



Ballad of Tam Lin and more.

14th April 2012

At last Saturday's concert in Ardrishaig Public Hall, Mid Argyll Arts Association was fortunate enough to bring together three of Scotland's most innovative musicians and composers: Dick Lee, no stranger to Mid Argyll audiences, James Ross who performed with Anna Wendy Stephenson exactly a year ago in this Hall and John Kenny, playing here for the first time.

They were commissioned to write a contemporary work for the 2010 Celtic Connections Festival and this resulted in a suite of six movements based on the Ballad of Tam Lin, perhaps better known as Thomas the Rhymer, a 13th Century historical figure. Legend has it that Thomas met the Fairy Queen beneath the slope of the Eildon Hills in Melrose. This spot is now marked by the Rhymer's stone which still exists today.

In a most informative introduction to Tam Lin, John Kenny explained that each member of the group had composed two movements but who wrote which ones was left to the listener to solve. Each movement was preceded by short narrative relating the story and what followed was a truly amazing musical journey using an array of instruments, including piano, clarinets, saxophone, trombones, recorders treble and descant played simultaneously, and a tall wooden instrument called a fujara. There was also a collection of computerised sounds and these were effectively used. The audience became completely spellbound by this composition which combined the genres and influences of folk, jazz and classical music.

The second half of the evening featured solos from each artiste showcasing more original compositions on their chosen instrument. James, who specialises in traditional Scottish music, played an Air followed by a Strathspey and Reel in a very modern style. Dick followed on clarinet with an unaccompanied Blues theme number. John completed the trio with a performance of Chants originally written by monks and discovered on the Island of Inchcolm in the River Forth. He then gave a most impressive performance of a final movement from one of his Sonatas for solo trombone.

The three musicians combined for a concluding item - just a few notes and/or words on a piece of paper. The end result was fabulous with again much improvisation and this was appreciated by the large audience which included many jazz enthusiasts.