciative and the atmosphere convivial.

The Festival is run by Leon McCaig who heads a committee of dedicated people continuing the vision of the festival conceiver, 'local businessman and jazz fan, Ally Thompson'.<sup>4</sup> Leon at first proved difficult to find, and I kept missing him by seconds. When I eventually did find Leon, he was kind and affable, taking me under his wing to explain the history and management of the Festival.

The financial aspects are interesting. The Jazz Festival is a registered charity under the UK's Gift Aid Scheme (a tax incentive applying to donations). It operates on an annual budget of about AUD\$50,000 with the majority of its funding from sponsorships, small grants, philanthropic patronage, tickets and advertising. This year the organisers had managed to safeguard the Festival's financial future by having two years' budget in the kitty so that planning and fundraising are not as tightly co-dependent.

Though not a funding source for the Jazz Festival, as an aside Leon explained that there are two charity shops in the town; the proceeds from one go towards maintaining the town's public swimming pool and the other funds the very popular Summer Festivities. The Summer Festivities comprise a six-week program of music, events, and diversions of which the Jazz Festival is simply one element; there are historic walks, art exhibitions, piping displays, a car rally and a very popular plastic duck race where thousands of plastic ducks with lottery numbers are set in the bay in a race to ride the tide. As in Stromness, the locals were perhaps more enthusiastic about these other celebrations for and by locals rather than the Jazz Festival itself.

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<sup>4</sup> Kirkcudbright Jazz Festival, 'A brief history of the festival', <<http://www.kirkcudbrightjazzfestival.co.uk/jazz.asp?ID=2>>



*'A wonderful jazz ensemble in a small but elaborate church'*



*Kirkcudbright's two charity shops*

In stark contrast to the artistic quality of some festival program booklets (notably for the later St Magnus Festival), the Kirkcudbright Jazz Festival program is a practical object resembling a small phone book. Leon laughingly explained: 'We'll put anyone in the program if they pay...; give me twenty quid and I'll put your name in next year's!' Leon's program is replete with the names of patrons, sponsors, supporting foundations, and all manner of B&Bs, restaurants, galleries, clothes shops and general 'thank you's' for gratuities. As a gesture, Leon sends free tickets to Festival sponsors but has little fear this will put much burden on venue capacity as 'they rarely come ... they may come to one or two things the first year, but then they don't really bother'.

The Festival organisers estimate that the event generates around AUD\$120,000 for the local community. The town's limited accommodation is invariably booked out. An interesting strategy to help with this is Leon's organisation of the musician's accommodation: he utilises rental houses and cabins in neighbouring villages, and has a team of people to ferry the musicians in and out. This frees up in-town accommodation for visiting audiences.

Major concerns for Leon include identifying a successor who might take the reins of organising from him, as he would like to step back in coming years. He is wondering how to attract younger people to the Festival as he has noticed in recent years some of the older people from the UK and abroad, who once came annually, no longer attend.

22-26 June 2018

**St Magnus Festival**, Kirkwall, Orkney Islands, Scotland

I returned to the Orkneys for the annual St Magnus Festival, named for a 12th-Century Viking-era patron saint of the Orkneys. My St Magnus Festival experience was a privilege, but it was quite a different beast to the other festivals. A prestigious and high-profile celebration of classical, chamber, choral and new music, the St Magnus Festival was started in the Orkneys in 1977 by composer Sir Peter Maxwell Davis. Local venues are utilised. I attended a moving performance of Rachmaninov's *Vespers* in the St Magnus Cathedral. This year's festival also saw innovative ideas such as having performances on a visiting tall ship.

The 2018 iteration was evidently proving to be challenging for organiser Alasdair Nicolson. Funding from Creative Scotland was not approved until much later than he would have liked. This meant that a masterclass program, which had been a previous feature, was unable to be organised for the 2018 Festival. Some European groups which Alasdair had tentatively booked could not be guaranteed their fee in time for them to commit, and alternate acts therefore had to be found. Fortunately for Alasdair and the Festival, they are now on a special three-year cycle of grant funding, which should make things easier for the next two festivals.

The official program for the St Magnus Festival is a high-quality booklet focused entirely on performers and performances with none of the sponsorship acknowledgements or advertising which are featured, for example, in the Kirkcudbright document. Alasdair Nicolson explained to me that the St Magnus booklet was designed to be a beautiful object incorporating Festival information and not 'an advertising space for sponsors... they can do that in other ways'.

The Festival from its inception has featured educational and masterclass components pitched at aspiring music professionals as well as classical-music-inspired amateurs, with some admirable involvement of local talent and young participants.<sup>5</sup> Another interesting element of the festival is

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<sup>5</sup> St Magnus International Festival, 'Programme: Community and Education', <<https://www.stmagnusfestival.com/community-and-education>>

its outreach to smaller nearby communities. (It reminded me of a discernible problem in my own Green Triangle region, with some residents in smaller outlying communities displaying indifference towards, and occasional resentment of, celebrations that seem to be overly centralised in larger towns such as Mount Gambier and Portland).



