

Note: next applications deadline February 28th 2023

News December 2022

What does it feel like, taking up music opportunities from rural Scotland? How does it affect the families? Where are the joys? And the challenges? For this newsletter, we decided to ask parents to share some of the realities and logistics involved in arranging for their offspring to attend music courses and rehearsals beyond their local area. Apart from the distance to travel and the time needed, it has become clear that additional accommodation has to be a consideration, as does time off school, or a parent's work, during the week, because of the time needed for travelling. Here are some stories from families whose journeys we have supported recently!

Attending rehearsals and concerts from Campbeltown can be challenging when it involves travel to Glasgow (190 mls) or further afield. Cara has been travelling to Glasgow, to play with National Youth Brass Band of Scotland. Her mother comments:

Nowhere is easily reached from Campbeltown and most trips require at least one overnight stay and a tank of petrol and often a half day off work and school to make the journey. It just takes a little extra planning, expense and time for us to get there! It's such a twisty road to Glasgow. There is permanent traffic management at 'The Rest and Be Thankful', near Arrochar due to landslides and the road can close if there is a risk of land sliding due to heavy rain, in which case another slower single track road is used as a diversion. The ferry timetable isn't great and usually doesn't fit in well and is only on for a very short summer season and is often unreliable. You never really know what's in store when you start a journey from here!



Over the past seven years, three brothers – Archie, Hamish and Ruaraidh have travelled from Drumnadrochit to Glasgow (185mls), in order to play with the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland. Their mother comments:

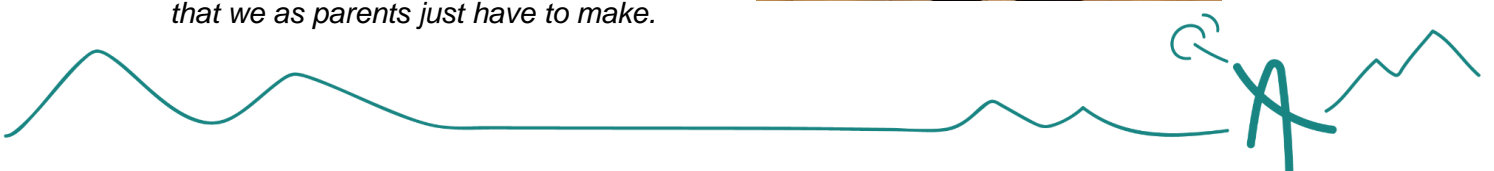




When my eldest son Archie was a member of the NYPBoS, they paid for his accommodation in Glasgow which was very fortunate. Now funding is much tighter, and no accommodation is provided. However, Ruaraidh is fortunate enough to be able to stay with one or other of his brothers whenever possible. Most of the events are in the central belt so I always take the opportunity to attend. On these occasions we generally stay at my parent's house. So far, the NYPBOS have only had a couple of rehearsals/ events on a school night. We have chosen not to attend as Ruaraidh is in S5.

The journeys from Tain to Central Belt (150 mls) are similarly complicated, and involve return journeys for the parents, in delivering and collecting their youngsters. Megan and her younger sister Eilidh have been attending National Youth Orchestra of Scotland (NYOS) courses. Their parents comment:

*The difficulties we face as parents to organise our girls to get to NYOS really are a challenge due to the distances involved. Living in the Scottish Highlands means we are 3 to 4 hours away from the NYOS venues, which involves additional travelling costs, with the options of either travelling the night before and staying over or having a very early start. In order to keep costs to a minimum, and also to minimise the amount of time we parents need off work, we choose the early start and drive down to NYOS. This makes a long day for the girls for the start of their courses, and also a long day for us as parents with the return journey home in the same day! **However, the opportunities that NYOS provides are absolutely worthwhile** for the development of the girls, and a sacrifice that we as parents just have to make.*



If you happen to live on the Western Isles, these challenges may be exacerbated. **Penny** and Oscar have attended NYCoS and NYOS courses. Their parents comment:



We take the ferry to the mainland and drive, which can take up to a full day each way. Music courses tend to start on a Saturday, so this means either arriving late (embarrassing for the child) or travelling out on a Friday, requiring parents to take a day off work and children to take a day off school. Depending on the end date & time we may need to take a day off for the return journey, too. This also means we may need to stay in a hotel for one or two nights.

*A less obvious problem is that for a course which is a few days long it is not worth parents going home after delivering the child and going back again to collect them at the end of the course: four days travelling and twice the cost. This means fitting short holidays into dates dictated by the course or imposing on local friends or relatives and working away from home. Of course, **it is all worth it because of the wonderful musical opportunities for the children**, but the difficulties and expense for rural families are not widely appreciated.*

Rowan has travelled from Lochgilphead to attend Scottish Schools Orchestra Trust (SSCot) outside Perth (120 mls). Her parents comment:

*Living in a rural area such as Argyll, opportunities for playing in an orchestra are few and far between, therefore young people that are looking to gain orchestral experience have to commit to long journeys and often overnight stays as the majority of these opportunities are based in the central belt. This involves both a huge time and financial commitment for families. Getting her there meant a round trip of 240 miles with another trip of 180 miles a week later to attend her final performance at the RSNO New Auditorium in Glasgow. Early starts and long travel times are something that you have to get used to when living in a rural area however, **the rewards of experiencing playing with like-minded people far outweigh the disadvantages of long hours on the road.***



For the past few years, Merryn has been travelling from Orkney, in order to attend Junior RCS in Glasgow once a month. She now boards at St Mary's Music School and attends Junior RCS once a week. Her parent has given us an account of the years when they were travelling from Orkney to Glasgow (320 mls):



*Over the years we settled into a system, having tried all sorts of permutations of staying in hotels, hostels and even glamping! We would take the evening boat to Scrabster, drive to Inverness where we would eat and have a quick rest. Then drive to Perth and stay at a hotel there. That meant that there was only an hour's drive or so to get to Glasgow for 0900 on Saturday. We would usually stay with relatives in Livingston on the Saturday, before having a more leisurely drive north on Sunday. **Merryn has always said that she would like to be a professional musician and she is certainly doing all the right things!***

What do we take from all this? Clearly, there are serious challenges for these families in rural Scotland, which vary, depending on where they live, and the age of the youngsters involved.

But we should also never forget the joy which youngsters have experienced during their adventures with music. As Megan has told us:

It was such a fantastic opportunity and experience. At the course, we had really good tutors for our 4 days, the conductor was wonderful, and the whole course was just amazing... It gave me such inspiration and just makes me want to keep playing and practising. My love for music has become even greater, and I can't wait to go back.

The Agar Trust aims to support youngsters (8-21) who live in rural Scotland and wish to take up educational opportunities beyond their local area. The Trust has been operating since 2014 and has made over 380 awards since then.

