

Bobby Brown

By Karyn McCulloch

Bobby Brown and the Scottish Accent Band is a name well known in Scottish Country Dance circles. But how much do the Scottish people know about the man himself? Probably not a lot – since he lives in Canada! I met up with him during his recent visit over here to find out more...

Bobby was born in Dennyloanhead, near Falkirk, in 1941. Music was always a part of family life – Mum (Jean Day, originally from Monymusk in Aberdeenshire) was a well-known singer in the 1930s and 40s, Dad (John, from Slamannan) was a fiddler and all his uncles were involved in some way with the "Pipes and Drums". Uncle John (who played the hammered dulcimer) had a band called "The D-Day Band" which included two fiddles, bass, piano, drums and even the occasional appearance of a saxophone or trumpet. This was before the typical modern day band of two accordions, fiddle, piano, bass and drums.

Bobby and his two sisters (Jean and Christine) were "sent for piano lessons" to Mrs Spence in Bonnybridge. However, the young budding musician gave the woman a hard time – as he wasn't very keen to learn to read music. So much so that he used to get "belted over the fingers w/ a pencil" when he played it wrong – she even complained to his father! However, he had a very good ear for music – in fact he cheated a wee bit in his first piano exam – he got his sister to read the music and play it for him, until he got the tunes into his head! And he would probably have got away with it if the music hadn't slipped under another piece of paper while he continued to play what was written on it! Having a good ear for music has obviously paid off though, because Bobby doesn't even remember learning the standard well-

known tunes (such as *The Fairy Dance*, *Mrs Macleod* and *De'il Amang the Tailors*, etc., etc.)! "They were just always there."

Sadly, when Bobby was only thirteen, his father died. After that, he was sent to a private school in Dumbarton but when he didn't settle in there at all, he got on a train and ran away home! In 1956, Bobby was working as an apprentice in a Grangemouth dockyard and he "absolutely hated every minute of it!" His sisters had already moved to Canada, so Bobby decided to move there too. In 1957 he emigrated to Winnipeg, at the age of sixteen, and a couple of years later he moved to Toronto.

It wasn't until he was living in Canada that Bobby started playing the accordion. There was no piano in the house in Canada, so he had spotted a wee 12 bass Hohner accordion in a shop – and used the money he had saved up for his holidays to buy it. He decided to take a few lessons "just to confuse him even more". He had the same problems with this teacher – mainly because he had eye problems, which made it more difficult for him to read music – which incidentally he can do. It was in Toronto that he met up with Stan Hamilton and Bobby Frew and after they got together to have a tune, Bobby was asked to join Stan's band as second box player. Then, in 1975, he formed The Scottish Accent Band.

Bobby Brown has fifteen recordings, including RSCDS Book 12, for which Bobby's Band was the first outside of Scotland to record for the Society in Edinburgh. In addition, Bobby has produced and arranged over 100 recordings for traditional musicians. BBC Scotland invited Bobby Brown and the Scottish Accent to participate in "Take the Floor" from Canada and he has also recorded twice for "Take the



Floor" in Scotland – in Elgin and Aberdeen. The band also recorded broadcasts for Radio Forth hosted by Robin Brock.

So far, Bobby has composed approximately thirty tunes. And, although he does not consider himself to be a composer, he has been asked to write tunes for certain dances by the Hamilton Branch, the London Ontario Branch and the Toronto Branch of the RSCDS. In 2004 HQ in Edinburgh honoured Bobby with the prestigious award of the RSCDS Scroll.

So, how does the Canadian Scottish music scene differ from ours? Back in the 1950s and 60s it wasn't much different – there were always people willing and able to take to the floor for a foxtrot or quickstep as well as the country dances. However, nowadays the country dances are pretty much on their own. And the dancers attending now are from all corners of the world, from ex-pat Scots, to New Zealanders, Australians, Japanese and many other cultures.

There are no Accordion Clubs in Canada and nowadays most concerts featuring Scottish music are poorly attended. Why? Possibly because the audiences no longer have any knowledge of the music the way our audiences do here in Scotland, so therefore they don't appreciate this kind of music. Most don't seem to have any interest in the music, unless it's being played for a dance. However, if you go to certain places in America, such as Boston or San Francisco, you may well find a concert being held which