*A St Magnus Festival performance*

I encountered some interesting logistical challenges in relation to the outreach event 'MagFest heads West' that was to see a sampler of the Festival perform in Stromness (the town that I had visited some weeks earlier for the Orkney Folk Festival, and a half-hour bus ride from Kirkwall). The event was scheduled to run in Stromness until 9pm but the last public bus back to Kirkwall (where I was staying) departs at 8pm. All enquiries about options were met with suggestions of trying to garner one of the few taxis on the island, or to find someone to carpool with; while a problem for a visitor like me, presumably the purpose of the event was simply to show Stromness locals a piece of the Kirkwall Festival. The Stromness outreach event was to be a large outdoor affair; due to bad weather and high wind, it was cancelled. Some musicians who were to play in Stromness instead played in a hall in Kirkwall that night; because it was an unofficial event not a relocation (and not covered by the Festival's insurance), refunds were offered to all ticket-holders.

29 June – 2 July 2018  
**Kelburn Garden Festival**

The most eccentric festival on my list, the Kelburn Garden Party Festival, is an annual four-day festival. Established in 2009, the event features a range of musical styles with associated artistic performances, all set in an outdoor setting in the grounds of a 13th Century castle located in North Ayrshire in west-central Scotland.

It was instructive to see how the Kelburn Garden party operated in terms of parking, ticketing, gates and the like, and talking with organisers was interesting. However, it became clear that Kelburn was not going to offer a particularly useful experience in terms of learning how one might present an authentic portrayal of a local community. The Festival was mostly about 'expressing yourself' and 'partying' and, as people arrived, it became clear that the Festival was mostly for people from Glasgow and larger cities to come and kick their heels up in an artistic and bohemian setting.

Talking with organisers Frodo and Luka confirmed this impression. They told me about similar Festivals such as Netherlands' 'Down the Rabbit Hole' that attracts a similar clientele. These psychedelic festivals have had some success in Australia, and can be useful for bringing sub-cultures and groups with similar interests together. Rainbow Serpent, Symbiosis Gathering, Earthcore and Burning Man Festivals are examples of this, where fire, dance, rave music, nature, mythology and psychedelia can be blended together into what is sometimes called a gathering rather than a festival. While this may serve the needs of those who are gathering, these events (the Kelburn Garden Party included) do not take place in towns. A less fettered and pre-prescribed space is used such as natural bushland, a beach, a forest or a desert.



*One of the less eccentric Kelburn Garden festival venues*

In Kelburn's case the setting was quite lovely, and the castle was nice-looking though inaccessible. Some of the ideas for different spaces that were weather-proof were quite charming, from erected sail-cloth, to sculptural fronds, to little shacks where different drinks could be purchased and where a different theme was evident (i.e. 'frappes and chill-out music'). However the Garden Party itself reflected nothing of the space or character of the nearby town of Largs or of any nearby community.

If the rain comes, apparently it is embraced as one might embrace a downpour in a tropical village while on holiday. This is another example of the stoic Scottish whatever-the-weather attitude.

Organisers at Kelburn suggested I might have been interested in another event with which they had been involved called the Eden Festival. I learned that this four-day annual event takes place in an isolated meadow 30 km north of Dumfries in south-western Scotland. The Eden Festival, which had taken place this year on the same weekend as Oban Live which I attended, had been mentioned by a few people during my trip, some of them accomplished musicians who recommended it highly.

I drove past the Eden Festival site a couple of weeks after visiting Kelburn, and the signs were still up. I researched Eden online and, though more music-oriented in nature than Kelburn and no doubt a lovely thing (it was short-listed for the Best Family Festival Award at the 2014 UK Festival Awards), it still seemed a gathering of like-minded outsiders and nothing to do with the local community. Perhaps turning this into a virtue, the Eden Festival appears to want to have very little negative impact on the area; the handful of locals in the nearby town of St Ann's are probably glad that the Festival organisers aspire for 'green' carbon-neutrality, similar in ethos to many Australian Festivals such as the Woodford Folk Festival and WOMADelaide.



*The signs still up at the Eden Festival's rural venue*

2-4 July 2018

**Ceòlas Festival**, Daliburgh, Isle of South Uist, Scotland

The Ceòlas Festival was the smallest festival in the smallest community that I was able to visit. Based on an education and participatory theme including 'summer schools' (offering 'unbeatable tuition in Gaelic music, dance and language from the best traditional musicians in

Scotland and Canada<sup>6</sup>), it is somewhat special. It demonstrates that, however humble the beginnings of an idea, if it is something of intrinsic social value and is built by committed and dedicated people, an idea can become a rock-solid reality.

