

The Agar Trust

Newsletter December 2020

This has been a very difficult year for music education. But as you will see, in spite of the challenges the Agar Trust has been able to support some impressive musical talent flowing from rural Scotland. We look forward to exciting developments next year, when other activities resume.

We are delighted to introduce four of our award holders who are now poised and eager to contribute to the future of music education in rural Scotland. Three were appointed in August as Agar Ambassadors and one is contributing to a Youth Forum for the Scottish Music Education Partnership Group (MEPG).

We also share some positive attitudes to using online learning for supporting music education in rural Scotland (pg 4).

The **Agar Ambassadors** will act as examples of the challenges faced and the achievements possible by young musicians from rural Scotland. Next year we will support them to visit youth music groups in the rural areas they came from. They will play to younger musicians, talk about their lives in taking up music as further study and the role of the Agar Trust and finally answer any questions from youngsters and their families. If that is not feasible in-person, then we will undertake online options.



Gavin Johnson, who is a tuba player, comes from Ford, near the end of Loch Awe in Argyll. Gavin is now in his 3rd year of study at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. He has played for many ensembles including NYOS, NYBBS, The Cooperation Band, NYWES and the Glasgow Wind band.

Q. What is your earliest memory of performing, Gavin?

My earliest memory would have to be playing at the mid Argyll music festival in 2011 in Lochgilphead on my cornet. I had never played in public before and I was competing against all the people my age from Campbeltown Brass (who would later become some of my best pals!). I played Pink Panther and I won! It was a very exciting day along with a very cool trophy for an 11yr old and I think that day might have been where I caught the music bug!

Q. What have you enjoyed listening to recently?

Recently I've really enjoyed listening to a lot of heavy orchestral brass music as a lot of it I am playing in classes during my BMus course at the RCS as well as playing in the side-by-side scheme with the BBC SSO. Tchaikovsky's 4th symphony and Shostakovich's 5th symphony are the two I'm loving the most. I

especially love listening to the Berlin Philharmonic and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's interpretations.

Q. What is your favourite thing to do when you're not performing?

While I'm not playing, in my off time, I love to watch Formula 1 and I always have done since I was 6! I love everything about it and I would never miss any part of a race weekend at all! It gives me a good chance to get away from uni and music in general, especially when everything's so hectic!

You can hear Gavin playing in the Cooperation Brass Band: this is an excerpt from the piece "A tale as yet untold" which was the winning performance at the Scottish Championships in March: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyjDBCD8tJ0>



Rachel Spence is a violist who comes from Fortrose on the Black Isle. Rachel attended St Mary's Music School and then the Royal Academy of Music where she now studies. Rachel has appeared as a soloist at festivals including the London Strings Festival, has been principal viola of the Verbier Festival Junior Orchestra, the Berlin Opera Academy, and Nevis Ensemble, and is an Ambassador for the Benedetti Foundation.

Q. What is your earliest memory of performing, Rachel?

My earliest memory of performing was as a member of Black Isle Primary Strings, when I had just begun playing the viola and was only plucking open strings! I think that performing alongside my peers from the very start of my musical journey was absolutely fundamental to how I have developed as a musician.

Q. What have you enjoyed listening to recently?

I've recently been enjoying listening to Jacob Collier. He looks at harmony and sound in a really interesting and new way, and also has a very active social media presence, which has been great to follow through lockdown.

Q. What is your favourite thing to do when you're not performing?

My favourite thing to do when I'm not playing changes all the time, but in the past few months I've been enjoying long distance running (which is not something I would ever have expected). I was at home in the Highlands through lockdown and running helped me to get outside of my village and also to have some sense of progress to punctuate the months of isolation!

You can hear Rachel playing with her string quartet, The Kyan Quartet. They are performing Felix Mendelssohn's String Quartet in E minor, Op.44 No.2, recorded in November 2020 at the Royal Academy of Music: <https://youtu.be/oNY-PwxE5Nc>



Neavan Lobban is originally from Inverness and has attended NYOS Jazz, NyCoS, and is now at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, where he is currently in his fourth year. He studies saxophone and he also sings: he is a member of the CBSO Chorus as well as NYCoS.

