



*“Dancing
Days are
Happy
Days”*

**Concert &
Exhibition
tribute to**

BOBBY WATSON

**Sunday 21st April 2002
Aberdeen Arts Centre**



 Scottish
Arts Council



STDT is the *only* national organisation which exists to promote, research, conserve and foster *all* of Scotland's dance traditions. Everyone dances at some point in their lives, and STDT is the national advocate for the enjoyment of all forms of traditional dance socially and educationally.

Background

The Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust was established in November 1995 following a series of consultations held throughout Scotland, organised by the Scottish Arts Council.

Aims

To promote and enable dance activity and awareness; Establish an on-going programme of educational outreach; Develop a nationwide research network; Establish and maintain a Scottish dance archive & resource centre.

Plans

STDT is about **sharing and partnership** and is keen to present the process and results of research so far. As part of this initiative we are in the process of developing a **web site**, and expect to organise a **major conference festival in 2003**. As well as this, STDT is looking into ways of **demonstrating all dance traditions and commissioning new works** through experienced professional dancers and choreographers. It is expected that this will provide a conduit for promoting our dance traditions, heritage and creative developments both nationally and internationally. The first stage of our formal **resource centre** will be in place by the end of 2002.

Our next **traditional dance development project** is taking place over the next year in partnership with Perth & Kinross. In parallel with all of the above, we are now developing the next stage of our national **research and development project**.

Achievements

As well as our on-going core programme of events and activities around Scotland, STDT recently completed a massive Scottish Arts Council Lottery funded pioneering research and participation project dance! Dance!! DANCE!!!. This was the first phase of a national programme. It took place over three years in the Scottish Borders and Angus. The results have been extremely encouraging. The Angus element of the project serves as an excellent example of the scope and success of the project:

- **Participation & Enjoyment:** 9,000 children and adults participated in dances, events, classes and workshops. This included the involvement of 34 schools and many venues across the area.
- **Archive and Historical Significance:** 80 interviews; 780 images collected, 14 key artefacts donated; 40 events and classes visited; two research volunteer groups started.
- **Skills & Training:** An excellent education pack developed and disseminated; research training days; in-service training days.

All of the above simultaneously accompanied by talks, special needs classes, research visits, volunteer research groups, database development, promotion, assisting local events and visits to the project.

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BOBBY WATSON

1914 - 1997



page	2-3	biography
	4-5	photographs
	6-7	tonight's programme
	8-10	tonight's performers
	10-11	the exhibition & archive
	11-12	sponsors and thanks

Bobby Watson

biography

Bobby Watson was a born dancer and performer—he loved an audience. His enthusiasm and energy for dance were infectious. He stimulated people's interest in Highland and Scottish Country Dance world-wide.

Bobby followed in the dancing footsteps of his mother and from an early age he toured the dance circuits, becoming the World Junior Champion in 1926 at Cowal Highland Games. Because of his stature and particularly small feet he was known as "Nipper Watson". Bobby went on dancing and winning.

He trained as a motor mechanic, and although interested in cars, it was dancing which was in his blood, and in 1936 he became a full time professional dancer following a successful audition with The Brighton Follies. Along the way, elocution lessons were given to soften his broad 'Aberdeen' accent, and acting, singing and comedy were added to his repertoire. During this period he met his wife Mavis, a particularly accomplished and experienced professional dancer who greatly influenced Bobby's life and career.



Bobby and Mavis Watson

At the end of World War II, Bobby found himself being "called up" again this time it was a request from his mother to take over her dancing school! And so he returned to kindle the northeast with his energy and enthusiasm. Mavis played an active part in Bobby's dance and performance career. They were perfectionists, and so their dancers had to be likewise.

Bobby's teaching, performance and judging career took him to Highland Games, festivals and shows from Aberdeen to America, Fraserburgh to France, Aboyne to Africa, Turriff to Tokyo and so on. He continued to compete until he was in his 40s, he last performed at the age of 70, and he taught until he was 82. Throughout his life he was an influential figure in the Highland Dancing World.

His performances were not confined to village and stately halls, or theatre stages; he was a pioneer of Scottish dance on television, where he danced in and choreographed shows such as *The Kilt Is My Delight* and *The White Heather Club*.

Bobby's Highland Dance performers - *The Deeside Dancers* - and his Scottish Country Dance performers - *The Clan Hay Dancers* appeared with him at home and abroad and on television.

Bobby Watson's contribution to Scottish Country Dance was recognised in 1986 by the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society when they awarded him their highest accolade, the Society Scroll.

