

Big project collects more than 1000 Orkney songs

by CATHERINE TURNBULL

THE Big Orkney Song Project went out with a bang last weekend with a final sing-along, workshop and free concert to celebrate its success.

The two-year initiative, run by Orkney Singers and grant assisted by the Heritage Lottery Fund, set out in 2008 to collect, rework and disseminate old, hidden or nearly forgotten songs about Orkney, written in Orkney or with an Orkney connection.

Sarah Jane Gibbon, who is archiving the collection said there are 627 songs already on the database and that is a fraction of what she expects to catalogue which will reach over 1000.

"We have discovered so many Orkney songs, it is overwhelming," she said. "This collection is of national importance."

During the life of the project more than 30 songs have been taught to Orkney people at 17 songshare workshops across the parishes and the isles. These featured a free concert of Orkney songs followed by the opportunity

to learn a newly discovered or reworked local song. At every session someone arrived with a song to donate. More than 300 people have been involved in singing Orkney songs over the last two years and some have written new songs, including the prolific retired schoolteacher Thora Linklater.

There have been 60 school visits made by project leaders and volunteers. Pupils had the opportunity to write their own songs. Other sessions were held at day centres and residential homes.

Aimee Leonard, Emily Turton and Sarah Jane Gibbon, also known as the Song Shop Trio, were successfully appointed as the three project leaders in 2008 allowing them to fulfil their dream of reinvigorating Orkney's song heritage.

The second year of the project has been spent cataloguing, notating and teaching the material gathered in the first year.

Sarah Jane added: "I still have archiving to do but by the end of October the public will be able to access the database in the Orkney Archive in a

portal for Orkney songs. You will be able to listen to songs, read the words, see notated versions and read biographies and histories."

It is hoped more funding can be found to record an Orkney songs CD, a CD of Thora Linklater's work and possibly a book.

On Friday there was a Singers' Session hosted by Bruce Mainland and Jo Philby at the Royal Hotel.

On Saturday afternoon a final workshop was held featuring the opportunity to learn two songs obtained from the Peter Kennedy Collections donated to the archive by Tony Engle at Topic Records.

The songs were The Brig Columbus as sung by Dot Foubister from Kirkwall/Flotta and Tam Gibb's Soo.

The weekend and the project was brought to an emotional close on Sunday at the Farewell Concert in Stromness Town Hall. Great performances were made by Billy Jolly, Frank Keenan and Login's Well, the Mayfield Singers, Saltfishforty, the Song Shop Trio, and sisters



FINAL CONCERT: Emily Turton conducts the Song Shop Choir.

Thora Linklater and Ann Tait.

The Mayfield Singers sang

songs donated to the project through a collection from composer Clive Strutt.

For more on the project visit: www.orkneycommunities.co.uk/ORKNEYSINGERS.



FINAL WORKSHOP of the Big Orkney Song Project at the Royal Hotel, Stromness: Sarah Jane Gibbon and Aimee Leonard.

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FINAL CONCERT: The Song Shop Trio, also the project leaders of the Big Orkney Song Project, from left, Aimee Leonard, Sarah Jane Gibbon and Emily Turton.

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FINAL CONCERT: Billy Jolly, left, and Frank Keenan both played in Stromness Town Hall.

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