

Scots Trad Music Awards 2006

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-5261, in the name of Rob Gibson, on the success of Scots trad music awards 2006. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates Hands Up For Trad, its founder Simon Thoumire of Footstompin' Records and the sponsors and supporters who made the 2006 awards ceremony and weekend entertainment in Fort William such a happy and successful gathering; draws particular attention to the staff of the Nevis Centre whose hard work allowed the annual event to move from its Edinburgh base and offer a top-class venue, a friendly Highland welcome and a tremendous warm-up for the major events to be staged there in 2007 during the Scottish Year of Highland Culture; offers congratulations to winners of a wide range of awards, voted on by thousands across the globe, that give significant recognition to the excellence within Scotland's thriving contemporary traditional music scene; encourages the funding bodies to invest in this success which promotes, through composition, performance and enthusiastic audience response, such a positive message about Scottish cultural confidence, and believes that Scotland's television media should build on BBC Radio Scotland's role as the sole consistent champion of our Scottish music and traditions by broadcasting the images and sounds round the world.

17:08

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): It is my pleasure to celebrate the Hands Up for Trad awards and Scotland's traditional music scene in general, to seek continuity and increase for all the strands that support it, and to argue that Scotland's music and traditional arts should be seen far more often on Scotland's television screens and around the world.

Agriculture accounts for only a small part of our gross national product, and so do all our cultural industries, but without food no other part of the economy can work and without our cultural heritage we would not be the Scots that we are today—a nation with a generally positive self-image that can be at ease with itself and prepared to celebrate that heritage with others.

A huge debt is owed to Simon Thoumire, who is a fine musician in his own right and the moving spirit behind Hands Up for Trad. In the programme for the 2006 awards, he says:

"The aim of these Awards is to highlight Scotland's wonderful traditional music in all its forms and to create a high profile opportunity which will bring the music and music industry into the spotlight of media and public attention.

The Awards, which give recognition to excellence within Scotland's thriving music culture, encompass all aspects of

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traditional music, from Gaelic Song, folk, Scottish dance music to pipe bands and a host of others in between."

The Nevis Centre in Fort William provided a tremendous venue for the awards last December. The weekend is to be repeated this year, the Scottish year of Highland culture.

Many groups are teaching our native music around Scotland. Some examples are the Scots music group of the adult learning project in Edinburgh, the Gordon Gaitherin, and the national centre of excellence in traditional music at Plockton high school, but no formal teaching organisation is as powerful and influential as the fèisean movement. That was confirmed in a recent book by Kate Martin, who is now lecturing in community education at the University of Dundee. She was a founder of Fèis Rois. She has edited a history of the first 25 years of the fèisean movement that was launched at the Hands Up for Trad weekend last December. She sums up thus:

"It seems that in return for a relatively small investment, in the Highlands and Islands and beyond, the Fèisean are producing a generation of assertive and skilled young people who are confident in their culture and as a result can relate to other cultures. They are creating networks, enhancing the quality of life, building social capital and community capacity, and contributing to employment in rural communities.

When young people become aware of and confident about their own culture, it becomes possible for them to appreciate other cultures, and contribute to a wider social participation and understanding."

That is precisely the message that the Commission for Racial Equality uses to underpin a confident multicultural society. Indeed, the City of Edinburgh Council underpins its increased support for Gaelic in the city's life on that basis. That dovetails with the idea of cultural entitlements that in turn underpins the youth music initiative that has proved to be a substantial injection into the experience of primary 5 and 6 pupils in the past three years.

Will the minister's evaluation of the initiative ensure greater future investment? Will there be more instruments? Will one year's experience of live music mean just that—and not just an hour-long lesson for 12 weeks of that year? That ambition would extend the confidence and scope of the scheme. I hope that it will be possible for every one of those children to experience some live traditional music and musicians in their classrooms as well as many other musical forms.

In the foreword to the fèisean book, the then minister, Peter Peacock said:

"I would also like to commend these bodies that have supported Fèisean nan Gàidheal over the years. They should be pleased with the results of their investment in the organisation. This is indeed a success story."