I was surprised that a place as rich in Neolithic history, textile culture and folk music like South Uist struggles economically. The tourism industry is, however, less than robust notwithstanding the direct ferry connection with Oban. The main form of tourism comprises birdwatchers and trout fishers whose presence serves South Uist well. But for an island with seminal works such as Margaret Fay Shaw's collection of women's 'waulking' songs, it seems surprising that its more historical and cultural aspects are not more broadly appreciated in economic terms. (Incidentally, 'waulking' is the rhythmic soaking and thumping involved in the creation of the woven tweed for which some of these islands, and especially nearby Harris, have been celebrated).



*Local Ceòlas publicity*

Ceòlas works under the Feochan banner and has built up an organising team of a few dozen individuals who run the summer schools, plan events, work with the Lews Castle campus of the University of Highlands and Islands (located 50km north on the bridge-connected island of Benbecula), and work towards a strong and sustainable Uist music future. Part of their strength

<sup>6</sup> Ceòlas Summer School, <<http://www.ceolas.co.uk/events/summer-school/>>

is to have quality connections with ‘the global Gaelic Diaspora’<sup>7</sup> with (typically Canadian-sourced) guest tutors from Cape Breton and Nova Scotia where some Gaelic traditions turn out to have persisted more authentically than in Scotland itself.

That Ceòlas is low-key is perhaps its strength. It reminds me in this regard of some southern Australian music ‘summer schools’ such as the now-defunct Under the Southern Cross camp near Kyneton, Victoria (run by Launceston-based organisers) and the Brucknell band camp near Timboon, Victoria, which has focussed on mentoring young people who play brass and woodwind instruments.

The Ceòlas-associated *ceilidhs* (the ubiquitous name in Scotland for social gatherings organised around traditional and participatory folk music and dancing) at this event are a highlight, and all feel included. I spoke to some people from mainland Scotland who come every year just for such evening and community events despite never having learned an instrument. This spirit of interest and inclusivity is at the heart of the Ceòlas Summer School. This year they even had workshops on the non-musical but culturally-authentic themes of foraging for food like seaweed and shellfish along the shore!

Talking to organisers also involved with the Moladh Uibhist, which is designed to teach Gaelic songs (specifically music from Eriskay and the Uists) to outsiders, I discovered that there is much more they feel they can do to facilitate this interest. The three days of Moladh Uibhist see enthusiastic learners sitting in a circle sharing an experience together, discussing history and context and being a part of a living culture.

6-8 July 2018

**Stonehaven Music Festival**, Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire, Scotland

The Stonehaven Folk Festival features traditional and contemporary folk music. It was established in 1989, so has a record of nearly thirty years of sustainability. Stonehaven is a north-eastern Scottish coastal town of about 12,000 residents (comparable in population to Portland Victoria, where I work) though it is relatively close to the larger city of Aberdeen (population around 200,000 people).

The Stonehaven Folk Festival turned out to be absolutely a town-run festival. A dynamic and enthusiastic team had brought together a music program that was inclusive, broad and intimate. The town was alive with the festival. Being so close to Aberdeen (a mere thirty kilometres away) makes it easy to attract large contingents of visitors. Because the Festival is well run with a broad program, these visitors return year after year.

There was a visible embracing of the festival by the town – an example being the local Men’s Shed running a temporary festival campground with a free cooked breakfast for guests each morning – and, according to several people, there are strong economic rewards. This was put largely down to having many people staying in Stonehaven (even the caravan park is booked out well in advance) and also to the many who prefer a day trip from Aberdeen.

The proximity to Aberdeen makes Stonehaven different to the more remote Festivals with which I am most familiar, but I still gleaned many ideas from my visit. I was impressed at how the organisers have grown the festival from a small folk-music festival to what still has folk roots and large *ceilidh* components but also caters to many other tastes. The most innovative idea, at least from my perspective, was not in fact folk-music-driven.

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<sup>7</sup> Traditional Arts Culture Scotland, ‘Ceòlas Summer School 2016’,  
<[https://tracscotland.org/traditional\\_arts\\_eve/ceolas-summer-school-2016/](https://tracscotland.org/traditional_arts_eve/ceolas-summer-school-2016/)>

A group of young local musicians who are 'into metal and indie music' had asked organisers if they could be involved in the Festival somehow. Rather than say no, which would have left a younger contingent of locals feeling disenfranchised, or say yes and include music of a style or quality at odds with long-time festival attendees' expectations, the Festival organisers did a rather clever thing. They let this young group (who are very organised and driven, according to my organiser contact Kerry) have use of 'the Drill Hall', paid for a security guard and provided an additional budget for whatever program the group wanted. The group was thrilled. It immediately began organising a rock/metal/indie event involving local mates' bands and visiting bands from Aberdeen. This was not designated to be part of the official Stonehaven Festival; rather, it ran concurrently as a Fringe event. This independence apparently suited the young organising team rather well; they were wanting to attract people from Aberdeen and would do all their promoting and networking through Facebook and already-linked social media contacts. The net effect was not only to add another layer to a rather dynamic township's festival period but also to give enthusiastic local young people a meaningful, exciting and capacity-building experience in their own town.

