

# North Staffs Accordion Club

## Newsletter

March/April 2021

No 493

Book now for the  
**ZOOM**  
CHARITY CONCERT INTERNATIONALE  
Tuesday 6th April 2021 at 7.00pm  
featuring

Bruno Continenza (Rome, Italy)  
Anne-Marie Devine (Shannon, Northern Ireland)  
Gina Brannelli (Bristolport, England)  
Mario Conway (Cardiff, Wales)

With some light entertainment from club members Viv and Peter Cowie

Online attendance is free though a donation would be welcomed for our selected charities (if suggested).

The Zoom invitations will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.  
Organised by the North Staffs Accordion Club  
Further information available on [www.northstaffsaccordionclub.co.uk](http://www.northstaffsaccordionclub.co.uk)  
Contact by email: [info@northstaffsaccordionclub.co.uk](mailto:info@northstaffsaccordionclub.co.uk)

ON  
**7.00PM APRIL 6TH**  
WITH  
**BRUNO CONTINENZA  
ANNE-MARIE DEVINE  
GINA BRANNELLI  
& MARIO CONWAY**

A FEW PLACES  
STILL  
AVAILABLE

MAY 18TH 7.00PM  
**ZOOM** CLUB NIGHT  
WITH  
**THE FETTLERS**

**HI EVERYONE. I HOPE YOU ARE ALL WELL. I ASSUME THAT ALL OF US ARE NOW PROTECTED BY THE VACCINE OR AT LEAST MOST. THE WEATHER IS CHANGING AND HOPEFULLY WE WILL ALL BE RELEASED SOON. LILY**

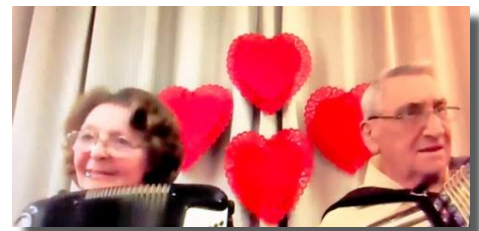
## FEBRUARY CLUB NIGHT

With our annual February theme of ‘Love Songs’, we had eighteen players to fit into our club night on Tuesday the 19<sup>th</sup>. Remarkably, by the end of the 150 minute and 36 song session, not one song had been repeated. Quite a few of the members felt brave enough to accompany their playing with singing, enough for someone to remark, “We should start a club choir!”



To avoid virtual boxing matches our order of play is decided by a random number draw and first place was awarded to Mike Richards who, using backing track with his accordion accompaniment, started the ‘singing’ ball rolling in his second number, the Beach Boys song, *Sloop John B*. Following his lead the second player, John Plumb (*above*), also sang. His renditions were *I Wish You Love* and *Hello Young Lovers*.

Ann and Richard Millward had a ‘hearts’ backdrop for their performance and started off everyone experimenting with Zoom filters when they came on with heart head-gear (Ann) and a ‘saints’ halo (Richard)), although Ann later seemed to have acquired the halo (*above*). It added a bit of frivolity and colour to the evening as did Betty and Ken (*right*) with their elegant heart-shaped table mats placed as a background decoration.



The next singer was Peter Cowie who had the luxury of having accordion accompaniment by his wife, Viv. They performed *I Just Called to say I Love You* and *Mona Lisa*. Viv is getting good at this accompanying lark, staying on chords and fill-ins and off the melody. Peter, on the other hand, has the ‘strongest voice in town’.



Another of our regular singers was Miriam Umpleby who gave us *Scarlet Ribbons* and the Phantom of the Opera number, *Love Changes Everything*. She was immediately followed by Steve Hughes who sang a Cliff Richard number *When the Girl in Your Arms*, and Jimmy Clanton’s *Venus in Blue Jeans*.

The vocal icing on the cake came with the last number of the

evening which was a costume virtual show by the Houghton family (*above left*). Steve played the accordion accompaniment and Cathryn and Lydia singing/acting the Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat number '*Those Canaan Days*' It was a performance worthy of the best amateur dramatics company which, apparently, they had also put on for their church.

None of the other accordionists have been mentioned and there were some excellent performances. They are all listed, along with what they played, on our website. Our virtual club nights are as popular as ever with a record number attending.

## MARCH CLUB NIGHT

This was another virtual club night with good attendance by the members, all peering from their pigeon-holes at the start of what turned out to be a most enjoyable evening's entertainment.

Compere Steve Hughes greeted those attending with a special welcome and thanks to our guest from Birmingham. **Tracey Middleton**. Tracey (*right*) has made appearances at the club in the past but only as member of folk duet, Amaryllis. She said she was very pleased to get our invitation, the first club invitation for her as a solo player. She said that the invitation had got her playing again after five-months of not doing so during the lockdown and that for the past six weeks she had been brushing up her non-folk repertoire for this event. She played our usual two ten-minute spots with some beautiful playing of *Rumbata*,



*Accordeon in Switzerland*, a tango medley, *Only Love* in the first half and, in the second, *Musette for a Magpie*, *Pasodoble medley*, *La Bamba*, and encore Frosini's *Cubanola*.

