

North Staffs Accordion Club

Newsletter

May/June 2021

No 494



HI EVERYONE. I HOPE YOU ARE WELL. WE HAVE A NEW MEMBER TO WELCOME THIS MONTH — PAUL DICKINSON. I BELIEVE HE ALSO PLAYS THE UKULELE. (BUT I MIGHT NOT HOLD THAT AGAINST HIM).



LILY

LIVE BAND REHEARSALS RETURN



The first couple of live rehearsals of the band took place at Bradwell

Workingmen's Club on Thursday nights, 20th and 27th May, with all players having a social distanced table each in this large concert

room and suitably adorned with face masks or shields. With MD, Steve Houghton, in command and working to a pre-selected list of repertoire pieces it was good to be back in live music mode. The event was thoroughly enjoyed by the members especially the beverage table service! We now look forward to our first live club night in July providing that the government guidelines remain unchanged.

NEXT CLUB NIGHT

The next club night will be held on Zoom on Tuesday 15th June. The theme will be 1980s music. We have no guest player. If current government roadmap dates and planned relaxations are maintained we hope to have a live club night in July.

CHARITY CONCERT INTERNATIONALE

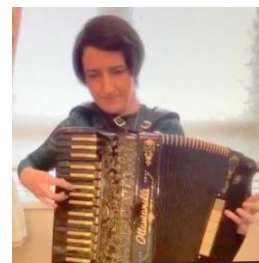
by Steve Hughes

Eighty-nine people, just eleven short of our limit, booked in for the Charity Concert Internationale which took place on Zoom on the evening of Tuesday 6th April, 2021. With the convenience of viewing from home they came from all parts of the UK and included some also from Castelfidardo in Italy, Malta and Latvia. Our guest players were also spread over a wide geographic area, coming (without travelling!) from Italy (Rome), Northern Ireland (Strabane), Wales (Cardiff and Wrexham), and England (Stoke on Trent).

Anne-Marie Devine of Strabane (*pictured here*) took the first spot. She is a music teacher, teaching accordion, banjo, penny-whistle and other instruments, with a business, Up-Beat

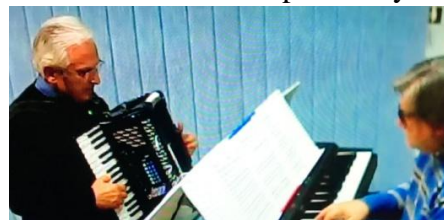


Music, on the border between Northern and Southern Ireland. She started the concert with a rousing rendition of variations on *Carnival of Venice*, played on a Hohner Marino. This was followed by Irish music played on her musette tuned Ottavianelli. Her last number, *Alpine Express*, again on the Hohner, was an unexpected duet, Anne-



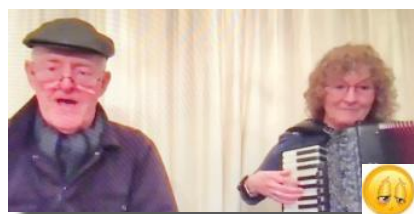
Marie and her teacher, Sean O'Neill, playing at speed with perfect synchrony. Her choice of instruments well suited the music she played throughout.

Anne-Marie was followed by **Bruno Continenza** (*left*) who runs the Educative School of Music, Rome, Bruno playing a Musitech accordion accompanied by his son **David** on a digital piano. All seemed well when they started off with *Waltz No 2* by Dmitri Shostakovich but following this they fell into technical problems with the quality of the sound getting progressively worse over their next pieces causing us



unfortunately to have to terminate their spot prematurely.

Club members **Peter** (vocal) and **Viv Cowie** (accordion accompaniment) (*left*) were the next to be spotlighted but after an introduction of their piece by Peter, their screen froze. After a pause to see if it would correct itself followed by a phone call we again had to terminate the spot. It was only afterwards that we found out that



Peter and Viv's laptop screen went white and they continued through the song (or rather 'act') just in case the rest of us could see them! It's a shame that we missed that bit of light entertainment which we had scheduled as a half-way spot.

Thus ended a somewhat traumatic first half of the concert. Fortunately, things were to improve for the half to come.

