



**HOMECOMING SCOTLAND 2009**—HIGHLIGHTS of the year included a few **BBC radio programmes**, ‘**Musical Genes**’ with **Tom Morton** (some leading questions about being part of a musical family and having a very musical child—sadly missed though his joyous music lives on); ‘**Sunday Morning With Richard Holloway**’ and some TV moments, including **Hiort (about St Kilda)** and **Newsnight Scotland (talking about Homecoming Year)**. Sincere thanks to everyone who emailed and phoned—there was such a warm-hearted, enthusiastic response to these programmes I am amazed at folk listening to repeats in the middle of the night—that means after midnight at this stage in my life!

### *Now to the year....*

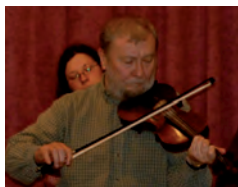
**Jan. 15**—Celtic **Connections Festival** in Glasgow Royal Concert Hall: “ **Cape Breton Night**”, the opening concert at Celtic Connections, a night to remember with friends from over many years— Jerry Holland, Mary Jane Lamond, Ashley MacIsaac, Wendy MacIsaac, The Barra MacNeils, JP Cormier, Darren McMullen, Kimberley Fraser, Andrea Boyd, Ross Kennedy, Phamie Gow, David Milligan and Corrina Hewat. That great Cape Breton ‘drive’ was a fine way to begin the three-week festival—sadly it was to be Jerry’s last appearance in Scotland as he died in July. What a loss to traditional music, but what a legacy.

**Feb. 13**—My Dad, **George Bennett**, age 92, returned to Scotland after 43 years in Canada where he had a long career as a civil engineer. Of all ‘events’ of **Homecoming Scotland 2009**, this was the least expected—and for me, the most special. Sadly he took his last farewell of us on April 28. I miss him immensely as he loved music, was a good musician himself and most of all gave us life-long encouragement. Obiture: [www.theherald.co.uk/features/obituaries/display.var.2515186.0.george\\_bennett.php](http://www.theherald.co.uk/features/obituaries/display.var.2515186.0.george_bennett.php))



**Feb. 24 & 25**—The **Library of Congress Symposium**, Washington, **ROBERT BURNS AT 250: POETRY, POLITICS & PERFORMANCE**. To mark the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns, Scotland’s national poet, the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, in collaboration with The Scottish Government, held a public symposium on Burns’ life and work, as well as his impact on America and American culture. Leading scholars, poets, and musicians from Scotland and the United States join experts from the Library of Congress in the two-day event. Along with Scotland’s First Minister Alex Salmond, Sir Sean Connery and Kay Ryan, Poet Laureate of the United States, were (alphabetically) **Margaret Bennett**, Valentina Bold, Peggy Bulger, John Cole (Director, Center for the Book, Library of Congress), Ted Cowan, Robert Crawford, Nat Edwards, Billy Kay, Ed Miller, Cate Newton (National Library of Scotland), and Stephen Winick of the Library of Congress. The talks and concerts have now been posted on the American Folklife Center’s website. Links to have been interwoven into the program schedule with the wording “View the webcast...” See: [www.loc.gov/folklife/Symposia/Burns/program.html](http://www.loc.gov/folklife/Symposia/Burns/program.html)

**Feb. 21-22**—A pilot project dear to my heart, a weekend of sharing songs across both Scots and Gaelic tradition, ‘**Bridging Tradition**’: **Kenna Campbell** joined us at the **Ochertyre Song Weekend** to share her songs (while it was my turn to teach the Scots songs). The WRI Hall was filled at night for a real old-fashioned ceilidh, tea and all. As one old-timer said, ‘we used to have real ceilidhs like this years ago in Comrie and up the glen too....’



**Mar. 7-8**—Our second weekend of ‘**Bridging Tradition**’ (just before a snow storm!) with **Tom and Maggie Spiers** to share the **Ochertyre Song weekend**, on Saturday in the WRI Hall in Comrie and on Sunday with the residents of BLESMA (the home for British Ex-Servicemen and women) in Crieff. None of us will forget the joy of sharing our songs with ‘the old soldiers’ or of hearing them join the choruses.