Some of these performances will be appearing on our YouTube channel 'Accordion TV North Staffs'. Thank you again, Tracey



For the rest of the night's entertainment we had playing by members. We started the evening with a playalong with a difference. It was led by Mike Richards who had chosen the music and had prepared backing tracks for

each of the three pieces. He played the pieces twice through, the first time playing the melody to the backing track with the players, and the second time leaving it to the members to play the melody without hearing it other than their own attempt.

Again we had singing, this time from three regulars, Miriam Umpleby, who sang *Tulips from Amsterdam* to her own accordion accompaniment, bass singer Mike Richards with backing track and accordion who sang *The Ferryman*, and Peter Cowie sang *The Fields of Athenry* and *End of the World*,



with Viv Cowie providing the accompaniment on her Vignoni. We had two classical pieces played, Haydn's *Serenade* played (again) by Miriam, and *Scheherazade (3rd Movement)* by Rimsky-Korsakov played by Barry Graham. Tony Britton once more displayed poster backgrounds for his contributions, *Somewhere My Love* and *Love is a Many Splendored Thing* (*left*). Having discarded her accordion and Northumbrian pipes, Moira Hague, told us a loooooong joke.



A full list of players (*including Rosie Galley below and Greta Moseley and John Cordon above*) and what they played is

published on our website.

It wasn't all plain sailing and we had more technical hiccups than usual. Editor, Lily, missed the whole concert (couldn't get the link to work – or was it an excuse not to have to write this account?) and Norman and Joan had to get help to log in. Although he could apparently see and hear us, Ken Marek sat in virtual darkness throughout having failed to get his camera working. When it came to their turn to play Betty Nixon and Ken Hall couldn't get their sound heard by the rest of us even though they were unmuted. They had to play later in the programme when sorted out.



These snags aside, the quality of sound that we get from Zoom is much improved with their latest software releases.

During the break we tried out the Zoom polling feature. With more and more members taking part, the end time of our club nights can get rather late and the members were offered options to address this. The options included accepting the later time, reducing the time per performance or having players perform alternate months. 75% of those present opted to accept the later finish time.

We look forward to our April club night which will have a theme of '1970's music'.

## CHARITY CONCERT INTERNATIONALE, SPRING 2021

A few places remain available for the online charity concert organised by our club for Tuesday evening, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2021. The guests, who are not charging for their performance, are:

**BRUNO CONTINENZA** from Rome.

**ANNE-MARIE DEVINE** from Strabane in Northern Island

**GINA BRANNELLI** from Blackpool.

**MARIO CONWAY** from Wales.

And there is an 'intermezzo' of light entertainment by our members **Viv** and **Peter Cowie**.

There is no charge for the event though we are accepting donations, which will be forwarded to our chosen charities, the **Alzheimer's Society** and **The Amber Trust**. As this newsletter is written the furthest booking we have had is from Latvia.



## LIVE PLAYING - LATEST GUIDANCE

At the date of writing, following is the government roadmap as it affects us for live playing. These are 'not before' dates and could be reset to later (but not earlier) dates:

**29 March** – 6 people can meet outdoors, including back gardens, meaning informal small rehearsals in an open space can resume providing there is no audience and social distancing rules are applied.

*Note that the DCMS advice confirms that as an organised event it would not be restricted to two families as is the case for social gatherings.*

**17 May** – Band rehearsals may restart, social distancing, without an audience and subject to having produced a relevant risk assessment.

**21 June** – Legal limits on social contacts may be removed and all activities may restart. This, however, will be subject to government reviews prior to the date.



## APRIL AND MAY CLUBNITE

Don't forget that our April club night on the 20<sup>th</sup> will have a theme of '1970's music'.

Then on 18<sup>th</sup> May we will be welcoming back to the club, via zoom, the popular **Fettlers** (left) from up in Bolton. They have visited us a few times in the past but this time they will be beaming themselves down via Zoom without the chore of travelling.

## LEN FORSTER RIP

It was with great sadness that we received news of the passing away of Len Forster, once conductor of our band. He had been suffering from COPD over a long period of time. I first met Len when we both worked at local computer company English Electric, which later became ICL, in the 1970s but was not aware of his music interests. Some years later our band played in the Alsager Community Hall, sharing the stage with a local ladies' choir which Len was conducting. This was his contact with our club, which he joined, later becoming the conductor. He was a lively character with a keen sense of humour, very



knowledgeable in the field of music, a good accordion player and on the practical side could re-tune an accordion. The world has lost a gem. RIP. **Steve**

*An article written by him for our newsletter in 2005 follows.*

## HOW I CAME TO PLAY THE ACCORDION

by **Len Forster** (Sept 2005)

Many years ago I used to listen to Sandy McPherson on the wireless, (radio wasn't invented yet), playing the theatre organ. Mother played the piano, Dad had a 12 bass 'Pietro' accordion and his mate, George Formstone, had just bought a Hohner Verdi III 120 Bass. Towards the end of the war I was picking up tunes and playing, mostly right handed only, on the piano. Not the accordion – mother said it was decadent and for busking on street corners!! Moving on, I spent my formative years in the local C of E village school in Clutton, Cheshire. We lived in Coddington. We did sums, English, singing, poetry, scripture, played rounders and danced around the May pole. Everyone from 5 to 15 was taught in one big classroom, (comprehensive I presume).