Gina Brannelli was scheduled to play at this point but had cancelled a couple of days before due to bereavement. Recently

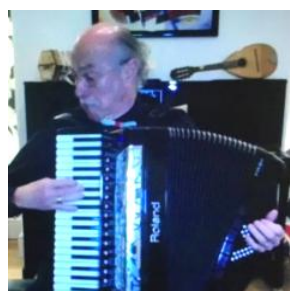
enrolled member **Barry Graham** (*above right*) from Wrexham and local accordionist **Stefan Andrusyschyn** (*left*) stepped in to fill the gap for which we are very grateful.



They each played a couple of pieces, Barry ending with a Ukrainian Cossack song rich with bellow-shakes and Stefan, a lovely rendition of

Blue Danube. A new star emerged when Stefan's son, young Dimitri (*also in the picture*), walked 'on stage' behind Stefan and, after doing his travels of the room, helped us with the applause!

The last spot of the evening went to **Mario Conway**. Now retired, Mario last played as a guest at the North Staffs Accordion Club 21 years ago in April, 2000, and welcomed our invitation to take part in this concert as a means of 'getting going' again with some serious practice. His programme included his own arrangements and compositions, some of which he played on his recently acquired Roland V8 and the last two numbers on the heavier Hohner Gola, finishing the evening for us in a fitting way with an intricate *Fantasia on Funiculi, Funicula*.



Our thanks go to all members involved in organising the event, Barry Smith for his advice on choice of players, club president and musical director, Steve Houghton, for his masterly handling of his role as master of ceremonies on the night, especially for seeing us through 'times of Zoom trouble'. Most of all we thank the guests for performing for us free of charge and the audience, not only for their attendance but also for their generosity in donating over £700 towards the two charities,

Alzheimer's Society and **Amber Trust** (music for deaf children). Thank you also for the many emails and messages that we have received saying how much the concert was enjoyed.

Full details on our website

A full list of the music played by each player is given on our website www.northstaffsaccordianclub.com for the Charity Concert Internationale, and each of our club nights.

APRIL ZOOM CLUB NIGHT

Another month, another Zoom club night. We hope that soon we will have them in the flesh!



Having been through the 50s and 60s, this month the theme was 1970s music beginning with a 'playalong' with music selected and played by Greta Moseley. She was accompanied by all the players present though they were muted, so unheard, any mistakes well hidden.

John Jones was drawn to open the solo proceedings. This he did with a medley of 70s music played in his usual fashion; by ear.

John was followed by Tony Britton (*above left*) who played **Waltz No.2** by Dimitri Shostakovich complete with a backdrop showing a Vienna ballroom with dancers. Mike Richards gave us a song with his second piece, **Red Rose Café**, and Steve Hughes (*right*), before playing **Tarantella Napoleana** gave us his understanding of the derivation of 'Tarantella' which, he said, came from the word tarantula. Apparently, Italians bitten by a tarantula would dance a fast dance to sweat the poison from their bodies (*both words connected to the Italian village of Taranto*). Greta Moseley then took us up to the break with her 1970's selection.



After the break we had contributions from Geoff Capewell, John Cordon, Steve with Cathryn Houghton (*left*), Betty Nixon, Paul Hobbs, Miriam Umpleby and Viv and Peter Cowie. Steve and Cathryn had been late in 'arriving' which Steve put down to having difficulty in setting up a new sound system. After a solo from Steve, Cathryn joined him singing the Elvis song **Snowbird**. The technology did not behave perfectly but it was a lovely performance. Paul, as usual, gave us a master class of precision, Miriam a trio from her own

voice and accompaniment through pre-recordings mixed with live, and Peter and Viv brought us to a fitting conclusion with **Let it Be**.

Most of the players managed to include one, if not a second, 1970s piece.

MAY ZOOM CLUB NIGHT

Compere, Steve Hughes, welcomed the members attending, with a special welcome to our guests, **The Celtic Fettleers** (*right*) and visiting players, Joseph Grima and David Attard all the way from Malta and Tracey Middleton the short(?) hop from Birmingham. The evening started with a 'playalong', music selected by John Jones from our club-preferred book, 250 All-Time Hits and played by him as the 'live player', all other players muted.

Miriam Umpleby was the first solo player with a lovely, and dextrous, presentation of **English Country Garden** played on a glockenspiel. She was told to look forward to an invitation from our MD to contribute to the percussion section of the band! In Miriam fashion, her accordion playing for the next song was accompanied by her singing the melody to her previously recorded vocal harmony.