**Mar 9**—The **Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club Hundredth Annual Dinner**, with special guest HRH the Princess Royal, who, incidentally gave a superb speech. I sang the old favourite, ‘**Jock o’ Hazeldeen**’.  
Visit:- [www.eswsc.com](http://www.eswsc.com)

**Mar. 23** —“**Echoes and Reflections of Traditional Scottish Customs in the New World**” at Gairloch & District Heritage Society. A packed house AGM followed by my talk. [www.gairlochheritagemuseum.org](http://www.gairlochheritagemuseum.org)

**Mar. 26**—‘**Homecoming stories for children**’ at Robert Douglas Memorial School, Scone (storytelling), sponsored by the A.K. Bell Library in Perth.

**Mar. 28 – 31**—Four events in Newfoundland in preparation for ‘**the Homecoming Newfoundlanders Cèilidh**’ singing with

the Newfoundland MacArthur family as twenty of them prepare to come home to Scotland: (**Fund-raiser/ publicity for the Homecoming Scotland tour, April 27 to May 7**),

- 28<sup>th</sup>: Port aux Basques hotel
- 29<sup>th</sup>: St. Kevin's Centre, St Andrews, Newfoundland
- 30<sup>th</sup>: Cornerbrook Arts and Cultural Centre, Cornerbrook, Newfoundland-it brought back memories to me of singing at the opening of it 40 years ago!
- 31<sup>st</sup> Stephenville Cultural Centre, Stephenville, Newfoundland

**Apr. 7**—marked the founding of the charity '**Grace Notes Scotland**' which is dedicated to '**handing on tradition**'— I am one of three directors on the Board, along with Liz Elkind (in Edinburgh) and Mary Norton (North Uist). **Visit Grace Note Scotland introductory web page.**

**Apr. 27 to May 6**—The **Homecoming Newfoundlanders' Tour**: event at venues in Luss (Loch Lomond), Crieff, Perth, Laggan, Ullapool, Genuig, Skye, Isle of Canna (**Music & lecture of Emigration**). **Homecoming Newfoundlanders' Tour** of three generations of talented singers, musicians and dancers, all descendents of a remarkable family who emigrated from the Isle of Canna and Moidart to Newfoundland in the 1820's.



**May 8 to 9**—**Ullapool Book Festival, Ullapool**—stories and songs of Highland emigrants, set near Loch Broom, departure for many. Visit the jewel of Book Festivals at [www.ullapoolbookfestival.co.uk](http://www.ullapoolbookfestival.co.uk)

**May 15 to 16**—**Word Festival of Books, Aberdeen: The Scottish Diaspora** was the theme, with challenging and lively sessions such as "Literature & Identity" a discussion with Cairns Craig, Ian Rankin, James Robertson and **Margaret Bennett**. [www.abdn.ac.uk/word/](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/word/)

**May 21 to 24**—**Orkney Folk Festival** (singer, storyteller) It's easy to understand why folk return year after year to this wonderful festival! [www.orkneyfolkfestival.com/](http://www.orkneyfolkfestival.com/)



**May 30 to 31**—Another Ochtertyre Song weekend, this one with **Sheila Stewart** of the legendary and much loved Stewarts of Blair. We had a full house, glorious sunshine that had us sitting in the garden listening to the bees (and for some brave souls, a sort of aquatic céilidh in the river). In all, a memorable weekend and Sheila joined in the Gaelic chorues, proving that it's never too late to get your tongue around those syllables (in either language).

**Jun. 12 to 14**—**Keith Folk Festival**. The TMSA gathering of friends from far and wide—great sing-arounds! [www.keithfestival.btinternet.co.uk/](http://www.keithfestival.btinternet.co.uk/)

**Jun. 19**—**Ed Miller's 'Texas-Scotland Homecoming Tour'** - speaker, singer on Ed's annual tour of Scotland. For folk who love to sing this is definitely the tour to be on—with tour-guide extraordinaire **Charles Hunter (from Balquhiddier)** this is no ordinary bus journeys tour. Even the driver joins in! [www.songsotscotland.com/](http://www.songsotscotland.com/)

