

North Staffs Accordion Club

March-April 2025

No 517



HI EVERYONE. I HOPE YOU ARE ALL WELL AND ENJOYING THE GOOD WEATHER—NOT NEGLECTING THE PRACTISING OF COURSE. THIS MONTH WE WELCOME A NEW MEMBER – JOHN BARANEK FROM WARRINGTON.

NORTH STAFFS ACCORDION CLUB'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY

by Joan Walley (and an addendum to the article published in our last newsletter about her father's rather special accordion)



The forthcoming 40th anniversary of North Staffs Accordion Club coincides with **the centenary of the granting of city status for the City of Stoke on Trent.** Anniversaries matter. They're the milestones in our cultural history. They mark out our shared history. What went before and the way we were shows us how we got to where we are. The cultural events that celebrated landmark occasions are imprinted on our lives too. Their significance stays with us as memories live on long after the event itself. Whether it's the fading photographs, the stories retold over the years, or the artefacts that commemorated them, the memories and sounds still linger however far removed they may be from living memory.

I'd like to think that these two anniversaries are an excuse to shine a spotlight on a very special musical instrument that has been handed down from my dad. I know that as an accomplished accordion player his cherished accordion meant a lot to him. I know that in its 40th year the accordion club is exploring ways of bringing its history to a wider audience. I know that their many enthusiasts are interested to find out more about the specialist companies who have manufactured piano accordions over the years. The sad news about the liquidation of Maugein, the French company that closed shop after 105 years of making the instrument makes accordion enthusiasts everywhere more determined than ever to create solutions whether through employee buyouts or other means.

In a craft city like Stoke on Trent we know all about the importance of heritage brands too. Local accordion players are very proud of the links they have with the Italian city of Castelfidardo where companies like Scandalli, the iconic company of handmade and incomparable handmade musical instruments are based.

The people of the Potteries who once flocked to Trentham Gardens for their entertainment are still seeking entertainment. Music in all its forms helped and continues to shape our city. Musicians, professional or amateur play an enormous part in our lives. Musical artefacts that have been handed down remind us of our cultural heritage. All the more reason for the North Staffordshire Accordion Club's 40th year celebrations to put a spotlight on keeping that tradition alive. I hope that they are successful in tracking down the history of my dad's specially made red white and blue accordion and that its story can trigger wider interest. If only it could speak, what a tale this special accordion could tell.

CELEBRATION OF OUR 40TH ANNIVERSARY

We will be celebrating our 40th Anniversary at our rather special May club night. Our ex-chairman, Mike Richards, is the only current member who is also one of the founder members. Joy Rendel, who was Joy Kibble at the time, another of the founder members, now lives in Devon and will be making the journey to be with us on the night. We look forward to a performance by the band, a pie and pea supper, the cutting of an anniversary cake, speeches and accordion performances.



FUTURE CLUB NIGHTS

The April club night will be a players' night without a theme, and in June we can look forward to having Steve Roxton and Jean Dauvin. Jean, from France, has, once again, teamed up with Steve for a UK tour.

FEBRUARY CLUB NIGHT

The February club night was held on a bitterly cold and windy evening which had a detrimental effect on the attendance, with only 22 turning up. This did not impact the enthusiasm and enjoyment of those who braved the elements, and a good time was had by one and all.

For the first time in many years we had a performance of members' own compositions. John Plumb was the first drawn to play, with a composition in C entitled '*When You are Gone*'. John had



composed this, with lyrics, in August 1960 after leaving his newly-wed wife, Jean, in Llanbedrog, Wales, because the sea air there greatly alleviated her morning sickness. Jean was carrying her first-born child, Nicholas John. John Plumb would have played the piece himself but, suffering with a painful arm, he sang the lyrics, with help from the audience, whilst accompanied by three of the members, Viv Cowie, John Corden and Steve Hughes.

Steve Hughes was next up with a Gm composition called '*Molly's Tears*'. He explained that he tried to get his granddaughters' names in his compositions and was up to 3 of 6. Steve was followed by Jacqui Flather with a lively piece, hot off the press, with a title of current relevance, '*Zelensky's Polka*'. No, she didn't ask his permission and it isn't known as to whether he dances the polka but it went down well with the audience.



The last piece was a composition by Viv Cowie in D entitled

'*Shetland in the Morning*', a 'folky' piece related to the 'Up Helly Aa' Shetland festival held annually. The lyrics were sung by hubby, Pete, with a bit of help from the audience with the two-line chorus 'Up Helly Aa the locals sing, Up Helly Aa we are the Vikings'.