Paul Hobbs was next to play with, as usual, his own arrangements for his adroit playing skills. He played an Italian waltz, **Battagliero** and **Pennies from Heaven**. Paul always gives the impression that there are two or three people playing.



Top of the bill, our guests, the Celtic Fettleers, accordionist Michael Joyce and guitarist Bryn Ford, then followed. It was the first time for them to meet up in person for 15 months though they have been making lockdown recordings remotely. It was a very entertaining spot demonstrating what good instrumentalists they both are and with Michael adding his voice in song to some of the numbers. They started off with a jig medley they call *The Jig of It* followed by a jazz version of *All of Me*, both of these with vocals. The following numbers were instrumental with Bryn giving a slide guitar Hawaiian accompaniment to *Quendale Bay*, and they ended up with one of Michael's favourites, *Tico Tico*, and *You've Got a Friend in Me*, the latter with vocals. It was a brilliant spot with Michael and Bryn ensuring that they have 'a friend in' everyone present.



After the break Mike Richards (*right*) started off the entertainment with a sea shanty, *Whip Jamboree*, adding his voice in song to the accordion and backing track. This he followed with a Scottish medley. Mike gave us a bit of detail into the difficulties in choosing the rhythm for his backing tracks, sometimes whittling the choice down from about 50 variants, all of which he has to listen to.

We then had our two visitors from the Santa Maria Accordion Band, Malta. Joseph (Jo) Grima (*top left*) was first on playing a Hohner Marino 96. He played French pieces, a shanty, and *La Foule*, a waltz made famous by Edith Piaf. David Attard (*left*) then followed. David is the secretary of the band and explained its set-up. They have eight accordions, playing two parts, a drummer, two percussionists and a string bass, playing, in normal times, about 15 concerts a year. Another lovely player who played *Historia De Un Amor* and *A Tempo Di Musette* on his Roland.



Tracey Middleton, the next player (*right*), watched and apparently prompted by her no. 1 fan, mum Polly (whose arm we could see on screen), gave a lovely performance of *Carte Postale* and *Sway*. Tracey was a guest in March and, along with some of the other guests we have had, has returned to take part.

John Jones MBE then followed with an Edith Piaf medley. He has been an avid busker for charity throughout our 'annus horribilis' apart from the absolute lockdown period and his takings for charity are now in the region of £320,000.

Last but not least, we had a rousing performance by Barry Graham who played *Dancing Fingers* and *Beer Barrel Polka*. Of his 10 or 11 accordions, tonight he played a Ranco Antonio. Circa 1935 with just 2 treble registers, palm operated and 'no bullet holes'.

Full details of all the music played are published on the club website.

TACKLING YOUR NERVES

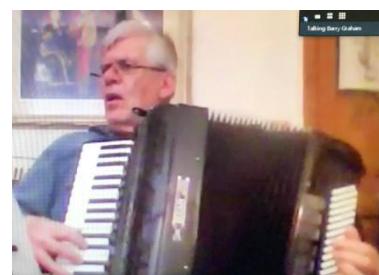
by Dr Barry Graham

The following article was written about fourteen years ago for members of the Chester Accordion Club. The author has kindly given us permission to publish in our newsletter.

At recent meetings, several members have asked me how they can overcome nervous anxiety when they play in public, as they find it causes them to perform below the standard they expect of themselves.

I thought it might be helpful to share a few techniques which I have used at various times, either singly or in combination, and which, I think, will help the overall standard of performance.

I find it helps to apply Eastern thinking. Whatever we undertake in life should be *right at the beginning* (correctly prepared with the right motivation), *right in the middle* (played with care and attitude), and *right at the end* (the proper aim is achieved).



So to start with, we ask the question, “Why are we playing in public?” We have comfortable warm houses, where we can play away to our hearts content and not worry whether we make any mistakes or not. So why put ourselves through this harrowing experience? We could go and play in a mountain hut or on a deserted island - perhaps our partners would appreciate this.

If we set out with the idea of ‘showing off’ or proving how good we can play, then any failure becomes more threatening. The **only** reason to play in public is to give the audience a pleasant and enjoyable experience. If we can hold that as our prime aim, then we do not have to worry about letting ourselves down, but we can concentrate on the perspective of the audience.