**Jun. 27**—Kingussie, to be part of **David Taylor's retirement céilidh**. There can be few individuals in the Highlands who have given so much to young traditional musicians as David. During his career as history teacher at Kingussie High School, David, who is a fine piper, also taught bagpipes (in his own time, and for no fees) to any youngster who wanted to learn. **At the age of ten, Martyn became one of his pupils.** An inspiring teacher, David has put together 'folk bands' and groups, helped with arranging and most of all, gave enormous encouragement to all. On the occasion of his retirement this céilidh brought together a great host of those who have been privileged to share David's music-making, and what an array of talent! Proceeds of the night exceeded £1,000.00 and were donated to the newly created **Martyn Bennett Scholarship Fund** at the **RSAMD**.

**Jul. 12 to 18**—**The Swannanoa Gathering's Celtic Week**, Asheville, North Carolina, Aside from meeting up with long-time friends, fellow-musicians and loyal students, this is a wonderful week of joyful music-making. Day time classes, (my two were Gaelic Song and Celtic Calendar Customs) evening sessions, jams, céilidhs, dances, concerts in a beautiful mountain setting. [www.swangathering.com](http://www.swangathering.com)

**Jul. 25**—In **Aberfeldy 'Craic-ing Cancer Concert'**. Wearing our pink ribbons, in a packed house, with Glasgow actress and comedienne (and past conductor of Aberfeldy Gaelic Choir) Isobel Rutter, storyteller Maria Cairni, the Aberfeldy & District Gaelic Choir with folk duo Kenny "Crieffan" Graham and David "Dibble" Morton as well as Edinburgh musicians in the acoustic group "The Wanton Pegs". And a cracking night it was, raising over £ 6,000.00 for **Breast Cancer Awareness**.

**Jul. 28 to 30**—**The Clan Morrison gathering** in Ness, Isle of Lewis. A packed programme for overseas Morrisons (from as far afield as Panama and New Zealand) to celebrate their roots. My talk was about '**The Morrisons among the Scottish Gaelic Settlers in Quebec**'. Delicious local foods, interesting demonstrations and discussions at the **Comunn Eachdraidh**

and two unforgettable céilidhs.

**Aug. 1–Laggan’s céilidh** - community gathering on the weekend of the Newtonmore Highland Games and the MacPherson gathering 2009.

**Aug. 7–A Scottish – Bulgarian Night, at home in Ochertyre**, a feast of food, music, song and tradition, with James MacDonald Reid, Doris Rougvie & Hugh Hoffman, John Clifford and friends. None of will forget this most special sharing of tradition and culture.

**Aug. 15–The Edinburgh International Festival, ‘A Concert of Gaelic Psalms’ with the Lewis Psalm Singers** at Greyfriars Church. The Director of the Edinburgh Festival, Jonathon Mills told us that of all the festival events (in the ‘official’ programme) this concert was the first to sell out. Aside from the fact that all of us in the group love to sing psalms (*there is no vocal music with such freedom expression and ornament—the jazz of the voice*), we have to ask: Why should a concert of sacred music in Scotland’s ancient language be first to sell tickets? It was a glorious night and one we’d love to do again. Halleluia!

You can hear the Gaelic psalms on the three CDs: “Salm I” & “Salm II” and “Salm and Soul”. All proceeds to Bethesda Hospice, Isle of Lewis, which also sells the CDs: <http://shop.bethedahospice.co.uk/>).

Listen on at Coda Music

see: <http://www.codamusic.co.uk/product-detail/8636/Salm+And+Soul++Margaret+Bennett/Salm+And+Soul>

Sue Wilson’s review ‘never was a concert better named than Salm and Soul’

see: [http://www.footstompin.com/products/cds/salm\\_\\_soul](http://www.footstompin.com/products/cds/salm__soul)



**Aug. 27–The Stornoway Book Festival. “Highland Customs from the Cradle to the Grave”**, in An Lanntair (a superb venue, full of interest).