Known for his infectious enthusiasm and boundless energy, Bobby was delighted too, when the Lord

Provost of his home city presented him with life-time use of his own special car registration number, **NRG 1**.

Bobby Watson played a part in the life of hundreds and thousands of people, his pupils, his fellow dancers and judges, non dancers, and so many others who all remember him for his high standards, but most of all for his "energy and enthusiasm" and good sense of fun.

Bobby Watson, Aberdeen's own "Lord of the Dance", died in October 1997.



Teaching Highland Dance at RSCDS Summer School, St. Andrews

-
- Born into a musical and dancing family in Aberdeen 21st April 1914
 - At two and a half years old he was a pupil at **John Pirie's Dancing School**
 - Introduced to teaching from an early age by assisting at his Mother's dance school
 - Competed at Highland Games—with success!
 - 1926 **Junior World Champion** at Cowal Games
 - In the late 20's he started dancing in shows in and around Aberdeen
 - Successfully auditioned for the **Brighton Follies** in 1936. From then on he was a professional full-time performer adding acting, singing and comedy to his repertoire
 - Later in 1936 he went to South Africa—the first of many overseas tours
 - Met and married Mavis. She was from a London family steeped in the Music Hall tradition and proved to be a very influential figure in his life and career
 - Their double act delighted audiences for many years at home and abroad
 - Following Bobby's World War II service, at his Mother's request, he returned to Aberdeen to take over her dancing school
 - Dancing classes spread to venues at home and abroad including Braemar—by Royal request!
 - In 1950 he was a co-founder of the **Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing**
 - Greatly involved in Scottish Country Dancing. For many years he taught at the **RSCDS Summer School** in St. Andrews
 - During the 50s and 60s, television gave him a whole new and vast audience via programmes such as **The White Heather Club** and **The Kilt is my Delight**
 - He competed at Highland Games until he was in his 60s and last danced in public at the age of 70, but continued to play the bagpipes and accordion for his pupils dancing displays
 - He continued teaching until he was in his 80s
 - His last event with his dancers was **"Saturday Night at The Auld Meal Mill"** in November 1996
 - Bobby Watson died in October 1997, aged 83 years.



Bobby Watson & the Deeside Dancers on the BBC's "The Kilt is My Delight"



Bobby (third from left) with the Clan Hay Dancers



Bobby (second from left) with the Clan Hay Dancers



Bobby (centre foreground) and dancers performing the Sailor's Hornpipe on board a clipper berthed in Aberdeen Harbour

tonight's programme

"Dancing Days are Happy Days"

- **DAVID LOW** – Piper
Cock o' The North, Wilt thou go to the Barracks Johnny
- **GORDON RAEBURN**
Sailor's Hornpipe
- **PAM DIGNAN'S DANCERS**
Scottish Lilt
Flora MacDonald's Fancy
- **THE GORDON SCHOOL OF DANCING**
Astaire and Rogers Act
- **QUEEN VICTORIA SCHOOL PIPER and DANCERS**
Sword Dance
- **PAM DIGNAN'S DANCERS**
Strathspey, Reel of Tulloch
- **BOBBY WATSON DANCERS**
Scotch Measure
- **ABERDEEN BRANCH, ROYAL SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCE SOCIETY**
Children The White Cockade, Lady Catherine Bruce's Reel
Adults The Blooms of Bon Accord, Miss Milligan's Strathspey,
La Tempete - 3 separate dances linked in one
continuous movement
- **BOBBY WATSON DANCERS**
Earl of Errol

- **MEMORIES OF BOBBY WATSON**

Alexa Burnett, Sheena Cooper, David Low, Sandra Adams

- **FINALE**

HIGHLAND FLING

*"Fa, learnt ye tae dance, ye tae dance, ye tae dance,
Fa, learnt ye tae dance, it was Bobby Watson"*

The concert has been carefully devised as a tribute to Bobby Watson. One short concert cannot tell the story of such a great life. Tonight's music and dance all played a part in his life and here are some notes of interest regarding some of the dances:

Aberdeen Branch of the RSCDS - Adult dances in order of performance

The Blooms of Bon Accord – chosen because Bobby took a great pride in his home town. The dance was devised by John Drewry in 1971 to celebrate the first time Aberdeen won the *Britain in Bloom* competition.

Miss Milligan's Strathspey is a tribute to Miss Jean Milligan, one of the co-founders of the Society. It was devised in 1973 as part of the golden celebrations of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society. Bobby Watson was a regular teacher at the RSCDS Summer School in St. Andrews and Miss Milligan was very attached to her "boys". They even were allowed to tease her! In the exhibition is a photograph of Bobby tying Miss Milligan's dancing shoes, especially posed for the camera.