12-14 July 2018

### **Tiree Music Festival**

The three-day Tiree Music Festival takes place on the small Hebridean island of Tiree. It was founded in 2010 by two locals (Stewart MacLennan and Daniel Gillespie, the latter being the member of music group Skerryvore whom I encountered in Oban). They are assisted by 'an army of volunteers'.<sup>8</sup> It has proceeded to win a swag of event and tourism awards. It limits itself to two thousand attendees to keep the event 'small and intimate'. The organisers are explicit in regarding the event as an economic contribution to the island community, with 95% of attendees being visitors. They publish an impact report<sup>9</sup> which is (to my knowledge) uncommon and in itself a potential model for Australian events.

Tiree was the sole 'camping-accommodation-only' Festival in my schedule. It takes place in a purpose-constructed site, with a variety of unpowered camping options from motor-home sites to 'glamping tents'. (The glamping was new this year and sold out immediately, and organisers will increase this aspect as they have bought the tents and equipment as an organisation, and financially it will put money back into the Festival within a very short time-frame). The site is isolated, there is no Wifi, but had perhaps the broadest age-range of ticket-holders of my Scottish experience: roughly 50% in the 25-55 years of age bracket, with a fairly even split of those below and above that age (according to organisers and past surveys).

Access to Tiree is by ferry only, with the infrequent commercial 8-seater plane flight utilised as much as possible to bring artists and festival team-members back and forth. The flight used to be on a 16-seater plane, but Tiree's little airport had evidently been downgraded from the status of being sufficiently important to warrant an employed security guard. According to some arcane regulation, this meant that it was only permitted to serve 8-seater aircraft at a maximum.

I asked organiser Daniel if the festival could itself have paid for a temporary airport security guard for the week and in that way temporarily facilitate larger-capacity planes; he made it very clear that it is 'a Scottish Air Traffic thing' and there is nothing a private citizen can do anything about. He had looked at booking private charter ferries, but the arrangement with CalMac, the

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<sup>8</sup> Tiree Music Festival, 'About TMF', <<http://tireemusicfestival.co.uk/about-tmf/>>

<sup>9</sup> MKA Economics, 'Tiree Music Festival 2016: Visitor Survey and Economic Impact Report', <<http://tireemusicfestival.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/TMF2016VisitorSurveyFinalReport.pdf>>

ubiquitous Scottish ferry operator, is quite a good one apparently. It represents yet another of the many things to which Scottish island festivals must simply adjust.



*An impromptu performance on the ferry by travellers to the Tiree Music Festival*

Tiree's dependence on ferry access has ramifications for bringing in supplies and dealing with medical emergencies. Even the police must have a contingency plan if there is trouble as there is no facility to lock people up on the island. According to 'Scott', a police officer in attendance, the festival used to pay about the equivalent of AUD\$15,000 for a police presence which included the deployment of several officers, police vans, and accommodation and living costs, and some very time-intensive contingency planning. Scott explained that he had managed to cut this charge to less than about AUD \$10,000, a concession which he is also trying to put in effect for other western Scotland festivals and events, as he believes that such events are 'a good thing all round' and should be supported as much as possible.

The Tiree Music Festival organisation has become incorporated as a not-for-profit entity. It regards the event as having 'hit capacity' and 'the perfect size', so they are now 'tweaking it'. The festival had the best on-site food of any festival I attended; it did so by utilising 'Argyll Food' which is a collective of small, ethical stallholders who use local produce and production.

The 2015 Festival three years ago had been a particularly amazing experience, which clearly tested organisers, audiences and Tiree locals but also brought them together. That year, audiences began arriving through the week, and the whole Festival was set for a great weekend. However, the Friday saw hurricane-strength winds, obliging the organisers to collapse the 'big top' tent. All the campers' tents were blown away and camping debris was strewn around the island. According to organiser Daniel Gillespie, 1700 people were evacuated from the campsite.



*Tiree Music Festival site and surrounds, by day and night  
The upper image, capturing me indulging in a non-musical art form, is by Mike Rushby<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> Rushby, M, 'Festival review: Tiree music festival 2018 – small, beautiful and brilliant', *MNPR Magazine*, 31 July 2018, <<https://mnprrmagazine.com/festival-review-tiree-music-festival-2018-small-beautiful-and-brilliant/>>

Word was spread via Facebook, and Tiree locals began arriving and offering to take people in for shelter. The church and school offered similar assistance. The hurricane blew itself out and the weather looked like it was going to be fine for the weekend. Organisers contacted the Tesco supermarket in Oban (back on the mainland) and asked if they could buy as many tents as possible with as much discount as possible; Tesco managers, having heard of the traumatic events on Tiree, donated a huge number of tents. Argos Supplies did likewise with camping equipment. CalMac Ferries offered to transport all this to Tiree for free, and the event was the biggest news in Oban that weekend.