Two other compositions were planned to have been played but Paul Hobbs and Miriam Umpleby were unable to attend on the night. We look forward to hearing them on a future club night.

A message to members – start working on one for March 2026.

The evening continued with contributions from the players present with the theme 'Love':

Charlie Walker

Poems with guitar accompaniment Love Song, and the hilarious Wallpaper

A-Team (Rosie, Viv, Jacqui and Tony)

La Vie en Rose, Speak Softly Love

Elizabeth Brixton)

Lili Marlene, You are the One (Indian song) & Silver Celebration

Jackie Flather

And I Love Her, Can't Buy me Love

Geoff Capewell

Answer Me, Longing for You, Ich Lieber Dich

Rosie G and John C

Kentucky Waltz, Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain

Betty Nixon
Derek Wilton

Tony Britton
Steve Hughes

Sweet Caroline, Music of the Night
Groovy Kind of Love. When I Fall in Love.
My Resistance is Low,
Somewhere my Love, Sealed With a Kiss
Falling in Love with Love, My Funny Valentine

MARCH CLUB NIGHT

by Rosie Galley

If you didn't manage to come to March's club night, what a treat you missed. I so enjoyed meeting new people and listening to some wonderful music. As preparations for the night were made John Jones provided some lovely background music including the famous *Sweet Caroline*.

One of the new people I met was John Baranek. John had come to our club many years ago along with three other friends and had come all the way from Warrington. It was great to see that he joined the club as a member, and he really enjoyed the evening.

The players started the evening off with several tunes and we enjoyed joining in with singing.

Our guests were Gennaro and Colette Fiondella. They had travelled 5 hours to get to us from Worthing where they have an accordion academy. They met when Gennaro was 10 and Colette was 8, when they used to go to the Keith Harling school for accordion lessons. Colette put aside the accordion for a time to work in accountancy but always said to Gennaro that she would call him some day and 21 years later, she did (!) and the rest they say is history, culminating in their marriage during Covid.



They both played Cooperativa accordions and played a wide range of tunes from *Flowers of the Sea* to Elvis's number *I Can't Help Falling in Love with You*. Most of the music had been arranged by themselves and one number called *Rondo Waltz* had been written by Colette for her GCSE's, which Gennaro had set as a duet arrangement. One of my favourite tunes of the night was *Pachelbel Canon in D* which brought back memories for me as it was played as Keith, and I came out of church when we got married. I also really enjoyed a gentle tune called *The Lonely Shepherd*.

After the break Miriam played her own band composition called *Accordions on the March*. She had recorded the music for accordion 2, 3, and bass, and played this while she played accordion 1. It was a very rousing tune. John Jones treated us to a medley of Abba songs, and we also heard from Joe Hill. Joe has been recovering from surgery and unable to play his accordion for some time. He told me he had practised what he was playing in the morning, and it hadn't gone well, but when he played Monti's *Czardas* we all sat back in admiration at his musical talent, it was superb.



Miriam

Gennaro and Colette gave us such a wonderful evening of rich music. The late great singer Aretha Franklin once said "Music does a lot of things for a lot of people. It's transporting, for sure. It can take you right back, back, to the very moment certain things happened in your life. It's uplifting, it's encouraging, it's strengthening."

After an evening of such amazing music I certainly came away feeling uplifted and encouraged.



John Jones

MILOŠ MILIVOJEVIĆ APPEARS AT KEELE

by Steve Hughes

On Wednesday 12th February I had the pleasure of going with Stefan Andrusychyn to a candlelight concert held at the Keele University Chapel. The attraction, for us, was the appearance of the extraordinary accordion player, Miloš Milivojević, as part of the London Tango Quintet, a group of 'internationally acclaimed musicians performing tango music at the highest level'.

The performance was outstanding with well-known Astor Piazzolla pieces interspersed with solos, traditional tangos and original pieces composed specially for the group. Miloš (*left*), on his Pigini Nova bayan button accordion, played the Astor Piazzolla piece 'Oblivion' as his solo, a piece that Stefan





plays himself. We had a chat with him during the break and what a gentleman he turned out to be. Well done for Keele University for bringing this group to Stoke on Trent.

We had some added entertainment following the concert when a Ukrainian youth (probably about 16 or 17 years old) from the audience took to the grand piano and confidently, and loudly, played two or three Chopin pieces. Those of us remaining in the hall were enthralled.

new.milosmilivojevic.com

keele.ac.uk/artskeele

IN 'THE PITS FOR PANTO!

By Jacqui Flather



In October last year, I did something I had never done before – I answered an ad wanting musicians!

