

The Agar Trust

Newsletter December 2019

We have reached five years of operation with The Agar Trust and are so delighted with the astonishing range of 300 award holders who are taking up educational opportunities in music from the most remote parts of rural Scotland. Of these, around 30 have decided to continue their studies at conservatoire or university. While some are studying in Scotland, others have gone to London, Birmingham, Manchester, Cardiff and even Norway and the States. We have decided to focus here on a few of the award holders who received awards in September 2014, to show you what they have been up to since then. We have attempted to arrange them approximately by age, so you can see how various musical pathways have developed. They're an inspiring bunch!

One of the Trust's youngest applicants in September 2014 was **Lucy (flute)** from Moffat. Over the last five years we have supported Lucy to travel to Glasgow every week in order to study flute and piano at Junior Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. She has just sent us a video to tell you her story: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AlwQLikWL6m2aDTim--qrLYMg9_cVpVb/view?usp=sharing



Here are two more of our long-standing award holders. In 2014, **Hattie (cello)** from Rosemarkie received an award for travel to National Youth Orchestra of Scotland Junior (266 miles round trip). She subsequently became Principal Cello with NYOS and then went to the Yehudi Menuhin School in Surrey, where she is now studying. She recently played with a group from school, in aid of Children's Hospice Association, Scotland. Her older sister **Molly (violin)** also received an award for travel to private violin lessons and was leader of NYOS Junior. She is also attending the Yehudi Menuhin School at present.

Both girls enjoyed an orchestral tour to Spain with school friends in 2018 and Molly comments: *"It was the first time for me performing outside the UK and it was also inspiring to see for myself how I can share my music with anyone, whether or not we speak the same language, and we can still feel the same joy with music"*.

Like Molly, **Rachel (viola)** from Fortrose received support in 2014 to get monthly viola lessons in Central Belt and to prepare for auditions (250 miles round trip). In subsequent years she travelled to St Mary's Music School in Edinburgh, played with NYOS and is now at the Royal Academy of Music in London, where she has had many amazing experiences including a month in Berlin, as Principal Viola of the Berlin Opera Academy Orchestra. She has set up a new string quartet, the Seer Quartet, together with other students from RAM, so we look forward to hearing them play next year.

Rachel has also joined the Nevis Ensemble, who are doing wonderful work, taking music “out of the concert hall to swimming pools and children’s parks, to homeless centres, museums and train stations.” We see she is working with them in a classroom here! Read more at: <https://nevisensemble.org/rachel-spence/>



(photo:Tommy Ga-Ken Wan)



The Agar Trust has no expectation that everyone we have supported will go on to study music, or indeed to make it a career, but we hope they will continue to learn and enjoy playing and singing, throughout life. We have a heart-warming story from **David (accordion and violin)** from Moffat who we have supported for a number of years to attend RCS Juniors. He comments: *I wanted to keep my music ability as a hobby so I did not pursue a career in music. However, I am now a student at the University of Glasgow studying theoretical physics but that has not stopped me from playing. I instantly joined the University’s Music Society where they have a folk group, they hold a weekly*

rehearsal to perform in their various concerts throughout the year.”

He also told us of a recent “Help Refugees” concert in Dumfries where he played with his sister Iona (another previous award holder). The concert raised over £3,000!

Alexander (baritone) from Lairg received a grant in 2014 to travel to the National Youth Choir of Scotland rehearsals in Glasgow (340 mile round trip). He is now in his 3rd year at Aberdeen University studying Music. He has continued to sing with NYCOS, as well as the University Chapel and Chamber choirs. He has sung in some amazing locations, including Carnegie Hall New York, The Royal Albert Hall and the Usher Hall, opening the Edinburgh Festival with NYCOS. He comments: *“It’s been a bit of a whirlwind, that was spearheaded through the Agar Trust’s initial assistance way back when I really started this journey in 2014”.*

After starting his musical life with school tuition and Highland Young Musicians, **Findlay (cello)** from Fortrose received an award in 2014 to attend the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland (NYOS), in common with so many of our award holders and was subsequently Principal Cello of NYOS at the BBC Proms.

He is now in his final year at the Royal College of Music and has a very full musical life including a performance at the Wigmore Hall this summer as part of the RCM Showcase concert and has just returned from a series of concerts in Germany and the Netherlands, with the Atelier Quartet.