This story has become something of a legend and Tiree Music Festival branding has embraced it. Slogans such as 'TMF – whatever the weather' and 'I survived Hurricane TMF' appeared on websites and merchandise, and several Scottish Arts and Tourism Awards acknowledged the festival's resilience. Some visitors to the festival still stay with their 2015 rescuers and have built ongoing friendships.

Festival organisers feel confident that they can now cope with anything. They work on robust contingency plans reviewed every morning of the festival. There is also a support services briefing with organisers at which concerns from any service is voiced and addressed.



*'We survived TMF 2015. Our tents didn't'.*

17-19 July 2018

**Hebridean Celtic Festival, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, Scotland**

The Hebridean Celtic Festival at Stornoway has, since its inception in 1996, developed into an iconic event for a diverse audience, made up of long-time returners, first-time attendees, Lewis ex-pats, international visitors and a broad age spectrum.

Festival Director Caroline McLennan explained that the Festival's audience numbers had grown from about 1,200 attendees in its foundation year to reach around 16,000 by 2005. A downturn, perhaps a consequence of the 'financial crash' (Caroline's words) followed a few years later, but a strong recovery has since been evident. An additional stage was added for the event's fifteenth anniversary in 2015, and a smaller acoustic stage added last year. As Caroline explains it, 'we have slowly been growing and adding items to the site to ensure we continue to attract a family audience. Obviously the infrastructure and budget had to grow alongside and managing that has been the trick'.

The venue, in beautiful grounds very close to the town centre, featured for the 2018 event a large marquee as well as a *very* large marquee. The large marquee (also used at Tìree Music Festival and scheduled to be used by Ullapool's Loopallu festival) is dedicated to acts from the north-west of Scotland. The *very* large marquee is for drawcard acts which included some more established local acts and always has a drawcard headliner act. The organisers believe that a drawcard headliner is imperative to the festival's profile and cited reasons such as the ex-pat returners and publicity as contributing factors.



*The Hebridean Celtic Festival: ticket sales on the ferry to Stornoway*

This year's choice of Deacon Blue as the headline act was a very impressive addition to the Festival's line-up. The organisers and volunteers were astonished that Caroline McLennan, the Festival Director, managed to secure such a well-known Scottish act, famous for its hits in the 1980s and 1990s and in the middle of a tour celebrating its 30-year career. A media report revealed Caroline herself to be just as excited: 'Deacon Blue are a huge, iconic band whose music transcends age barriers and I can't wait to see them on the festival stage... I am over the moon they have chosen HebCelt to be part of this milestone in their career'.<sup>11</sup>

I went to the Festival site the day before its official opening to observe a well-organised volunteer-staff orientation. Later conversations with these volunteers during the festival itself brought to my attention the importance of such an orientation to the festival's successful organisation.

There were core volunteer staff in the festival, ranging from a site manager (who first attended the festival as a teenager, has worked in a family construction company and has been Celtic Festival site manager for many years now) to administrative staff (with similar stories). One stage manager is a medical doctor in her professional life, and uses her annual leave every year to come to Lewis and perform her stage managerial role. The organisers cite this dedication of volunteer staff as being at the core of the festival's success and its ability to run effectively.



*The Hebridean Celtic Festival site*

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<sup>11</sup> 'Deacon Blue to headline Hebridean Celtic Festival on Lewis', *The Herald*, Glasgow, 7 December 2017, <[https://www.heraldsotland.com/news/15705079.Deacon\\_Blue\\_to\\_headline\\_Hebridean\\_Celtic\\_Festival/](https://www.heraldsotland.com/news/15705079.Deacon_Blue_to_headline_Hebridean_Celtic_Festival/)>

## **Observations and recommendations**

The aim of this nine week Fellowship was to look at small music festivals in maritime communities across Scotland in an effort to find strategies and solutions to address perceived needs in community music celebrations in south-eastern South Australia and south-western Victoria.

Inevitably, and appropriately, each of the Scottish regional festivals which I was fortunate to attend had its own idiosyncratic features. This was a function of the unique physical geography, social character, history and degree of isolation of each locality. It was also a function of the particular individuals and groups on whose enthusiasm and effort the staging of the events depends.

In this sense, a finding of the Fellowship is that any reasonable event held in any locality – even an event which ostensibly has little connection to the place, such as the Kirkcudbright Jazz festival – necessarily absorbs some of the character of the locality and, in turn, adds to the character of the locality. Spin-off economic effects from looking after the visitors and performers who are accommodated, fed and perambulating locally can only be positive, even if some locals who are not engaged in hospitality or retail activities can grumble about the temporary congestion and inconvenience.