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We have to build on the backing that Highlands and Islands Enterprise has given to the strengthening of communities that underpins its backing for the fèisean, and extend that to the Scottish Enterprise area for the rest of Scotland. Will the minister comment on that proposal?

BBC Scotland's promotion, Scotland's music 2007, celebrates and showcases many strands of music making on the radio, but we need to lobby hard for BBC television to show off our talent. Will there be many more hours of music on television this year? Thousands of people voted in

the Hands Up for Trad awards. Surely we agree that the BBC should cover that event on television, ensuring a worldwide audience. Can the Government seek to get a pledge from BBC Scotland to do just that?

Many journalists, such as Ruth Wishart in *The Herald* of 21 February this year, have commented on the link between a newly self-confident Scotland and the resurgence of Scottish traditional music as exemplified by the annual Celtic Connections festival in Glasgow. It has developed an international audience and global artistic content. The most striking factor in the resurgence is the relative youth of many leading participants. There is no doubt that the fèisean movement is largely responsible for that. That is why the Scotland Funds has Fèisean nan Gàidheal as one of its early project partners.

The Scotland Funds events across Canada later this year will feature the best of young musicians from Scotland. They will take this world-class music to other Scots-Canadian communities and build permanent bridges.

In the article in *The Herald* that I mentioned, which was part of a series on 300 years of the union, a leading figure in the arts education community, John Wallace, who is the principal of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, said:

"Scotland's creativity and confidence have been enhanced by devolution. Independence? It would skyrocket."

Hands Up for Trad has provided a modern focus for our thriving traditional scene, but it is our duty—and no one else's—to support and develop that healthy self-awareness.

The award-winning young Gaelic singer Julie Fowlis, who is a great star of today, was featured in a recent article in the *Sunday Herald*, which said that she knows that

"singing in Gaelic, especially when your songs get played on national radio, is on some level an act of conservation. 'I am aware that I am singing in a language that is in a very fragile state and is very much under threat,' she says, 'and if I can do even the tiniest amount towards helping keep it alive then I would be very happy.'"

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That belief underpins people's celebration of our traditional music.

I hope that members of the Parliament will put their hands up for trad, celebrate it, seek to continue to increase public support for it and insist on television coverage of Scotland's music for a growing audience, thereby allowing many more people to enjoy our unique contribution to the world's diverse cultural heritage.

17:16

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I, too, enjoyed the 2006 Hands Up for Trad event, as Rob Gibson well knows, because I was sitting with him at the same table. I know that the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport had intended to be there and would have enjoyed it greatly if she had been able to make it on the night. I am looking forward to the 2007 event as part of the Scottish year of Highland culture.

I agree with the motion that Rob Gibson has lodged—it would be good for more traditional music to be broadcast both here and across the world because that would encourage people not only to appreciate, but to participate in, Scottish traditional music. That is what really interests me, because traditional music is almost unique among the arts in being about participation.

As Rob Gibson said, many of the stunning artists whom we saw at the Hands Up for Trad event came up through the fèis movement, which has introduced many young people to traditional music. They go to the junior fèis at the age of nine, in primary 5, where they play traditional music for the first time. Sometimes adults are introduced to traditional music at the adult fèis. Some of the young people will go on to be world-class professional musicians, but others play just for pleasure or among friends. Both my kids went to the fèis when they were in primary school. One of them continues to listen to traditional music but does not play it and the other one plays rock music; the fèis provided a good foundation for both of them.

In an age in which it can be argued that people are becoming more passive, traditional music encourages people to be active. It involves doing rather than just sitting back and appreciating what others do, which can only be good for people's personal development and confidence. One has only to see the young people from the fèis who do the ceilidh trail every summer in Ross-shire. After rehearsing for a bit, they go round different places where tourists are gathered and play stunning music that is hugely appreciated. That has become a massive event in the calendar. Among other things, participants learn how to present themselves on stage and how to work all the

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equipment. They are usually kids in their teens, in the later stages of school. The event gives young people confidence in an age in which we sometimes say quite negative things about them. Anyone who sees those young people would be inspired by their achievements.

