

Peter Elmes

Everyone in the Wellington Region knows and loves Peter Elmes. He has been part of the region's SCD scene for six decades. During that time, he has had several bands, and he has mentored many musicians. But now Peter has decided to retire from playing at SCD events.

As mentioned in Melva's article above, the Region celebrated and thanked Peter with a Tribute Dance, which featured his favourite dances, including some for which he had composed the tunes, and dances which had been devised for him. He also joined the band (Aileen Logie, Hilary Ferral and Don McKay) to play a special bracket of four dances. I am delighted to be able to include tributes from several people in this issue of Harbour City Happenings, as well as some photos, both recent and 'historic'.

Désirée Patterson, Editor



Peter's Tribute Dance (Photo: Loralee Hyde)

Peter the Musician

From Maureen Robson

My first memory of Peter was at a practice for a demonstration for the Region. Peter had endless patience as we went through the dances bit by bit. I believe that was the year our hockey team was playing in the final at the Olympics and we stopped the practice to watch the game (1976). At the time he had just formed an SCD Band called "The Scotsmen". Peter himself played for many of the demonstrations at the annual Scots Ball and Wellington Region Ball, which invariably came on to the floor to the music "*The Hamilton Rant*".

I later found out Peter was a self-taught button accordion player who was born in Te Kuiti and his earlier life was written about and published in the Box and Fiddle magazine in March 2007.

Peter has always been generous with his time and any request to play anywhere was usually accepted. He has played at many annual dances, region events, day, weekend, summer and Australian winter schools. He also played at Government House twice, once for Lady Beattie's birthday in 1984 and again for the Wellington Region Diamond Jubilee Ball in 2012.

He was invaluable when I asked him to play for a "Reels" class. Because he is so experienced, he played for the reels in jig time, then reel time and finally strathspey, even playing two bars, four bars and six bars to enable dancers to master reels of three and four. This was always done without written music; it just came from his incredible memory. We have done this class together on several occasions.

The members of the band have changed over the years but Peter was a constant. He was always on time, well prepared and ready to play when the MC indicated. New dances come out all the time and Peter was able to put together suitable brackets of tunes to fit the dances. His brackets of tunes have been admired by many musicians here and overseas.

Several of the devisers of dances have asked him to compose music for their "new" dance. Given a copy of the dance, he is able to fit the music to the dance formations and, in the case of square set dances, changes of music at suitable times. Many of these have been published by the RSCDS, NZ Branch, Wellington Region and Lower Hutt Club.

He has recorded four LP records and a CD "*Thistle Hall*", which have been used extensively throughout the world.

Peter played for the Linden Club for 39 years, quite a record. He initially asked Ian Simmonds, the teacher at the time, whether he would like live music for the club. Ian gratefully accepted the offer and a partnership ensued.

Ian trained a set of dancers from the Wellington Region to dance regularly at retirement villages and care homes and Peter came along to play for the dancing. This went on for many years. I also know Peter still goes along to some of the care homes and retirement villages to play music for the members of the villages and homes to enjoy.

There will be a big hole in the music scene following Peter's retirement. However, he has always encouraged "new" musicians to play, and I think that members of the Wellington Region, which has benefitted most from his talent, will continue to encourage those musicians well into the future.



Melva presents Peter with a Certificate of Appreciation
(photo: Loralee Hyde)

Celebrating music at Johnsonville

From Kristin Downey

On Monday 1 October, *Wild Heather* brought great joie de vivre to six sets of dancers for Johnsonville's second Tartan Night of the year. Lynne Scott, Anne-Marie Forsyth, Mary McDonald and Sharlene Penman played two events in three days, having just played for Glendarroch's dance over the weekend. What a fun night, made more special when we danced Rod's dance *My Golden Bear*, to the recommended music for the first time. (Rod had "*Dovecote Park*" by James Braidwood in his head when he devised the dance in 2016.)

Two weeks later, 26 of our members joined dancers from across the Wellington region for the New Dancers' Celebration. This time *Roaring Jelly* (Lynne Scott, Sharlene Penman and Richard Hardie) took their turn in bringing fine music to our dancing feet. Our 11 new dancers had a wonderful night, supported by 15 of our more experienced members. Thanks to Island Bay and Kelburn clubs for organising such a successful night.

At the start of November, we held our AGM and a belated Samhain/Halloween themed night. There was no live music, but Rod carefully selected the atmospheric musical delights of *Ferla Mor*, the cheerful chirpiness of the music for *Ellwyn's Fairy Glen* and the Harry Potter-esque *Slytherin House* amongst others. Witches' hats, devil's horns, spiders and ghostly grey all added to the atmosphere.

To finish the year, we had the pleasure of Peter Elmes' company and music on two occasions. Many of us attended the Wellington Region's "Tribute to Peter Elmes" dance on 24 November, thanking him for his musical contributions, and marking his retirement from playing for Scottish country dancing. Then at our Final and Tartan Night on the following Monday, we were honoured to have Peter playing for us as the very last of his Scottish country dance musical engagements. And what a night it was, with seven sets on the floor dancing to rousing music by Peter, Aileen Logie, Don McKay and Hilary Ferral.