Q. What is your earliest memory of performing, Neavan?

Definitely with my primary school choir. Every year we performed at the Inverness Music Festival and developed a winning streak in our category, which made it all the more exciting!

Q. What have you enjoyed listening to recently?

Cannonball Adderley! I've had his album 'Live in Chicago' on repeat for the last couple of weeks. I've also been listening to music for my end of year recital in May. John Williams' 'Escapades from Catch Me if you Can' is one of my favourite pieces in my repertoire at the moment.

Q. What is your favourite thing to do when you're not performing?

It's actually just sitting watching a film with my housemates in the evening. I went 6 months without seeing them over summer so I want to make the most of it while I can.

Neavan has sent us this film of students from Birmingham Conservatoire which was made in May 2020 during the initial Coronavirus lockdown. See if you can spot him, he's in disguise! <https://youtu.be/4Nxx7E1raTM>

Music Education Partnership Group (MEPG) Youth Forum



Lucy Rowan, who is from Moffat is contributing to the MEPG Youth Forum. Lucy is currently attending Douglas Academy Music School as a weekly boarder, studying flute and piano and she hopes to go on to study music at Higher Education level. We are confident that she will be a very effective advocate of music education for youngsters in rural Scotland. You can hear Lucy playing Debussy's Syrinx here: <https://youtu.be/vVN8qd-o2Y>

Q. What is your earliest memory of performing, Lucy?

I remember playing a flute piece in the Dumfries & Galloway music festival in Primary 5 and winning my category, I absolutely loved having an audience to play to and getting positive feedback from the adjudicator when I finished!

Q. What have you enjoyed listening to recently?

I have recently been loving Bedrich Smetana's Ma Vlast, a beautiful piece of orchestral music, as well as Grieg's Holberg Suite! Both very enjoyable pieces that are easy to listen to.

Q. What is your favourite thing to do when you're not performing?

I love spending time with my friends and family, seeing people throughout the pandemic was a real struggle so it has been great to reconnect with a few people in school as well as going for dog walks! I've also been trying out a bit of yoga recently which is actually very enjoyable and also helps a great deal in relation to playing flute.

Ever Onwards - The Agar Trust in 2020 and beyond

Feedback from our award holders over the last year shows that attitudes to online learning may depend where you live. While most folk have really missed making music with their friends, others were in any case receiving online lessons, or were quite used to missing in-person lessons because of bad weather, ferries or other travel problems. Sometimes online learning is a more attractive option than the alternatives.

Since I got online lessons already, it didn't make that much difference and it made it easier for my teacher because she already knew how to do the lessons but I missed out on a concert with the Sinfonia. (M, Orkney, violin)

Normally, if the weather was bad, I couldn't leave the island for lessons. Now I'm able to have regular lessons despite the weather, because it's all online. (N, Argyll, voice)

Another positive is that many performing groups have made concerts and music workshops available online, so they were accessible to all, regardless of rural location. We are delighted with these innovations and would really like to see this embedded as part of established practice in the future.

In August, the Agar Ambassadors talked about their musical lives, together with one of our Advisers: Katy Bell, herself a professional cellist. You can listen to the recording: "Musical journeys from rural Scotland" on our YouTube channel here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzJTp2-juM&t=376s>

The Ambassadors would never have started their musical journeys without tuition close to 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. This really underlines the importance of local educational opportunities, and we very much look forward to working with them in 2021.

While our Ambassadors are all studying music with a view to pursuing a future career, the Agar Trust has no expectation that everyone we have supported will go on to study music. However, we do hope they will continue to learn and enjoy playing and singing, throughout life.

Young musicians from rural Scotland certainly deserve our support to progress. If you would like to contribute or to find out more about the Agar Trust's activities, please visit our web page at www.agar-trust.org.uk

The Agar Trust: Supporting young musicians in rural Scotland