So let us put ourselves in the position of the audience for a few minutes. Now, what would we like to hear? Four or five technically difficult pieces played somewhat shakily, and with loss of expression and continuity, or would we rather hear two or three easier pieces played well and confidently, with lots of expression and feeling?

So my first point is that the selection of suitable pieces, particularly the first piece of the performance, is so very important. I would suggest that this piece should be one that we know so well that we can play it without the music, at least in our head, if not physically on the accordion! Even if we cannot remember it, we need to have a familiarity with the sheet music so that the very effort of reading the music does not distract us from the mechanical problem of playing the piece and hearing what we have played. In my experience this is a common problem. And it is probably more entertaining to use an opening pieces that the audience hasn’t heard us play *too* many times before, if we really wish to entertain them. We all have our favourite pieces, but they may not be everybody’s favourites! Something fresh is usually welcome!

So, having selected a suitable piece, we’re up there and ready to play! Despite any time-pressure from the MC for the evening let’s not rush at it! Why not take a few seconds just to make sure that we are comfortable, and that the accordion is comfortable, and that we can see the music, and that we have all pages in the right order. And before starting, it really is worth taking just a few extra seconds, to remind ourselves of any key and register changes, and the order of the different sections of music in that piece. How often do we forget a ‘repeat’ or a ‘D.C al fine.’ It’s best to know where we are going before we start out! No map reading on the motorway!

So we choose this piece which is well within our technical playing ability. Do we need to wipe our hands or to use a little talc or chalk, especially in hot weather? And after getting ourselves all set up and taking a few seconds to breathe gently and relax, and remembering to open and close the bellows before we start, to get rid of creaks and stiffness (in the bellows - not ourselves), we start to play. Grasshoppers!



We find that instead of our mind staying with the music, within a few bars we will be thinking of something entirely different. Is there anybody who has not noticed this? The people in the East say that Westerners have ‘grasshopper minds’. It does not matter what we are doing, before we have completed it, our mind will have wandered to half a dozen different topics, most of which are entirely unrelated to

the matter in hand. If you do not believe this, try the following experiment. In the countryside or on the beach place two stones, about 20 metres apart. Decide that you only want to think about the act of walking, and nothing else. Now walk from one stone to the other very slowly, trying to think of nothing else except the walking. How far do you actually manage to walk before some other thought jumps into your mind? For most people it is less than 5 yards! Most of us are incapable of walking for about a minute without 10 or 20 apparently random thoughts entering our minds.

Unfortunately, when we are playing music, our minds also tend to wander off, quite suddenly onto unrelated topics, just like a grasshopper disturbed on a piece of grass. So when we are practising our music we need to develop more awareness of this happening. As we cultivate this awareness, or watchfulness, we can gently start to ring a little alarm bell in our mind as soon as it happens. With this awareness that our concentration has shifted we are then in a position to *gently and uncritically* bring it back to the music. We do not get angry or annoyed or frustrated with ourselves, because this wandering mind is simply a human characteristic that we all have, but rarely study. If we do not cultivate the awareness, then we cannot limit the damage to our performance from drifting concentration.

So by practising playing in this fashion, we can learn to stay with the piece. It also usefully distracts us from the presence of the audience. We are just too busy reading the music and trying to stay aware and applying the gentle corrections to the mind as it wanders, to be agitated by the presence of a room full of

people. If we start to worry about the people this is merely another grasshopper thought and we need gently to come back 100% to the music. Do you think a circus tight rope walker would be distracted by the audience?

But we must start doing this at home. Choose a simple and familiar piece about a minute in length or less. Play it through gently. During the piece and at the end try to note how many different things we have actually thought of, besides the music. Now try again, this time, being aware of the intrusive thoughts as they arise, and gently trying to bring our mind straight back to the music in a non-critical way. And then get into the habit of playing like this nearly every time you play, whether alone or in public.

Now I will say a few words about distraction from the audience. One of my University Lecturers was by nature very shy. But he overcame this to become a very extroverted and popular lecturer. He had a secret. Every time he became embarrassed he would imagine the entire audience were sitting on toilets, and the shoe was on the other foot, so to speak. I understand this is a fairly 'bog standard' technique amongst lecturers, but I have not been able to ascertain how many musicians use it.