La Tempete - this reel is from one of the early RSCDS books and would have been performed by Bobby, either with the Clan Hay Dancers or as a member of the Aberdeen Branch team, in demonstration and for fun. In it you should be able to see the wind swirling around and even flashes of lightning during the storm!

Children's dances

The White Cockade dates back to 1797 and has connections with the Jacobites; it has retained its popularity and is still danced regularly today.

Lady Catherine Bruce's Reel - another traditional dance with a familiar tune - *The Laird o' Cockpen*.

Bobby Watson Dancers

Earl of Errol - Bobby Watson, alongside Isobel Cramb revived many old dances of which the *Earl of Errol* is one. The dancers perform it as Bobby taught it and not as it is usually danced today.

tonight's performers

Jimmy Spankie

Concert organiser and narrator, who needs no introduction! Jimmy is well known to most of us from his television days with Grampian and his extensive charity work, and is a director of the Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust.

Alison Diack

Our second narrator - a part-time lecturer in Gaelic at Aberdeen University. Recently she catalogued the Bobby Watson Collection held by the University. This was a great honour for Alison, who was a pupil of Bobby's for 14 years and danced in his performance team. Alison continues to dance and sings with Aberdeen Gaelic Choir.

Frank Thomson & Dennis Morrison

Frank (accordion) and Dennis (piano) provide the music for us tonight. Their long association with music and dance make them masters in their field. Over the years they have both produced many recordings, including one by Frank for the RSCDS, and Dennis' recent one with fiddler Paul Anderson.

David Low

"A Piper for all seasons" - far travelled and always in demand. He worked closely with Bobby, as he was a founder member of the Clan Hay Dancers. His participation at Highland Games, dance festivals, concerts and ceilidhs has forged a long-standing link between dancers and pipers.

Gordon Raeburn

Our young Bobby Watson for tonight! Gordon is 9 years of age and is the grandson of Betty Jessiman, a contemporary of Bobby Watson who competed, performed and judged alongside him for many, many years. Gordon is taught by his mother, and his ability is apparent from the trophies which he has won over the years. He performs a double act with his sister which won them the Art 2000 award at the contest held in Inverurie.

Pam Dignan's Dancers

Pam started dancing with Betty Jessiman and then danced with Bobby Watson for 25 years. Following in his footsteps, she has had her own dancing school for 23 years and teaches Highland Dancing at the RSCDS Summer School at St. Andrews. We are delighted to have

some of Pam's dancers performing for us tonight.

The Gordon School Dancers

Robina Freeman established the Gordon School of Dancing in Montrose over 30 years ago. She stages shows and performances of various dance forms at home and abroad. Tonight two of her pupils are following in the dancing footsteps of the famous 'Astaire and Rogers' double act.

Queen Victoria School, Dunblane

The school traditionally provides education for the children of Scottish service personnel. At the core of that tradition is the school's Pipe Band and Highland Dancers, who are represented here tonight by Pipe Major Gordon Ross and four dancers.

Bobby Watson Dancers

Suzanne Callum, Gail Clark, Alison Diack and Pamela MacRae have come together again to dance for us in memory of Bobby Watson. They were the last senior Highland dancing team he taught - the last of a long line of very accomplished dancers taught by one of the greatest masters.

Seumas Grant

A Gaelic lecturer in the Celtic Department of Aberdeen University and a singer, who will tonight accompany the Bobby Watson Dancers with *puirt a beul* - Gaelic mouth music.

Aberdeen Branch of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society

Bobby Watson was a life-time member of this branch and we are pleased to have some Branch members dancing in this concert. Formed in 1925, the Branch continues to flourish with a membership of over 300. The children have chosen to dance *The White Cockade* and *Lady Catherine Bruce's Reel*, as they enjoy both the dances and the accompanying music. The adults' dances were selected as a tribute to Bobby Watson. It may interest you that the ladies wear their sashes as Mavis Watson devised - she thought the traditional way did not flatter all women. The Branch invite us to "Come and join the dance!" at their summer socials each Wednesday from May to September in Beechgrove Church Hall.

Alexa Burnett

Alexa lives in Fraserburgh and for the past 46 years she has run her Burnett School of Dancing. She was one of Bobby and Mavis's first pupils in Fraserburgh, learning Highland, Ballet

and Tap. Her everlasting memory of Bobby is that of his endless patience - even with those who had two left feet!

