



group on guitar and help with musical arrangements.”

The money they receive covers the part-time income of the three team members and has enabled them to buy excellent digital recording equipment and software, a public address system, pay for hall fees, teas for the concerts, and printing and advertising.

After the two-year period of collecting songs is over, the electrical equipment will be available for others to use as it will be community property.

By then, the team will have visited every parish and island in Orkney to hold a total of 25 concerts and workshops like the one in Finstown, and attended every retirement home to sing to the residents and to hear them sing.

Aimee, the workshop leader and song developer, is a familiar figure in the folk music world and this helped them to buy the equipment at a generous discount.

She said: “I went to a big musical equipment distribution company and gave them a long list of what we wanted. I explained that it was a community project and asked them what they could do for me. They gave me a brilliant deal and threw in some extra items.

“I get the material, develop it and teach it,” she explained. “Sarah is archivist and historian and is in charge of creating the database we want to have at the end of the two years. By then it is intended that there will be a comprehensive archive of all the Orkney-based material we can find. Emily’s main job apart from making sure everything runs smoothly at this end – like the catering at these events – is to notate everything.”

An example of this was dealing with a song Sarah found in the Orkney Library and Archive. It was one of several sung by Sidney Scott from North Ronaldsay. It had never been notated. Sarah had transcribed the words, which she passed to Aimee, along with the recording. Then Aimee worked out what key it was sung in and “cleaned it all up,” removing background noises from the 40-year-old recording. She rearranged the song, making it more contemporary, recorded a new version, and gave it to Emily, who then notated it.

This process means that at the end of the project anyone using the *Big Orkney Song Collection* at Orkney Library and Archive, will be able to listen to a number of songs, not just in the original versions but also to hear newly arranged and notated versions. The collection will consist of a database and paper catalogue with extensive listings of song biographies as well as electronic versions of the newly-arranged material.

In addition, the collection will contain an archive of the project and sound bites from the “songshares” will be included.

With the approval of Orkney Island Council’s education department, the team would like to bring the project to the county’s schools.

“You can store the material on hard drive and on CDs as much as you like,” said Aimee, “but you want it in here” – pointing at her head – “and that’s where the children need to have it. If it goes ahead, we could start it in August.”

So what happens when the collection has been processed, catalogued and archived?

“Actually,” said Aimee thoughtfully, “we hope just to carry on researching and regenerating songs...” ■