

Stranraer Jazz Weekend 2023 (October 13th to 15th)

The beautiful 2023 brochure begins with 'Welcome to an action-packed, spectacular Jazz Weekend', and that is absolutely true.

'Action' is not obligatory from the audience, as we comfortably filled all 73 rooms of Stranraer's premier venue, the North West Castle Hotel. This is only seven miles from Cairnryan Ferry dock, so the journey from NI is easy. Most of the jazz is performed at the hotel, and the excellent standard of their food means one doesn't have to venture outdoors for the entire weekend – especially convenient if the weather is very Scottish, which it was.

So, to the 'action'. The all-important jazz, some charming traditional numbers as well as lots of New Orleans style, is played virtually continuously from just after breakfast, through lunchtime and afternoon, early evening and after dinner till 11PM – in fact, it felt like 'back-to-back' – by top jazz players such as Spats Langham (bright, happy banjo), John Hallam (elegant, refined sax), Tom Kincaid (crystal-sound piano with fingers running on the keyboard like liquid gold), Emma Fisk (sweet and sensual yet virtuosic violin) to name but a few. They didn't fail to make us feel inspired, happy, positive and rejuvenated. Of course, the audience can also take part in the 'action', as there is plenty of opportunity to take to the floor and shine with your smooth steps in polished dance shoes (if your steps are not smooth, it doesn't matter as long as you're having fun).

With this amount of high-class music, combined with half-board stay in the hotel with its swimming pool and curling rink (more 'action', if you like), this is a gem of a jazz festival. What a great way to get that extra energy at the start of autumn!