

The 2011/12 season was another successful one for Music in Peebles, with an increase in the number of concerts, growth in both membership and audiences, successful initiatives aimed at bringing music to young people, and a small operating surplus at the end of the year. Once again, we are grateful to Enterprise Music Scotland (EMS), who provided financial investment, with funds from Creative Scotland, to make all this possible.

We began the year by promoting two events in Peebles Arts Festival, an evening concert and an afternoon workshop for children. Audiences for both were disappointingly small and a financial loss resulted. In contrast, our main subscription series saw a growth in average audience of 25% over the previous year, and our aggregate audience for the year exceeded 1,000. Membership also showed an encouraging increase of 15%. The season consisted of eight concerts (up from six in the prior year), including one funded by the Tunnell Trust, to whom we are grateful for the opportunity to present an outstanding concert, by the Fournier Trio, on a fee-free basis. As always, our concerts included a variety of music, from early to contemporary, and of artists, from established international performers to those just starting their careers. We also continued our commitment to presenting concerts by young people, this time with pupils of St Mary's Music School, Edinburgh.

For the first time, we have analysed audience reaction through the use of feedback forms at our concerts. The results show overwhelmingly positive responses, with an average rating of 4.6 (out of 5) and no concert scoring below 4 overall. We also used the feedback forms to collect information about audience preferences for particular composers, musical periods and chamber music forms, and will use this in planning future seasons.

Particularly pleasing this year has been an increase in attendance by young people. This followed a very successful set of workshops in local schools by Quintet Zambra, facilitated by Music in Peebles with support from EMS. We also began actively promoting our concerts to pupils at Peebles High School and providing free tickets via the Music Department. Early results have been very encouraging in attracting regular attendance by pupils.

Before the start of the season, we commissioned an assessment of our Steinway grand piano and this identified the need for significant work to improve its performance. The work was completed in November 2011 and we have had very favourable reaction from all the pianists who have played it this season. We are most grateful to Scottish Borders Council Community Grants Scheme, who provided funds to allow us to go ahead with this work.

Communication with our members and potential audiences has been a major focus this year, and in addition to introducing our website in April 2011, we have experimented with wider distribution of printed publicity material and the introduction of regular newsletters. Feedback indicates that these have been well received and have helped to raise the profile of Music in Peebles. Promotional activity will continue as a priority for the next year, to ensure maximum awareness of our concerts.

As always, we are grateful to the management, staff and volunteers of the Eastgate Theatre for all the work they do on our behalf. We are indeed fortunate to have such a venue and its professional and dedicated team, to the benefit of both audiences and performers.

Finally, I would like to express my personal gratitude to those members who have provided hospitality to visiting musicians, saving the club substantial amounts in accommodation costs, and to my fellow committee-members, all of whom are volunteers. All have contributed to the success of Music in Peebles. Particular thanks are due to Rosemary Hamilton, Jeanie Wheeler and Alan Herd who are stepping down this year after a combined total of 16 years' service; they leave with my thanks and best wishes.

John Fox
President, Music in Peebles
28th May 2012