‘Looking for an Accordionist!’ it said. The local amateur dramatics group for Stone in Staffordshire, known as the Stone Revellers, were doing their annual panto, and this year it was to be Treasure Island. They wanted their music to have a pirate-y sound!

I duly sent off an email – and promptly got a reply asking me what my experience was. I suddenly wondered if I had bitten off more than I could chew! I



sent a reply explaining that I had been playing accordion for just over 2 years, and I consider myself to be a reasonable intermediate player – but I was good at reading music, and sight reading. I told them that I have been a member of North Staffs Accordion Band for a couple of years, but I have never played in a band with guitars and drums and fiddle players – so this was going to be a real new experience for me!

The director, Rob, invited me to meet him and the musical director, Dan, one Tuesday evening – and to bring my accordion with me. Ooooooooooh! An audition!! Now I was nervous!

I needn't have worried - they were so pleased that they had found someone and that I lived so locally – and that I was willing to join them.

I played a little that evening with Dan – we had a run through of ‘Tell me Ma’ - and I felt OK with that – I would need a bit of practice – but as a band member – I wouldn't need to play the whole thing – I WAS IN!!

It was arranged that the band would meet at the local church hall one Sunday to have a run through the score – in the meantime, Dan sent me a link to download the music – it was a bit of a shock / pleasant surprise to see regular pop tunes, mixed into a few medleys.

There was a Taylor Swift medley which sounded great. There was a Money medley – which included songs like ‘Gold’ by Spandau Ballet, ‘Money’ by Pink Floyd, ‘Money, Money. Money’ by Abba, ‘Gold Digger’ by Kanye West, ‘If I Were a Rich Girl’ by Gwen Stefani and more. There were bits of music by Billy Eilish, Bruno Mars, Kylie, Dolly Parton and Billy Joel. We included Wellerman and Y.M.C.A. - all with the words changed to be in line with the Treasure Island story. There were 20 pieces of music in all!

What I also noticed is that the music was very simply written – with a vocal line with the tune, a counter melody and some bass chords written in blocks to show the rhythm.

The first band practice was a 4-hour session – it was such a lot of fun – although VERY nervous, I started to settle in and thoroughly enjoyed it – whilst at the same time still wondering and trying to work out which ‘bits’ of the music I was going to play.



We didn't meet many times in the run up to the panto – but did do a couple of sessions with the cast – they were SO GOOD! It made it so much easier to play with them – as their singing was superb. There was a cast of 35, made up of adults, teenagers and children – but they were all excellent!

The week of the panto arrived – and we had the first access to the theatre on the Sunday evening- when the stage guys were building the sets – and we had our first look at where we, the band, would be sitting. The theatre was brand new – it is in Stone situated next

to the Joules Crown Wharf pub by the canal. I live in Stone, and this was the first time I had seen inside the place, and I was really surprised how well it was set up.

The band comprised drums, keyboard, bass guitar, electric guitar, accordion and two violins – we were set up on a small, raised stage at the back of the main stage, behind a gauze curtain – which meant that when the lights were on us, you could see us all clearly, but when the lights were on the main stage you could not see us so much. It was tight for space – and a little dicey in case someone might fall off – but nobody did, thankfully! We were all mic'd up, and the tech team got the balance for our band sound right.

We had two nights of dress rehearsals which were LONG! Starting at 6.30pm and I was getting home after 11pm – and I only live 3 minutes away from the theatre, so I was lucky!

Then it was opening night – we were all so excited! And I was nervous – The fiddle players and I had the intro to the first song which opened the show! We hit it – then we were away! The band played better and better and better over the five completely sold-out shows – we really gelled, and it sounded great. The audience loved the whole thing – they really got involved, as you do in panto, but it just made it for everyone.

Something which struck me was just how much work and effort had gone into producing this show – from writing the script, choosing the music and writing the score and lyrics, designing and building the set – so it moved around – deconstructing it all again at the end – then the time given by everyone for the rehearsals. Just an incredible effort by all the team – and they produce 4 shows a year!

Did we have any blunders? Not really – everything went to plan – the band missed one of the cues for one of the songs on the first night – but it was panto – it didn't matter!

The last two performances were on 7th December – that day when we had very strong stormy winds. two minutes after the end of the matinee show there was a power outage over the whole of the town which lasted for two and a half hours – it came back on 10 minutes before the start of the last performance! The gods were with us!

Would I do it again? Oh NO you wouldn't! OH YES, I WOULD – ABSOLUTELY!!