Findlay says: *“The awards that I received from the Agar Trust have been a huge help in allowing me to continue to have a close connection with the Highlands while studying at RCM.”*

Follow this link to see Findlay talking about his musical life two years ago:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66soXdqpxZ0&t=2s>

And you can read more about his activities on his website:

<https://www.findlayspence.com/>

And now for the graduates!



We funded **Matilda (Soprano)** from Fortrose in 2014/15 with bursaries for termly travel to Cardiff, to attend the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. Matilda graduated in July this year. During her time in Cardiff she also worked as Assistant Director on Rossini’s La Cenerentola and sang with the Welsh National Opera Chorus in Jake Heggie’s “Dead Man Walking.”

Matilda then spent the summer in India, working with elephants! She is exploring a few different options at the moment and has started a directing internship in London. You can find out more about Matilda here, together with videos of her lovely singing at her final recital at RWCMD: https://auditionoracle.com/singer/matilda_walker/

Georgina (violin) from Glen Esk received an award in 2014 to travel to violin lessons in Edinburgh to prepare for auditions (200 mile round trip). She subsequently studied Music at Edinburgh University, and graduated this summer. She has played extensively with NYOS and went on tour with them to China in 2015.

Now she is freelancing in Edinburgh, teaching in various music schools and for Big Noise, whilst preparing for auditions for a Masters in Violin Performance. She is also about to start leading weekly music workshops working with homeless people from Social Bite.

Like Rachel, Georgina is playing with the Nevis Ensemble, who made a trip to St Kilda this year. You can read more about Georgina here:

<https://nevisensemble.org/georgina-macdonell-finlayson/>

And here is a clip of her, playing Piazzolla with Pàdruig Morrison

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-14C6XXfhC4>



Finally, we have reached the oldest of our 2014 award holders! **Joe (piano/accordion)** from Achiltibuie, who received funding from us to go to private accordion lessons in Glasgow. At that time, he was studying piano at UHI. He then went on to do a certificate in jazz performance at St



Andrews, followed by a Masters in music performance at RCS. He now lives in Glasgow and has a busy freelance career, performing and teaching with a variety of organisations. He plays with several folk groups including duo Charlie Grey and Joseph Peach, who together with Filmmaker Hamish Macleod recently launched a film and suite of new music called Air Iomall (Gaelic for “On the Edge”) inspired by a voyage aboard the tall ship Wylde Swan to uninhabited islands in the North Atlantic. That’s three of our 2014 award holders who have played on St Kilda! Joe comments: *“I’m really lucky to have such a varied and interesting working life in music. I love what I do, and I’m extremely grateful for all of the support I’ve had along the way, including from the Agar Trust. Coming from a rural background presents its own set of challenges when it comes to training and developing in music, so it’s just brilliant that the trust exists to support young people in overcoming these”.*

You can read lots more about Joe, on his website: <http://joseph-peach.com/>

The Agar Trust in 2019

A fifth of Scotland’s population lives in rural areas, but “rural” means 90% of Scotland’s area, so they can be thinly spread. Distances to educational opportunities can be considerable and the costs to travel to them are largely borne by individual families.

As the years have passed with the Agar Trust, the range of our award holders has diversified, both in terms of the educational opportunities taken up and also the areas of rural Scotland where they come from, but many of the lessons we have learnt here are still relevant.

Due to the considerable travel and subsistence overheads for those from rural areas, courses for orchestras, bands or choirs which are residential are very much appreciated. For individual specialist tuition, families will often need to travel very considerable distances at regular intervals. Some families will choose a specialist music school, where boarding can be an attractive option.

These award holders would never have started their musical journeys without tuition near home. It has given them a foot on the ladder and inspired them to work harder. Locally based orchestras, bands and choirs also play a significant role in providing experience in playing and singing with others. It can be very challenging to audition for a national orchestra, band or choir unless there have been opportunities to gain some experience by playing with a group at home. This really underlines the importance of these local educational opportunities, where they are available.

As you can see, in spite of the challenges there is lots of musical talent flowing from rural Scotland. They certainly deserve our support to progress! If you would like to contribute to the Agar Trust’s activities, please visit our web page at www.agar-trust.org.uk