More interesting, in the sense that they should be more transferable to other places including my own Australian region, are themes or lessons which emerged which were common across a number of, and perhaps all, the festivals. Again the way these themes emerged in particular localities had idiosyncratic qualities, but these seem to have been factors which the individual festivals needed to recognise, adjust to or make some sort of decision about.

### ***How is the festival managed?***

I initially wondered whether the management of a successful, and especially sustainable, festival needed a remunerated directorial role to create an accountable individual and figurehead responsible for the event. With regard to the festivals which I then experienced, there were a range of management structures varying according to the balance between volunteer and paid (if any) organisers and the role of oversight boards or committees.

Three models emerged here:

- ***Successful festivals with a remunerated Director:***  
In these cases, such as St Magnus and HebCelt, there is evidently great confidence in the Director and the subsequent trajectory in which these well-established festivals are heading.
- ***Successful festivals run by a community-based committee:***  
The events run by a local committee, such as Stonehaven and Kirkcudbright, seemed to be more labour-intensive. They nonetheless seemed to bring together elements of a local community (as board members and/or event volunteers) rather effectively, in some cases needing to manage or transcend awkward local 'political' relationships.
- ***Successful festivals dependent on a key individual:***  
The third model that emerged is the event created and/or sustained by a familiar charismatic or driven visionary who can pull people together. Daniel Gillespie's Tiree Music Festival and Kevin Peach's Loopallu event are examples of this, though it needs also to be acknowledged that these festivals, in addition, rely heavily on a dedicated event team and committee.

The organisers of several of these festivals had made conscious decisions for a change of direction based on their particular circumstances. Changing to a new approach, however, did seem to work best where it was driven by an organisational wish to 'make a good thing better', rather than being perceived as a panacea for making a struggling festival stronger.

***What is the role of volunteers?***

Irrespective of their management and governance structure, each of the festivals also depended, to varying degrees, on voluntary labour. In some cases, returning volunteers supervise more recently engaged recruits. It was striking to observe the number of festivals where dedicated volunteers return to perform the same role year after year. Other festivals draw on friends, Scout groups and other local organisations.

***How does the festival envisage its social/cultural relationship to its host community?***

A key question, and a key distinction between different festivals, is whether the event is conceived primarily as a celebration for the local community or whether it is designed primarily to attract outsiders. These need not be mutually exclusive: quintessentially local events can attract outsiders and indeed the local authenticity can be a genuine marketing theme. However, if the event seems primarily a generic exercise with little social connection to the community, there need to be other factors, such as significant economic spin-offs, in order for a community to fully support the festival. While the Kirkcudbright Jazz Festival seemed to be of little interest to most locals, it had an acknowledged and appreciated positive economic flow-on. On the other hand, the Hebridean Celtic Festival brought together local community members, 'ex-pat' Hebrideans visiting home, and people from around the world. The Stonehaven Music Festival managed to serve both as a genuine focus for its local community while also attracting many day-trippers from Aberdeen.

A difference between regional and remote Scotland and regional Australia, at least in my experience, is that Scottish history has produced communities which can claim to share fairly homogenous and agreed cultural commonalities. Perhaps to some extent the maintenance of these commonalities is contrived in the face of inevitable social change, or indeed is an espoused purpose of culturally-oriented events, but – to me as an outsider – it often appeared genuine. There were points in my experience where I found myself envying aspects of this shared culture. On Tiree, I watched a grandfather and granddaughter dance a Scottish folk dance and then have complete strangers join in. On many occasions across a range of events, when a band launched into a well-known folk song, the entire crowd stood as one and joined in.

Is there an Australian equivalent to this kind of cultural commonality? Sometimes Australians experience remnants of a more homogeneous past when God Save the Queen, Christmas carols, Anglo-Celtic folk songs and classic Christian hymns were cultural possessions common to a post-colonial popular culture (acknowledging how this excluded the cultural traditions of Indigenous Australians and perhaps others). While these older traditions have not entirely disappeared (the revival of ANZAC dawn services is one example of continuing currency or adaptation), my time in Scotland tapped unexpectedly into a little bit of yearning for other shared cultural/musical themes. Perhaps we are in the process of developing new commonalities, because I also appreciate and value how an increasingly heterogeneous and multicultural Australia enjoys a great liberty in not being too bound by heavy cultural memory and claustrophobic homogeneity.

***Does a successful music-oriented festival need a headlining musical act?***

Of the important strategic decisions facing the organisers in the events which I experienced, the decision on whether to feature a well-known headlining musical act stood out as the one which

seemed to stimulate a range of opinions across the range of stakeholders: organisers, performing musicians, local community members, and audience members visiting from afar.