KNUTSFORD ACCORDION DAY, 2025

We still have some places left for the Knutsford Accordion Day to be held at the lovely Marthall Hall, Knutsford, on the 10th May. If you haven't booked yet, contact Steve Hughes on **07939 362294** or email chair@northstaffsaccordionclub.com

Our MD for the day is **Jane Ward**, MD of No.1 Ladies Accordion Orchestra:

JANE WARD

My brother started taking accordion lessons when I was seven and I was fascinated by the instrument, so my parents gave me the choice of either continuing with my ballet lessons or to begin learning to play the accordion. Luckily I made the right choice.

I started having weekly lessons with Jennifer Neal of Jenny's Accordionists in Colchester and within a year I had taken my Grade 2 practical exam and won my first competition. Jenny also held weekly group classes and eventually formed two small orchestras.

Each following year, until I was 13, I took theory and practical exams, reaching Grade 6 theory and Grade 7 practical. The following year, the syllabus for the theory was upgraded and I found the jump too difficult so never finished my theory exams. However, I completed all the work for Grade 8 and Diploma practical exams although was never able to take them as I didn't have the required Grade 7 theory.

The orchestras took part in many competitions, both in the UK and abroad, with a fair amount of success, and I became the leader of the Intermediate, then Advanced and finally Art Level orchestras. I also took part in the duet and group sections in the NAO UK championships and, in 1981, won the Advanced Solo, Art Level Duet, Art Level Group and Advanced Band sections, after which I decided to give up solo competitions, although I continued to play in the orchestra until 2002.

During this time I also played in German, Polish and Scottish bands and developed a love of French musette music.

In 1989 I was approached to play for a local morris side – and this introduced me to the world of folk music (and my husband!). Folk music is now my main love,



although I'm happy to dabble in any other genre.

After moving to Newmarket in 1992 I joined a local ceilidh band and played with them for 24 years and gave private lessons, both locally and on zoom. I used to go to folk workshops and regularly went to the accordion weekends at Halsway Manor, in Somerset, and there met Karen Tweed and Paul Hutchison. They asked me if I would be a tutor for the beginners' group and I did this for several years. I also depped for Paul's accordion classes at Cecil Sharp House.

10 years ago I was approached by the No.1 Ladies Accordion Orchestra who were looking for a new Musical Director. The group was originally formed by Karen Tweed who unfortunately had to give up leading them due to ill health. I changed the direction of the music they played to a more orchestral style and they have gone from strength to strength – through their dedication and my nagging! The Ladies come from all across England, Wales and Scotland and each year we meet up in different venues across the country for 6 weekends of rehearsals and concerts. Because of working with them I have had to learn how to write arrangements (not easy for me) and I have also been able to fulfil a long-held ambition to conduct an orchestra.

I currently play in a quartet (accordion, cello, guitar/mandolin and voice/bodhran) performing traditional and contemporary folk music. My latest project is accompanying a tenor singer – our programme includes songs from the 1600s to present day, which gives me the opportunity to play baroque music - a genre which I feel works really well on the accordion.



WHEN YOU ARE GONE

Below is the piece of music written by John Plumb back in 1960 for his wife.

REFRAIN: [Grandioso]

$\text{♩} = 110$

C G7 C

When you are gone there re - mains An empty song there re - mains A life of void Till you come home a - gain!

10 C G7 C Fin

The nights are long, till you come.. The day's too strong, till you come.. My love just aches... For your re - turn

VERSE: Piano-Largo + Alla Marcia!

18 Em Am Em D7 G7 D.C. al Fir

When you're a-way Laugh - ter dis app - ears All that is left.. Is your mem or - y Which ling - ers

Diary

Club Nights at Bradwell WMC ST5 8JA (normally third Tuesday of the month)

May 20th	40s Anniversary Celebration
June 17 th	Steve Roxton/Jean Dauvin
July	Theme – Season of the Year
September 16th	The Northern Lasses
October 32st	AGM & Band
Nov 11th (2nd Tue)	Leonard Brown
December 16th	Xmas Party Roman Voloshchuk

Beginners/Improvers at Bradwell WMC

April	7th	28th
May	11th	25th

Band rehearsals at Bradwell WMC

Playing for Pleasure at the Boat Club, Endon
Knutsford Accordion Day

Tuesdays except 3rd
Second Thursdays 2 pm.
Saturday 10th May 2025

External Events

St Audries Accordion	July 4 th - 11 th
Midland Accordion Festival	November 7 th , 8 th and 9 th

Club Contacts

President Peter Cowie

Trustees:

Chair Steve Hughes 07939 362294

Acting Secretary Steve Hughes 07939 362294

Treasurer Tony Britton 07923 580760

John Corden, Jacqui Flather, Rosie Galley, Betty Nixon, Ron Rhodes

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