Traditional music is great for forging communities—a village where the pub holds regular traditional music sessions is much the richer for it—and, as I have said, it is great for giving young people something to do. We must actively promote traditional music, not just because it is our culture and it is our responsibility to conserve, promote, enhance, add to, develop and resource it, and not just because we have a duty to educate our young people about their culture and to enable them to participate in it. We should do so because taking part in events and learning to play music and to co-operate as part of a group are just so much fun. Even playing a tin whistle extremely badly with some extremely tolerant friends—as I have occasionally done—is a great deal better than not playing traditional music at all. More and more people should be encouraged to do it. I am delighted to support Rob Gibson's motion.

17:20

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I thank Rob Gibson for securing the debate. I also give great thanks to Simon Thoumire for his commitment to making the Hands Up for Trad awards happen. I have to confess that those are the only music awards in which I ever vote.

The categories for the awards demonstrate a broad spectrum of different organisations and different kinds of traditional music, from small organisations who meet to sing together and enjoy traditional music, to large, performing bands. Rob Gibson mentioned the ALP. A few

years ago, I went to an ALP weekend school on traditional music, which involved people from all over Europe. We learned some of their songs and taught them our songs. It got me and some of my friends singing again. It was a special and wonderful experience—we were there not to go out on the road and sing to other folk but to sing for the sake of it. That was important for all the folk who participated.

The work done with young people is vital. I praise people such as Arthur Cormack for his work in the fèis movement, which encourages young people to learn and to value music. I guarantee that such youngsters will come back to traditional music after rock music. The youth music initiative, which encourages young folk to participate in music, is a real plus. Not only does participating in the traditional arts help young people to learn music and learn to perform, but the confidence

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that comes with that, and the pride in their culture, are things that we cannot put a price on.

The Parliament talks a lot about tourism. Our arts are world renowned. People come to Scotland to learn and to celebrate Scottish traditional arts. They come to festivals such as Celtic connections, sometimes to listen and sometimes to perform, to meet others and to learn songs and different pieces of music from them. Scottish traditional arts incorporate music, song, storytelling, dance and language. Language is very important. We should be proud of our strong culture of language, both Gaelic and Scots. For years, people living in Scotland were criticised for their language and prevented from using it. We should be saying, "This language is important. Let's celebrate it."

I echo Rob Gibson's sentiment about broadcasting. Radio Scotland does not do a bad job of covering traditional arts and folk music, although it could do better and has done better in the past. I would like to hear my language on television. I would like to hear people singing songs and performing music that I like. I know that other people living in Scotland feel the same. We should be proud of our culture, not apologise for it. We have so much to offer.

I hope that when the minister responds to the debate she will recognise the value for tourism in Scotland when people come here to hear our music. I hope that she recognises the importance of encouraging young people to participate in music and of giving them support to perform it, perhaps make career out of it or simply enjoy it. That is why the debate is so important. We should have a debate every month on different aspects of the traditional arts in Scotland, to consider how we can build on them, to encourage young people and others to participate in and be proud of them, and to celebrate them.

17:23

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I congratulate Rob Gibson on securing a debate on Scottish traditional music. From Shetland to Gretna, it is an important part of Scottish culture. There are many different traditions, one of which we saw last night in the Parliament, when the Shetland squad gave us a taste of Up-Helly-Aa, in which a Viking minister, Tavish Scott, took part. It produced a most enjoyable evening.

In the motion, Rob Gibson rightly compliments the highly competent staff of the Nevis Centre, which I have visited in the past. Events such as T in the Park are particularly important to rural

Scotland. However, despite my enthusiasm for the many events that will celebrate Highland 2007, I am concerned that new events, heavily sponsored

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by EventScotland through the Scottish Executive, might cause displacements from the events that already exist.

For example, the organisers of the Hebridean Celtic festival, which takes place in Stornoway and is a bastion of Scottish traditional music, are surprised and quite angry that an enormous event featuring Elton John is being held at the Caledonian stadium at the same time as the festival. People cannot attend both events because the ferries do not run on Sundays. Surely some joined-up thinking could have put the events on different weekends. I am led to believe that the Elton John event is being sponsored through EventScotland to the tune of £150,000, so it is not surprising that the organisers of the Hebridean Celtic festival feel hard done by.