It was particularly interesting to learn about the stand taken by the Oban Live organisers in switching from a past practice of a headline act to a steadfast statement of celebrating local/regional music. On the other hand, the organisers of the Hebridean Celtic Festival saw it as crucial to have a headliner, and the Tìree Festival, according to organiser Daniel Gillespie, tries very hard to have a headliner from far away 'not just to attract outsiders, but because it is the one chance in the year, because of the inflated population, we can do this for locals' (Daniel Gillespie).

***Does the festival utilise existing infrastructure for venues or does it need a festival-specific site?***

This question was of interest to me at the outset. I have experienced festivals in my region which have failed when beachside marquees have fallen victim to inclement weather without a contingency back-up plan in place. One such failure can be sufficient for the event to disappear from the calendar.

The Scottish festivals which I experienced varied in the extent to which they relied exclusively on existing facilities such as local halls or erected their own independent but temporary tents and stages. Fortunately for the festival managers, but unfortunately for a robust test of the management of contingencies from my perspective, Scotland experienced (apart from my windy evening during the St Magnus Festival) what was apparently the nicest summer in decades. Thus, contingency planning was only able to be gathered in theory or from organisers' past festival experiences. The extraordinary emergence of the 2015 Tìree Music Festival from hurricane-like destruction, and its subsequent identification of that experience as a mark of its robustness, gives hope that – with the right community support – a good event should be able to survive almost anything.

***Is the festival actively pursuing long term sustainability through multi-generational engagement or an educational dimension?***

Cross-generational engagement in music festivals emerged as an unanticipated area of interest as I encountered inspirational examples. Although there are invariably diversions for children and particular events for adults to be found in the local Australian festivals with which I am familiar, they are not nearly as fully developed as they appear to be in Scotland. Some Scottish festivals seemed to have ingrained trans-generational strategies which have positive and long-term cultural implications for sustainability. The Feochan summer school program is a very strong example of this where young people are tutored in highland music by dedicated master musicians who travel regionally and to far-flung corners of Scotland.

Daniel Gillespie, whose key role in Oban and Tìree has been explained above, revealed to me that he first learned piano accordion at a Feochan school as an 8-year-old. He went on to be part of Skerryvore, one of Scotland's most successful 'Celtic rock' music acts, and then to create and run two impressive music festivals.

Daniel is trying to pay back some of that youth engagement; for example, he arranged for a young person to program a smaller outside stage at the Tìree Festival. Fortuitously 2018 has been declared the Scottish Year of Young People, with the Scottish Government actively encouraging youth engagement at public events. Event Scotland accordingly made funding available for the Tìree Music Festival to employ someone under 25. The organisers received a 'big chunk' of applications (Daniel's words) and chose young Tìree local Jamie MacDonald who has been studying 'up in Uist' and had attended the Ceòlas summer school. This all represents

an intriguing and impressive intersection of festivals, professional experiences and generations. Jamie proceeded to program the Highland 'indie folk' group Elephant Sessions on his Tiree stage. Not only did this turn out to be one of the best acts of the festival but I was personally familiar with Elephant Sessions having encountered them at the WOMADelaide event earlier in the year. It was a little surreal, having talked in Adelaide with the Elephant Sessions musicians about our joint future engagement (in different capacities) at Tiree, to be then picking up the conversation with them in Tiree talking about their Australian experience in Adelaide.

This engagement, encouragement and education of younger people is not just integral to traditional and folk music and its associated festivals, there seems to be a pride or even obligation in Scotland in considering these things. St Magnus Festival was the stand-out as being the least folk-oriented of the events on my itinerary but it too has a strong history of an educational dimension aimed at younger people.

## Disseminating findings

I am sure it is a common Churchill Fellow experience but a form of dissemination around the purpose of my program began prior to my departure, through local media interviews<sup>12</sup> and a Rotary Club presentation. I was pleased to achieve some media coverage during my period in Scotland (arranged through the Hebridean Celtic Festival)<sup>13</sup>, and I have been able to contribute further local media coverage since my return home.<sup>14</sup>

I intend, where it is deemed relevant and of use, to present my findings to fellow festival/event and community music organisers and/or leaders in my Green Triangle region. I look forward to this opportunity. There were many details, models and lessons that were too specific for elaboration in this report but which may be the catalyst for a solution or strategy in my local area.

Festival committees to which I have made myself available include those associated with the Portland Upwelling Festival, the Nelson Road-2-River Festival and the Port MacDonnell Bayside Festival. My work may also interest festival towns further from the centre of the Green Triangle region: on the SA side of the border, these might include Frances, Robe and Cape Jaffa and, on the Victorian side, towns such as Port Fairy, Koroit and Mortlake. I will also make contact with organisers of festivals that are now defunct or dormant such as Mount Gambier's Limestone Coast Tattoo and the Beachport Festival to see if there is any assistance I can lend to some future event or amalgamation arrangement. Discussions with committees and passionate stakeholders about building local events into robust, sustainable and authentic reflections of what their community is, how it functions and how they would like it to function would be at the core of my dissemination process.

