

ALISTAIR ANDERSON

English Concertina & Northumbrian Pipes

As a touring soloist, with no less than 37 tours of the USA, 5 trips to Australia and countless European tours to his credit, Alistair Anderson is internationally acknowledged as the master of the English Concertina and a fine exponent of the Northumbrian Pipes. He delights audiences with traditional music from Northumberland and beyond, as well as his own music, which has grown out of his love of these traditions.

“His appeal as a musician lies not only in his remarkable handling of the English Concertina and Northumbrian Pipes. It is also a result of his total involvement in his music, his absolute sincerity, which succeeds in reaching a far wider audience than his classification as a folk musician would suggest.”

The Stage

“The pleasure comes chiefly from the excellence of the playing; that particular delight which comes from anything superbly done. The concertina emerges as a flexible and sensitive instrument; in the hands of a player of Anderson’s quality it is amazing what it can achieve.”

The Guardian

“He remains one of this country’s most majestic and inclusive instrumentalists”

Colin Irwin fROOTS March 2010

A “Musical Catalyst”

Anderson’s passionate belief that traditional music had an important place in contemporary society led him to find ways to excite a new generation of young musicians and draw them into playing, singing, dancing and making the tradition their own.

- He founded Folkworks an organisation that helped to change the face of folk music, with large numbers of young people discovering traditional music, song and dance through their summer schools, workshops and education projects.
- Folkworks became one of the two founding partners of The Sage Gateshead and Anderson continued as its Artistic Director until 2008.
- Working with the Music Department of Newcastle University, Anderson developed England’s first degree course in folk and traditional music launched in Sept 2001.

Despite the huge amount of energy he poured into this work he continued to perform. He took his great friends and mentors, the retired shepherds, Will Atkinson, Willy Taylor and Joe Hutton to festivals the length and breadth of the country. He wrote music for a leading string quartet, for professional theatre even for an ensemble of ancient Chinese instruments. He collaborated with jazz musicians and wrote for a mixed ensemble of Northumbrian and Moravian musicians and spent October 2010 touring South Africa with traditional Xhosa musicians, singers and dancers. The success of his varied performance and composing work grows out of his deep understanding of traditional music balanced with an adventurous sense of its constantly changing nature and creative potential.

Compositions;

Anderson has a growing reputation as a composer of new music rooted in the tradition.

The Farne Islands, featured on Anderson's CD "Islands," (2009) was premiered in Hall 1 of The Sage Gateshead and was the first folk music to be toured by Music in the Round, the Arts Council funded chamber music touring scheme.

"This is an outstanding new composition, which will be a reference point for the way in which traditional themes can be used in wider musical settings. All in all this is a virtuoso performance from a true musical great." Living Tradition

"An assured piece of work from a master musician who pushes the boundaries of traditional music; playing to delight but not playing safe." English Dance and Song

Anderson's groundbreaking L.P. Steel Skies, his first extended composition, caused quite a stir back in the early 80s and was recently reissued on CD.

Steel Skies - 2010 reviews

"Anderson's vision in creating a fully realised new work, drawn from and naturally embedded into the musical traditions of the British Isles, gains even more significance as the years pass and is cited more and more as a reference point for the legions of gifted young musicians currently bursting out of Newcastle and elsewhere. Anderson is, of course a master of the English concertina and pretty hot on the Northumbrian pipes. Yet it is the complete entity that is so impressive and even now the range and balance of Anderson's melodies take your breath away." fROOTS

"This was one of the first attempts at a composed musical folk soundscape, which seek to evoke the spirit of a particular area, and it remains one of the most successful. For me its greatness lies in its lack of sentimentality. The tunes are largely unaccompanied in the conventional contemporary sense of strumming guitars or vamping piano or accordion, but solo instruments weave their polyphonic magic managing to be both evocative and invigorating" Jon Boden

Steel Skies - Original 1982 reviews

"Bravely Anderson has decided to break with the traditional mould of unison melody playing... and a complex trelliswork of harmonies is created. All in all this is a delightful landmark in the development of folk music"

The Scotsman

"Anderson has achieved what many others have tried without success. He has composed a work which, while remaining rooted deeply in the traditional music of his region of Britain, contains neither pastiche nor attempts to fuse irreconcilable elements. The melodic lines of songs without words give way to dance patterns enriched by unexpected harmonies and delightful combinations of instruments. It is a fluid living work, which will yield even more riches with successive performances."