Also planned is an event at Inveraray called Connect, which is to be subsidised with £250,000, and another at Aviemore entitled The Outsider, which will also receive help from EventScotland. I am not in any way against those events, which should make the year of Highland culture a great success, but I am worried about the existing shows that receive hardly any funding in comparison with the big, new events. It would be a tragedy if the new events displaced events such as Rock Ness, which was a success last year, or Tartan Heart, which has been going for some years, or any of the smaller concerts that will take place in the Highlands this summer. I hope that I have firmly made the point about displacement and that the minister will investigate the situation.

I agree with Rob Gibson about BBC Radio Scotland and its coverage of Scottish music. I am a great fan of accordion and fiddle music, which is enjoying a terrific resurgence. Accordion and fiddle clubs are valuable in rural communities. I greatly enjoy listening to Robbie Shepherd's music shows on Radio Scotland, which emphasise the importance of Scottish culture.

I am delighted that the Inveraray and District Pipe Band was recently awarded lottery funding of £17,000, having been voted a winner by a television audience. At the other end of pipe music, the Red Hot Chilli Pipers are also doing extremely well. Traditional Gaelic music also plays a great part. The songs and poems of Sorley MacLean and Duncan Ban MacIntyre will last for ever.

Scotland's traditional music is like tartan and Highland dancing. It is a distinct brand that helps to market Scotland and it brings more people into contact with the history of a remarkable people, expressing love, sorrow and happiness through music that emanates from a culture that often grew from harsh conditions in a beautiful, though sometimes very hard, environment.

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17:27

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): I thank Rob Gibson for giving us the opportunity to congratulate Hands Up for Trad on its sterling work and recognise the tireless work of its founder Simon Thoumire in promoting Scotland's traditional music.

Scotland's music is, of course, distinctive, easily recognised and much loved around the world. It is an important part of determining who we are. It tells the history of the nation and illustrates clearly the story of Scotland and her people. That is why I believe that the Scots trad music awards are so important. We need an opportunity to celebrate and honour the best in traditional music. Although the awards have been running only for the past four years, they have become an important part of our cultural calendar. As someone who had the pleasure of attending one of the events, I may say that the awards are also a very lively part of our cultural calendar.

As Rob Gibson said, the 2006 awards were presented in Fort William. I am sorry that other ministerial duties prevented me from attending. Like many organisations throughout Scotland, Hands Up for Trad is engaging with the Scottish year of Highland culture, and the awards will take place in the Highlands again this year.

I refer to Jamie McGrigor's point about displacement caused by the year of Highland culture. The aim of the year of celebration is to provide international, national, regional and community events so that there is something for everyone. I hope that people will take the choices that are on offer to them and explore new things as well as events that they have attended in the past. I hope that they will have the opportunity to attend whichever events they prefer to attend, and I hope that that will help some of the smaller events to build up their capacity in future years.

Mr McGrigor: I thank the minister for mentioning the issue. However, if the new events are receiving an enormous subsidy in comparison to what other events are receiving, does that not make the displacement more likely to happen?

Patricia Ferguson: The function of EventScotland is to attract big, national events as well as to support smaller, local community events. It has a special budget for the latter events, so, if they are not being funded proportionately, they should apply to EventScotland for that money. I am sure that if they contact the regional manager at EventScotland, they will be given assistance in doing that. I am happy to give Mr McGrigor the details of that later, if that would help.

I join Rob Gibson in congratulating the staff of the Nevis Centre for ensuring that the event was

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well catered for. I heard that it was a particularly good event, and I am sure that that was at least partly due to the legendary Highland warmth and hospitality. I hope that many visitors from both home and abroad will discover that during 2007.

Through funding from EventScotland, VisitScotland and the Scottish Arts Council, the Executive has shown its full commitment to supporting and showcasing our culture as well as to developing traditional arts as a whole, including Scotland's traditional music. It is worth taking Cathy Peattie's point about tourism. I hope that the involvement of VisitScotland and EventScotland is evidence of the fact that they see traditional music, and the traditional arts more generally, as being important in providing visitors with the package that they now require when they visit our country.