The 11+ loomed and nobody passed. It was decided that Leonard would have piano lessons – 'got to make something of him'. Miss Saunders loomed into the picture at 2/6p an hour for 18 months, at one lesson every two weeks. Brenda was, I have realised since, a bit special. She was classically trained on piano and organ, and a brilliant musician. A typical lesson was perhaps Beethoven, Bach or Chopin – some theory and, 'Now then what have you learned to play by ear this week?' Her view was that even the famous composers heard the music before it was written down for experts to 'have views on'. I sneaked the occasional 'go' on the accordion when everybody was out. We had no electricity – an oil lamp is useful for warming fingers during winter practice – water came out of a pump or the local mill pond complete with bits of weed and we had the occasional biology lesson (keep teeth closed when drinking). All food was organic - I helped my dad spread it on the garden and dig it in.

I never did a lot of practice. The country outdoors was more fun. I would be climbing trees, tearing the a\*\*e out of my trousers on barbed wire, fishing in the millpond and catching rabbits. On a Saturday morning you would see me on the pushbike heading off to the local warren with nets, pegs and a polecat ferret looking out of my v-neck pullover.

Getting back to this 'music thing'. I played the piano sometimes after leaving school and starting work in Chester. I had already played the organ at Coddington Church, entertained the local W.I. and played several times for school assembly. (I got 2 or 3 fights out of this). Cannon Alan Edwards at Bickerton Church needed an organist. I was volunteered and had a few lessons from Miss Clegg who was retiring after 50 years' organ service. This was 1954 and in July Miss Saunders was taken ill. She died that year and had requested that I played at her funeral. Miss Clegg pumped the organ. Miss Saunders had taught lots of people – why me?

Around this time I had a trip to Samuels in Liverpool and bought a 120 bass Frontalini accordion. Three weeks later I was there again swapping it for a 140 bass Paolo Soprani. Standing looking in the window with the Frontalini in its case, I debated what to do. A guy in a 'demob-suit' with a small brown case and a carrier bag came up and said, "Do you play the accordion then?" This was an Irish voice. I stuttered a 'yes'. "If I were you I'd get the big one in the middle of the window. It will last you a lifetime." With that he walked away. Someone in the drawing office the following day had a 'Liverpool Echo' with the headline that a man had been released from Walton Prison and had gone back to Ireland. The man had received a lot of press attention over the years and his name was Brendan Behan. I remain curious to this day.



Time and the years rolled on with national service and I served 5 years in the RAF in East Yorkshire. We moved to Alsager in 1965 and I took a job at ICL (then English Electric). I was appointed organist and choirmaster at St Mary's, Alsager in 1966 until 1983. The accordion lived in its case while I played the organ and piano at church and at most of the workingmen's clubs in the area. There is a whole book about the life of an itinerant musician. One day it may be written. Sufficient it to say that you learned to sight-

read all kinds of music and manuscripts in every possible key, (including the back door). I have often said that if you put a piece of old wallpaper covered in 'fly-dirt' on the music stand, I will play it. Some club artists' music was sometimes of poorer quality, and 'can you drop it down to a lower key'. 'Yes, I'll sit a bit to the left of the organ seat'. It does work and that was one of the lessons from Miss Saunders all those years ago.

One night we had a concert in Alsager Civic Centre. I had played the piano for Virginia Bryan, when the curtains opened. Guess what. A gaggle of accordions appeared, with a well known Welshman sat at the back, isn't it. He used to haunt me at ICL. He's come back to haunt me again, I am glad to say. I was back in the harness again – out of the case with the 140 bass. Many of you will know that I played and conducted with the band for a while until, for several reasons, I was forced to give it all up. After a few years of the dark ages, something switched me back on. Music played a large part in this process. When all else fails, disappear to the garden shed and give the old squeeze-box some 'welly'. It is infinitely better than any laxative on the market.

After 58 years of having a sometimes frustrating tussle with music, I think I am starting to get the hang of it. Over the years I have at least discovered something about accordionists. There is no 'middle ground'. They are either wild or tame. You have only one guess at my category. See you, as barmy as ever, at the next clubnite etc. etc. etc.

P S I hope the band never plays at a nudist colony. Think about it.

#### **Club Management**

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#### **Committee**

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Treasurer	Tony Britton	01782 563088

Helen Brown, Sue Edge, Alan Fernandez, Ken Hall, Paul Hobbs, Barry Tunnicliffe

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