I would also make myself available to officers from local City/District/Shire Councils, from funding/auspice bodies and from regional and tourism-development stakeholders that either are supporting festivals or may be doing so in the future. Among the organisations fitting these criteria would be Country Arts SA, the Limestone Coast Regional Development Board, Grant District Council, the Mount Gambier Regional Arts and Civic Centre, and Regional Arts Victoria. My observations, including but not limited to the six issues outlined above, ought to make for an interesting foundation on which to have discussions about a festival whether it be new, struggling, tired or thriving.

I returned from the Fellowship experience with some specific ideas which may be of relevance to the organisers of particular festivals in my Green Triangle region. I have chosen not to detail these specific ideas in this Report; in my judgement it would be premature and potentially disrespectful for them to be promulgated prior to a discussion with the organisers of the events themselves. Indeed, whether these suggestions are helpful or even viable can only be clarified

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<sup>12</sup> Denton, B, 'South East resident named among Churchill Fellowship', *Border Watch*, Mount Gambier, 2 October 2017; ABC Radio South East SA interview 15 October 2017, archived at <<https://soundcloud.com/churchill-trust/abc-radio-south-east-sa-discuss-all-things-festival-with-2017-churchill-fellow-adam-hardcastle>>; Story in *Portland Observer*, 20 October 2017; Denton, B, 'Music teacher on learning journey', *Border Watch*, Mount Gambier, 7 February 2018.

<sup>13</sup> 'HebCelt inspires far flung festival ambitions', *Highland Times*, 18 May 2018, <<http://www.thehighlandtimes.com/index.php?id=12157>>; Campbell, R. 'HebCelt inspires festivals on the other side of the world', *The Press and Journal*, Aberdeen, 18 May 2018, <<https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/islands/1476867/hebcelt-inspires-festivals-on-the-other-side-of-the-world/>>; 'We have friends all over the world', *Events: What's happening in Lewis and Harris*, 7 June 2018, <[http://www.hebevents.com/wp-content/uploads/EVENTS\\_148.pdf](http://www.hebevents.com/wp-content/uploads/EVENTS_148.pdf)>.

<sup>14</sup> McFeters, A, 'Plenty to learn on Scottish festival tour', *Portland Observer*, 17 September 2018, <<https://www.spec.com.au/2018/09/plenty-to-learn-on-scottish-festival-tour/>>.

through discussion with those who have the particular experience and responsibility for the respective festivals. Iterative discussions of this kind may well also trigger additional connections or ideas from my Fellowship experience.

In a very modest way, I may also have made a little impact in Scotland. The Scottish bands Skerryvore and Elephant Sessions have both had some Australian festival experience (the former at the Port Fairy Folk Festival, the latter at WOMADelaide); through me they learned about each other's independent experiences and accordingly about possible future Australian festival opportunities. In Oban, I was able to encourage and advise 'Ellen', a local 'cello player, about her application for a UK Churchill Fellowship. On a more esoteric note, during my visit to Kirkcudbright I stayed in nearby Garlieston which has a caravan park, a pub and a lawn bowls club and an ageing population of locals. The town sits on a tidal bay. During low tide, fishing boats lie dry docked; at high tide, they float in six metres of water. The local publican, upon hearing of my festival-centric project, asked for some ideas for a low-key low-budget festival for Garlieston. After some thought, drawing on the locale, the local history and also my on my primary-school teaching experience, I suggested that – as the quirky foundation for a broader festive occasion – the pub and the local school consider sponsoring a 'Garlieston Goldrush' involving small teams with metal detectors hunting for metal tokens buried in the sand between tides. Judging by the publican's response, it is possible that this suggestion will be taken up.

## **Conclusion**

Many Australian non-metropolitan regions face unfavourable economic, social and demographic trends which threaten their future viability. In my Green Triangle region, there are particular uncertainties facing families involved with fisheries, forestry, dairy and the Portland aluminium smelter. Enhancing and sustaining a region's identity and cultural vitality through authentic and sustainable festivals can be a locally-generated option for rebuilding resilience and confidence. There are implications for mental health and well-being as well as economic multiplier effects, creating employment, underpinning development in the tourism sector and acting as an incentive for locals to stay rather than leave.

Sustainability and authenticity are notoriously difficult to achieve. Yet I have been inspired by what I have seen and learned in regional and remote Scotland of authentically local, but nationally attractive, regional festivals. My immediate focus will be on passing on my thoughts to organisers and authorities in my local region, but I also hope that the lessons of my Fellowship have implications for nonmetropolitan localities around Australia.

I am grateful to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia, and its dedicated officers both in Canberra and in Adelaide, for entrusting me with the responsibility for undertaking this Fellowship. I also appreciate the hospitality of many people associated with the Scottish festivals; without their cooperation, the Fellowship could not have prospered.