Peter has played a very special role in the musical history of Johnsonville club. From at least 1984, Peter Elmes "and His Band" (in early years) or "and Associates" (in later years) played for the club's annual dances and tartan nights. Musicians John Smith, Merren Simmonds, and more recently Lynne Scott, then Don McKay, Aileen Logie and Hilary Ferral have lightened our hearts, and livened our feet with their music.

Peter Elmes the musician with the magic box and fingers!

In instructions to make things happen
"Press the button" is an often-used phrase
But a great array of buttons
Is what Peter Elmes gleefully plays!
Up and down rows of them his fingers fly -
Amazing the watcher's mind, dazzling the eye.
With powerful arm movements
The box is given a squeeze -
The constant flow of air producing
Melodious sounds our senses to please.
Sharing his love of music
Has ever been his goal -
Great technique from the head -
With feeling expressed by the soul.
The Town Hall and Region balls floor shows
Were complemented with helpful skill,
Allowing dancers to do something different -
That is always a thrill.
Over many years to work with you Peter
Has been a privilege and a pleasure.
To vast numbers of Scottish dancers
You've brought joy without measure.
You've lightened our steps,
And made our hearts sing -
To every one of our dances
A touch of magic you did bring.
So thank you Peter for enriching us
With innumerable happy days.
Please accept for the future our best wishes,
Our love, and well-deserved praise!

Edith Campbell : 24 November 2018



Peter plays with Iain Matcham, Lynne Scott, Carlton, Hamish and John Smith, at Johnsonville's Jewel Annual Dance in 2001 (photo: Lorelee Hyde)

Thanks to everyone who joined us for this joyful celebration of Peter and his button accordion, his arrangements, and his generous encouragement of young musicians. And many thanks to Peter for all he has shared with us.

For photos of all these events, including Lorelee Hyde's photo history of Peter Elmes, see <http://www.johnsonvillesc.org.nz/about-us/2018-events/>



Applauding Peter at Johnsonville's Final and Tartan Night (photo: Lorelee Hyde)

A visit to Karori Brownies

From Kristin Downey

At the end of September a few Johnsonville dancers joined Karori Brownies for their weekly meeting. Alan, Elaine, Pat and Rod shared their knowledge of Scotland, its history and music, tartans and Scottish dress, and of course Scottish country dancing.

This was something new for us, it's the first time we've been approached to visit a Brownie meeting and it was fun for everyone. The Brownies got to hold the bagpipes and hear Alan playing, see samples of different tartans and design their own, and learn a couple of dances. Rod guided them through *The Kingston Flyer* and *Room 1*, with Alan and Elaine joining in to lend a hand.

Keep tradition refreshed

from the Spurtle-wielder

It's happened again – another dancing season has nearly come full circle as we hasten towards Hogmanay!

Circle: line enclosing a perfectly round plane figure. Possibly it is the element of 'perfection' which makes a circle attractive – the qualities of having no beginning, no end – a satisfying completeness. But it must also be admitted that 'going round in circles' can be infuriating – the phrase denotes no progress. The early dances – *branles* (usually pronounced 'brawls') are frequently pictured being performed in a large circle: the basic step was like our strathspey setting step, but the trick was to take a big step to the left and a small one to the right, so gradually, the circle did 'progress' to the left; a variation was the 'strathspey' step to the left then a single step to the right, which meant the move to the left was achieved more quickly. This is a common pattern used in 'national' dances. After a sequence of a few of these sideways steps, a segment of other steps would be used more or less on the spot, when, in couples, the men danced with the women ("partner", though she kept changing!) to perform a figure of some kind, e.g. appropriate 'action' movements in *The Washerwomen's Branle*, then he handed her on to the next man to repeat it, so the circle kept moving. Couple dances going around the room in a big circle (e.g. *The Gay Gordons*) similarly progress – steps forward move boldly but going backwards are more tentative, resulting in less ground being covered hence the 'progress'.

Dancing in a circle means a group works together emphasising the friendly collaborative aspect of the dance. Scottish Country dances frequently include circles – four, six, eight 'hands round' *and back*. This part of the figure is so ingrained, one has to concentrate to remember when 'and back' is replaced with a different figure. It is easy to be caught off-guard! The music tends to enforce this reaction – *The Music Will Tell You* is the title of one dance. In the usual eight-bar segment the first four bars drive us onward, but sometimes the second four almost have an element of an echo or a slightly gentler voice.

Circles can be dangerous! For a period, country dancing fell out of favour in the ballroom when the vogue of couple dances – waltzes, etc – predominated. Sadly, many of those who continued to practise it largely did so in a rather wild manner – decorum was abandoned. We have heard of one young