Then, in preparation for **St. Kilda Day**, which will be August 30, 2010, marking the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the evacuation, we had two beautiful concerts with **Margaret Stewart and Gillebride MacMillan** along with **Ingrid Henderson** and **Ian MacDonald**. It was my pleasure to MC both:

**Aug. 28 & 29—at ‘Seallam’ in Northton, Harris, with Bill and Chris Lawson**, and then across on the ferry—in Berneray. One of the special joys of this night was staying with **Gloria MacKillop**, who had only recently lost her beloved husband, **‘Splash’** to all who knew him. Sadly missed, yet his presence lives on in the home he shared with his very special Gloria. Check out the perfect ‘bijou’ self-catering she has just created.

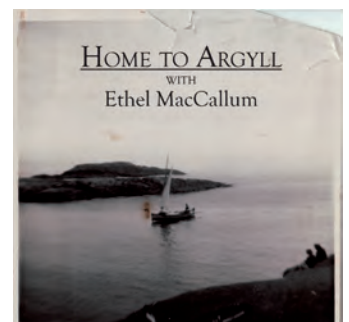
see: <http://www.burnsidecroft.com/contact/>

**Sep. 10 -12–‘ISLAND EMIGRANTS conference on ‘Emigration from the Outer Hebrides’ Leverburgh, Harris.** Organised by **The Islands Book Trust**, this was more an experience than a conference, deeply moving and memorable. Papers to be published in 2010. see <http://www.theislandsbooktrust.com>

**Sep. 26–Celebrations for Michaelmas** —my talk was on ‘*The Celtic Calendar and the Feast of St Michael*’ with a céilidh to follow. Organised by **The Grimsay Boat Shed** —despite the wild, windy, foggy weather, it didn’t spoil the weekend gathering with demonstrations of wool crafts, traditional lime-mortaring and discussions as especially the delicious community meal of local produce.

**Sep. 30–In Grantown-on-Spey, at the annual gathering of the Crofting Foundation**, the launch of a wonderful project for schools (of which *I am honoured to be the Patron*): **Crofting Connections**, jointly run by the Soil Association and headed by Pam Rodway and a team of inspiring teachers and enthusiasts.

**Oct. 20–Eden Court Theatre**, a concert of **‘Songs of Emigration and Homecoming’**—sharing the line-up with me were Paul MacCallum, Gillebride MacMillan and Ethel MacCallum along with Hamish Menzies (piano), Heather Downie (clarsach), Fiona MacAskill (fiddle) and James MacDonald Reid (pipes) with the Ochertyre singers on choruses and some old-style dances by James MacDonald Reid. It was also the **launch of Ethel’s new CD, Home to Argyll with Ethel MacCallum**, which features all her own compositions, including her Homecoming song, Tilleadh Dhachaidh, sung by Gillebride.



**Oct. 21–The Stables, Cromarty on the Black Isle**, and evening of stories, songs music and dance: **‘The Highland Emigrants’ Experience in Story and Song**’ with dancer & piper: James MacDonald Reid and singer-musician, Kenneth Graham.

**Oct. 22 – 24–Eden Court, Inverness, the highlight of Homecoming 2009 for the Highlands**, was this conference: **Scotland’s Global Impact – How One Small Nation Changed The World**: Buaidh Chruinneil Na H-Alba – Mar A Dh’atharraich Aon Dùthaich Bheag An Saoghal! Opened by the First Minister, Alex Salmond, the three day event featuring 30 international

speakers was chaired by Lesley Ridloch.

My paper '**Singing the History of Highland Emigrants in Eastern Canada**' was based on my fieldwork recordings in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Quebec.

**Oct. 24—Eden Court (MacLean Room):** Day Conference on '**Gaelic Speaking Canadians in Scotland**', organised by Prof. Norman MacDonald who drew together a lively group, which, encouragingly, seemed full of young people. My paper was, "**Speaking about it**" - a wake-up call for Scotland or an unavoidable fate? It was good to catch up with other 'Canadianists'.

**Oct. 27—Netherbow Theatre, Edinburgh—**"**Leaving the Land: Migration, Emigration and Clearance in Song and Story**". I was hosted the evening and sharing stories with international storytellers Gayle Ross of the Cherokee people, Rangimoana Taylor of the Maori and James MacDonald Reid whose people emigrated from Scotland nearly 200 years ago.