My lecturer was a strange man, but the technique worked for him. I now use different methods, but first, there is a little story, again, from the East. A girl was running through the forest on a beautiful spring day to meet with her lover. Listening to the birdsong and distracted by the thoughts of the meeting, she accidentally put her foot on the corner of a prayer mat of a devotee who was kneeling by the path, attending to his daily prayers. He immediately interrupted his prayers and ranted at her for disturbing him when he was busy with God and for being so obsessed with her worldly lover that she upset his discourse with his God. When he had finished letting off steam, the girl replied to him that if he had been concentrating on his God, as hard as she had been thinking of her lover, then he would not even have noticed her treading on the mat or going past!

To develop this level of concentration, we really need to try to use these techniques every time we play, so that they become natural to us. We actually need to fall in love with our music! If we develop this level of concentration, then we will not be distractible by people coughing or sneezing or talking, but hopefully we might still notice a fire alarm!

If we are distracted we should work on our own techniques of concentration, rather than getting uptight with the audience for whom we are actually privileged to play!

As we build up the power of concentration we can start to use extra little tricks to help our music and keep the mind on the job.

For example, if we have a nice gentle and easy piece to open with, we might feel it's a little dull and lacking lustre and hence not a good start to our entertaining. Suppose we can, with practice, keep about 75% of our mind's concentration mainly on the music. We can use the rest of our mind to improve the presentation of the piece. We could, for example, decide to play the piece so very softly and gently, like a lullaby. And to help with this, we could picture, with that spare 20% of our mind, a newborn baby, and we can imagine that the music we are playing is to be some of the first sounds he or she will hear in this world. This is an 'empowering image'.

Now what sort of expression and concentration is going to fill your performance! When our mind is concentrating both on a mental image as beautiful as this AND on playing the music, there isn't much spare capacity for straying onto extraneous thoughts. We still have 5% of our mind watching out for those extraneous thoughts, ready to redirect the mind back to the music and the empowering image. This is a very difficult technique at first, achieving the balance between concentrating on the music and also on the empowering image, but it is well worth practising and eventually can improve the sensitivity and entertainment value of your music quite a lot. So when you play a march, you might picture a smart military band, or when you play a Strauss waltz you might picture the elegant ballroom scene with the little orchestra and the rhythmic rise and fall of the dancers and the charged romantic atmosphere. Music is art and all art involves imagination and there is room here to let it run wild a bit!

You will probably never be entirely satisfied with your entire performance. There will always be something you can do better, but these techniques may help you to 'entertain' in the true sense of the word

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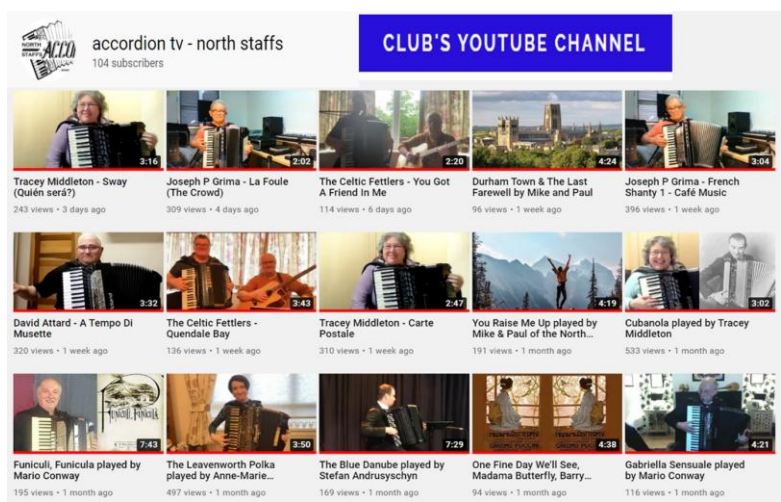


Our YouTube Channel gets its first 100 subscribers!

Yes our YouTube Channel has 104 subscribers, over 20,000 viewings and includes 49 videos of club performances. You can get to it by Googling.....

Accordion tv - North Staffs

or by clicking (or typing in) the link at the bottom of this page.



Enjoy the videos on

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