The year of Highland culture, which has been developed by the Executive in partnership with Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and others, is an exciting programme of events that is promoting Scotland overseas and providing Scotland's citizens with an

opportunity to celebrate our culture. I have no doubt that it will also have an economic impact, which is especially important in the Highlands.

However, it is not enough to recognise achievement in traditional music; we must also encourage the next generation to become involved. I was particularly pleased to read today a special newsletter that has been produced by Fèisean nan Gàidheal with the youth music initiative at Highland Council. The newsletter says that not only has the youth music initiative reached every primary school in the Highland Council area but it has led to the creation of employment for many talented professional traditional musicians. That is to be applauded.

In addition, we have the music school at Plockton, which focuses very much on our traditional music and arts. In the past school year, the music school had 21 pupils, of whom 20 were residential—the pupils are drawn from throughout Scotland. That is evidence of the growing popularity of, and interest in, traditional music.

Rob Gibson mentioned John Wallace and the RSAMD. I am always happy to applaud anything that is being done at the RSAMD, as I am always confident that it is absolutely of the best.

No exception to that, the department of Scottish music at the RSAMD offers the only honours degree course in Scottish traditional music in the world. The course offers a broad-based training to talented traditional musicians, enabling them to pursue a variety of careers or further study. The piping degree, for example, is run in collaboration with the National Piping Centre, which is recognised internationally as a centre of

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excellence in Highland bagpipe teaching.

Hands Up for Trad is involved in promoting the traditional music of our country and allowing young people to experience it and excel in it. In that regard, its organisation and promotion of the young traditional musician of the year awards should be recognised. The awards are held in January each year, as part of the Celtic connections festival—another event that promotes traditional music.

Mr Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP): The minister is drawing towards the end of her time. I wonder whether she is going to comment on some of the comments from members about broadcasting and whether she can give us an Executive view of the position of BBC Scotland regarding the amount of coverage that it gives—or does not give—to both the traditional arts and other arts and culture on radio and television.

Patricia Ferguson: I am trying to address all the points that members have made, and I will come to that point.

As I was saying, the young traditional musician of the year awards are a vital part of taking that agenda forward. The awards are broadcast by BBC Radio Scotland. I never cease to be amazed by the talent shown by the young people in the final line-up. I have never been involved in judging such competitions—thankfully—but I think that the judges must have a tremendously difficult job in singling out a winner.

As I mentioned, and as members will know, we are committed to ensuring that all children have the opportunity to be involved in music of whatever genre. We have implemented that commitment through the youth music initiative. I am sure that Rob Gibson will be interested to know—this answers a question that he asked—that Northumbria University is currently finalising a year-long independent evaluation of the youth music initiative on behalf of the Scottish Arts Council. The evaluation exercise includes an analysis of the styles and genres that have been supported by YMI funds.

Early indications are that Scottish traditional music projects have been very well supported by both formal and informal sector funding. We expect that the final evaluation report will be published later this month and I will ensure that a copy of it is sent to Mr Gibson.

The issue of broadcasting was raised by several members, including Mr Maxwell. I for one would like to see more traditional music and traditional arts and culture on our television screens. However, as members know, broadcasting is reserved to Westminster and responsibility does not lie with us. It is fair to say that the broadcasters need to make decisions based on their perception

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of the popularity of a particular art form. However, that is why broadcasters should perhaps reconsider the level of production that they dedicate to traditional music. I think that the trad music awards should be broadcast not just because we live in a world where people like awards ceremonies but because it would create value if we could see those who are being honoured. It would be a distinctive and helpful addition if those awards, and the young traditional musician of the year awards, were broadcast. As I said, I am amazed by the talent that comes through the young traditional musician of the year awards.

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I believe that Scotland's traditional music is a reflection of our culture as a whole. It is alive and well and at the heart of our nation. It plays a real and relevant part in identifying that nation. That is as a result of the excellent input from many individuals and bodies, some of whom have been mentioned this evening. I am sure that Simon Thumire and Hands Up for Trad are out there with the leaders. In concluding, I offer my congratulations on the past success of the Scottish traditional music awards and my very best wishes for the future.

Meeting closed at 17:37.