**Oct. 28—Roseburn Primary School in Edinburgh.** Nothing like spending a day with 4 and 5 year-olds telling them stories, watching their faces, listening to their questions and ideas for brightening up the world! This school has one of the loveliest playgrounds and gardens, with 'growing things' planted and tended by the children. We can learn a lot from them.

**Oct. 29—Portree, Isle of Skye** at the newly opened (and fabulous) **Highland Regional Archives**. An exhibition from their archive of photos and papers was perfectly in place for my talk, '**Recording the Traditions of Skye over the years**'. My dad's photos had a special place in this, from his Hydro-power station engineering snaps, his Cuillin Mountain Rescue Team days and the Isle of Skye pipe-band.

**Oct. 30—**Still in **Portree**, this was the day for the school pupils, around 150 teenagers — that's quite a big class, though they all seemed pretty attentive and interested in the topic of '**Stories and Songs of Emigration**', illustrated by my slides of Quebec and a few songs as well. Then a much smaller, though equally engaging group, the all-Gaelic history class, studying local history. **Highland Region's Education and Outreach Co-ordinator, Morag MacLean**, does a great job of pulling all this together.

**Nov. 1—The Filmhouse, Edinburgh.** As part of the Storytelling Festival, Filmhouse screened a double bill of **Hallaig and The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black, Black Oil**. A sell-out, with people queuing in torrential rain, for tickets to see these classic. After the screening, I took part in a post film discussion (chaired by Donald Smith) with film-maker Neil Kempell and land issues expert Andy Wightman, on themes raised in the films, such as land ownership, displacement, identity and the impact of contemporary life and the modern day issues on land ownership.

**Nov. 7—In Aberdeen at the 'Lemon Tree'. The TMSA Patron's Concert:** Two patrons of the Traditional Music and Song Association, myself & Sheena Wellington along with fine singers Geordie Muirison and friends.

**Nov. 8—'The Carrying Stream Festival'**, remembering and **celebrating the life and legacy of Hamish Henderson**, the Pleasance, Edinburgh, with Jimmy Hutchison and Tich Friar. Don't miss it next year!

**Nov. 10—'The Carrying Stream Festival'**, special event to mark the launching of Volume 2 of Timothy Neat's wonderful biography of Hamish Henderson. I was on stage for the discussion with Alec Finlay, Raymond Ross, Tim Neat and Steve Byrne with Donald Smith as Chair.

**Nov. 29—Dumfries**, headed to St Andrew's Day on the weekend of **Hands up for Trad!** The bijou cinema in the Robert Burns Centre were screening John Berger & Timothy Neat's film, "**Play Me Something**" and invited me to introduce it with Tim Neat, as I had been part of the production with my dear friend, Hamish Henderson. A film about storytelling, it stars John Berger, Hamish Henderson, Tilda Swinton (now of Narnia and Queen Elizabeth fame), Liz Lochhead, Anne-Marie Ross and yours truly with some others too.

**Dec. 4—**Our local **MSP Roseanna Cunningham**, Constituency came to visit us along with **Annabelle Ewing**, as they were interested to find out about what we do at Grace Note Publications (the amazing Gonzalo, a Venezuelan who has taken the world of Gaelic publishing by surprise) and Grace Notes Scotland (me). Not that's what you call keeping your eye on the ball—it's good to know we have MSPs who care what's going on in Scotland. We were sorry (and so were they) that they couldn't stay over for the following event.

**Dec. 5&6—in Comrie & Ochtertyre**, Perthshire, the inimitable **Cathal McConnell** who was our guest at '**Bridging Tradition at the Ochtertyre Song weekend**'. What a feast of songs, not to mention laughter and we had a fair range of guests from long-time devotees of Cathal's singing to a few who heard him for the first time—including a classically trained singer from Estonia and a classcal flautist. What choruses too!

**Dec. 2009—**Ended by '**sailing home**' with a remarkable project by **artist Pat Law**: her voyage took all year, with fifty artists (painters, poets, musicians, singers) and it was my pleasure to join them at the final stage of this 'virtual sail' '**7 Short Sails**'. Join us on the voyage. [www.heriot-toun.co.uk](http://www.heriot-toun.co.uk)



Margaret Bennett,  
Perthshire, 2009