

NYC Tartan Day – Whisky Kiss will get them dancing in Times Square

I met Iain MacPhail and Murray Fergusson, two members of the band Whisky Kiss to talk about their upcoming trip to New York and the events they are taking part in around Tartan Day tomorrow.

Murray and Iain were at school together and have played together as a fiddle-accordion duo for about thirty years. The group has a changing line-up and while these two have played with others over the years this is a very welcome reunion for them.



Whisky Kiss

They are both Edinburgh-based and enjoying the fact that Murray has just returned to the capital after touring the world with Belle & Sebastian (and teaching Mick Jagger's son among many other things). Murray had just tweeted that he has not been so excited about a gig for about 20 years as he is about going to New York.

It is tricky for the band to take part in the Parade as their instruments are more or less all electric, but they will be playing at ceilidhs before and afterwards. Murray explained that they have an electric violin, electric accordion and while the pipes carry themselves they can't carry the drum kit! Murray plays an American made five string electric violin which he says has dials on it that he is 'still discovering'.

On Friday night they play the pre-parade ceilidh with Shot of Scotch New York, then tomorrow at Times Square they will

perform along with Elite Pro Dance from Edinburgh who usually provide pre-match cheerleading at Murrayfield before rugby internationals. Then, to top off what will be a busy few days they will play at Bryant Park on Sunday lunchtime before heading home.

While the pair are the mainstays in the group along with their drummer Laurence, the fourth member of the group on bagpipes and whistles could be any one of three people, Ali Levack, David Shedden and Ciaren Ross. They rotate depending on availability, (and I was told they are really good!). Two of them were both finalists at the BBC Young Trad Musician of the Year award last year.

Ciaren who has a background with the Shotts and Dykehead Pipe Band is the lucky one who is in the Big Apple. The 21 year-old made his debut for Whisky Kiss on the Great Wall of China and it is hoped that he will be at the top of a human pyramid with members of Elite Pro Dance in Times Square at some point over the weekend.



The band has a lot of international form and they have been to Tartan Day before, but that does not diminish their excitement.

They have been rehearsing in advance of their US trip and they say that they are constantly striving for new sounds. They view this trip as a great opportunity to welcome Murray back on board as he has been living abroad for some years in Brazil.

For one of the other members Larry Deveney it will be an opportunity to take not only his wife to celebrate their first anniversary, but also his in-laws too. Larry who hails from Greenock is 'mad about New York'.

They regard this as an opportunity to represent Scotland and Scottish culture overseas rather than a money-making trip for the band. Murray said : "It's great that a country like the States is so welcoming to other cultures and celebrates them

alongside their own.

Iain said : "We were really excited to hear that the ceilidh we are playing the night before the parade forms part of Carnegie Hall's 100 events that they are doing this year to mark the centenary of his birth."

The Carnegie Hall events are part of Migrations: The Making of America Festival and you can read more about all of those [here](#). Murray commented : "There is something very timely about a festival in such a prestigious venue and such a world centre which celebrates the influence and contribution of immigrants as well. There is a message for our times there. It happens to be Scotland but it is a universal lesson."

Whisky Kiss is primarily a dance band with very few vocals at all. Iain explained their music is a great leveller. He said : "The Migrations festival will celebrate what was brought to America a century and more ago, the dances as much as the music. One thing we have found travelling from Asia to the Americas and all points in between is that everyone everywhere loves a ceilidh. There is something about a cultural gathering where everyone is equal and we are all in it together. We all make mistakes and we all get things right but we all just enjoy it."

Iain is the caller in the band, and keeps everyone on the dance floor moving in the right way (even if he can't keep those on stage under control!) He is also (although he did not tell us this himself!) the voice on the VisitScotland ads...

Between now and the US trip the band have a good few private events where they can continue to hone their skills before arriving in New York, but most excitingly the band members explained that they have just been booked for Edinburgh's Hogmanay at Assembly Rooms so that is where you can definitely see them later in the year.

They were booked when playing another gig with Gok Wan on the

decks – maybe that is a story for another day! You can listen to our chat with Murray and Iain here.

Fun facts about the band

- The band regularly includes 2 of the 5 finalists in the BBC Young Trad Musician of the Year Award 2018!
- They are the only ceilidh band to have an iTunes number one (their debut single Jocks Revenge topping the charts in 2 countries, on 2 continents, as well as reaching Number 6 in the UK)
- Whisky Kiss hold the two ceilidh-related Guinness World Records, namely the world's biggest Auld Lang Syne & the world's biggest Strip the Willow, recorded live on BBC1 on the Royal Mile at Edinburgh's Hogmanay
- Whisky Kiss are Visit Scotland's ceilidh band, appearing on their hit "Ceilidh Experience" video. Their dance caller Iain MacPhail also happens to be the voice of recent Visit Scotland adverts and videos, narrating on a number of VS projects.
- The band was described as "the best ceilidh band in the world" by the Hebrides Writer on their headline appearance at HebCelt festival
- Murray is the only musician that the band know who has studied at the Prague Royal Conservatoire of Music and led an orchestra at Sydney Opera House and played the Pyramid Stage at Glastonbury. He has appeared on Live with Jools Holland and played the Royal Albert Hall and the Usher Hall.