Daily Telegraph

"The finest recent original contribution to the tradition of English music" The Guardian

Other Compositions

Windy Gyle

"...in turn both beautiful and inspiring, underlining Anderson's gift as a composer and

arranger as well as being the most buoyant squeezebox player on God's earth."

Folk Roots

"Both composition and performance radiate light and energy, and Anderson's concertina pours out melody like molten metal – all glowing intensity and spitting sparks... music to stir the spirit in the dark time of the year."

The Guardian

On Cheviot Hills

"A Union of one of the world's leading string quartets and premier folk musician Alistair Anderson Anderson was commissioned by the Lindsays to write a piece for string quartet and concertina and has created something really quite special. It's a fresh and delightful performance which will surely rank as one of the years musical highlights."

Rock and Reel

"As fine a piece of boundary crossing music as you are likely to hear ... Alistair displays his deep passion for his native Northumberland and its music. He also displays his dazzling skills as a composer... an original and inspired quintet... rich in imagination and feeling."

Taplas

".... Uplifting, full of spontaneity and without question absorbing Highly recommended"

Get Rhythm

AirPlay

Bath International Music Festival commissioned Anderson and jazz trombonist Annie Whitehead to work together exploring the jazz/folk interface. The resulting work – **Airplay** – was chosen by the Arts Council Contemporary Touring Network to tour the country (from Southampton to Shetland) in 2003.

"A lyrically graceful, tenderly thoughtful release that grows more satisfying with every listen"

Jazzwise

In 2004 The Arts Council asked Anderson to lead an "artistic research lab" with the musicians of the London based African dance ensemble Adzido culminating in a performance in the Linbury Studio Theatre of the Royal Opera House.

In July 2008 Anderson produced music for an outdoor extravaganza by major Spanish multimedia theatre company **La Fura Des Baus**, commissioned by Culture 10, and a percussive dance piece – **Clog on the Tyne** for Summer Tyne Festival commissioned by The Sage Gateshead.

In Spring 2008 Anderson performed a "concerto" for concertina and Chinese orchestra, composed by Law Wai Lun, with the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, and wrote two pieces **Full Circle** and **Look East** for concertina and an ensemble of Chinese instruments drawn from the orchestra these were performed in The Singapore Convention Centre and The Sage Gateshead, as part of the East 08 festival.

In spring 2009 Anderson toured two new works for a small ensemble drawing together two great classical string players – Peter Cropper of the Lindsay String Quartet and Donald Grant of the Elias String Quartet - alongside brilliant Scottish harpist Catriona MacKay.

Border Ridge

- commissioned by The New Tyneside Orchestra as part of the 40th birthday celebrations of this leading amateur orchestra. **Border Ridge**, Anderson's first orchestral composition, had its first performance in November 2010.

Solo Performance

Although working with others allows increased scope for his composing and arranging skills, Anderson is still best known as a soloist:

“What allows Anderson to be highly entertaining without seeming too much the showman is his complete mastery of the subtle, complex, frequently brilliant music he plays. The audience loved it.”

Santa Barbara News, California

“....an evening of unique musical pleasure. This musician, full of vitality, charm and superb musicianship enthralled his audience with a programme of remarkable scope. His love of the instruments and their music was apparent in every note he played.”

Hamilton Journal, New Zealand

“On both concertina and Northumbrian pipes, Anderson's control, sheer rhythmic drive and great sensitivity are the first things to hit you. There was never any doubt about his ability to hold the attention of the audience with two fifty minute sets of instrumentals; even the Steel Skies tunes, which we're used to hearing with fiddles, flutes and mandolin, stood up as solos. If anything we were better able to enjoy how well he shapes phrases, especially in his own slow airs.

Anderson is a treat to watch, as well; his own involvement and delight in the music are infectious. Beautiful music, played with skill, taste and affection. His own tunes are particularly welcome; recognisably working from traditional styles he nevertheless introduces quirky personal touches which give them a real charm and individuality. My only complaint is that the slow airs never last quite as long as I want them to.”

Folk Roots