Sandra Adams

Sandra began Highland Dancing when she was 9 years old. She successfully competed at all the Highland Games, being 3 times runner-up World Champion at Cowal. She then entered the show business world dancing on *The White Heather Club*, *Songs of Scotland* and toured the world with *Scotland on Parade*.

Sheena Cooper

Sheena has led an exciting life in show business. She first danced as a pupil of Babs Wilson, who was a contemporary of Bobby Watson. Sheena has danced and choreographed for stage and television work and at one time had two Schools of Dancing.



UNIVERSITY
OF ABERDEEN

The Bobby Watson Exhibition and Archive

The Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust wishes to thank the staff of the University of Aberdeen for providing the Bobby Watson exhibition held in conjunction with 'Dancing Days are Happy Days'. Artefacts and papers on display from the Bobby Watson Archive (MS 3605) are on loan courtesy of Marischal Museum and Special Libraries & Archives, University of Aberdeen Historic Collections.

Special thanks are due to Mrs Myrtle Anderson-Smith, Senior Curator, Mrs Pat Ballantyne, Project Officer, and Kim Downie, Project Assistant, Special Libraries and Archives, and to Senior Curators Mr Neil Curtis and Miss Margot Wright, Marischal Museum. The exhibition was devised by Dr Alison Diack, Mrs Pat Ballantyne, and Dr Mary Anne Alburger. Transport and storage was arranged by Derick Giles, University Music, and the staff of Historic Collections. Video material was provided thanks to David Walton, Head of the Audio-Visual Unit, and Mats Melin, Perth & Kinross Traditional Dance Development Officer, STDT. Thanks too, to Jean Martin, RSCDS, to Marion Robson, and the many others who made the exhibition possible.

STDT also appreciates the excellent support given by the management and staff of the Aberdeen Arts Centre.

Do you have material related to Bobby Watson?

Historic Collections at the University hold extensive archives which cover a wide range of interests. If you know anyone who may have items relating to Bobby Watson, or to other elements of traditional dance, or other related subjects, please get in touch with Historic Collections. When items are accepted for deposit at Historic Collections they will then be available to all for study and research.

The Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust are sincerely appreciative of everyone who has contributed towards the production of

“Dancing Days are Happy Days”

We would particularly like to thank to Alison Diack, Pam Dignan and Jean Martin (Aberdeen Branch Of the RSCDS and Vice-President of the Society).

Pam Dignan Dancers - Stephanie Barclay, Laura Campbell, John Christie, Helen Clunas, Nikita Cusiter, Kerry Dick, Julie Donald, Lisa Fraser, Heather Fulton, Jennifer Fulton, Kerry Grant, Claire Henderson, Nicola Hendry, Clara-Jane Irvine, Sophia Irvine, Carys McKain, Nia McKain, Isla MacKenzie, Catriona MacRae, Joanna Morris, Elaine Morrison, Diane Murray, Karen Murray, Ailidh Nealgrove, Rona Nealgrove, Tracey Ogston, Natalie Robertson, Pauline Scott, Laura Wallace.

RSCDS Children’s Team - Emma Allsop, Heather Blair, Danielle Brown, Katherine Charleton, James Charleton, Matthew Cook, Gregor Cook, Clark Robertson.

RSCDS Adult Team - Dorothy Dickson, Margaret Gowans, Mary Lillie, Dorothy McKnight, Brian Anderson, Paul McKnight, James Stott, Ian Thompson.

Queen Victoria School Dancers - Claire Greenwood, Leanne Bridgeman, Andrew Martin, Alistair Paige.

STDT would also like to thank:

Lorna McLaren and Ken Carnegie for their melodeon and double bass music, Aileen Jamieson, Harold Kindness, Mats Melin, STDT Board Members Jimmy Spankie, Marion Robson and Mary Anne Alburger, STDT members and everyone else who has given generously of their time, not forgetting parents, grandparents and spouses who have played their part in making “Dancing Days are Happy Days” happen.

The Scottish Traditions Of Dance Trust wish to thank the sponsors, businesses and individuals who have generously contributed towards

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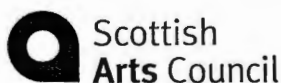
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Our thanks also to: The Strathmore Woollen Co. Ltd., Forfar, The Marcliffe at Pitfodels, The Gordon Highlanders Museum, The Gordon School of Dancing, Inveresk-Speyburn Distillery. We also wish to thank the staff of the Aberdeen Arts Centre for their kind help and assistance throughout.

Photographs of the *Clan Hay Dancers* and the *Sailor's Hornpipe* by courtesy of Alistair Reid; other photographs courtesy of relatives of Mavis Watson.



The Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust is supported by the Scottish Arts Council