

SUBMISSION TO CULTURAL COMMISSION.

'11 OCT 2004

BACKGROUND:

Greentrax Recordings Limited, which includes the Greentrax, G2 and Culburnie labels, plus Grian Music Publishing, was launched in 1986 by former Police Inspector Ian Green, who has devoted much of his life to promoting the music of Scotland.

The Company specialises in the best of the real music of Scotland, including folk (both traditional and contemporary), various instrumental, ceilidh band, piping (solo and band), Gaelic song and singer/songwriter. The extensive Greentrax Recordings catalogue, in addition to the highly acclaimed Greentrax label, also includes the very prestigious Scottish Tradition Series from the School of Scottish Studies archives and the Classics from Scotland Series, plus ace fiddler Alasdair Fraser's Culburnie label and the G2 label with its mix of Salsa, dance and other interesting Celtic related sounds. A glance through the catalogue reveals that many of Scotland's leading singers and musicians have recorded for Greentrax, including Aly Bain & Phil Cunningham, Eric Bogle, Gordon Duncan, Dick Gaughan, Jean Redpath, The McCalmans, Tony McManus, Mairi MacInnes, Sheena Wellington, Shooglenifty and Salsa Celtica.

Greentrax Recordings has won several awards, including the "East Lothian Business Achievment Award" in 1997, for good business practices and export achievements. In 1998 Scottish Television, through their "Artery" documentary series, featured Greentrax Recordings Ltd. and the lifelong involvement of Ian Green in Scottish traditional music.

"REAL" SCOTTISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC:

The traditional music and song of Scotland must be regarded as one of the most important aspects of Scottish culture. It comprises much of Scotland's history in music and song which, for many centuries, was passed on orally from generation to generation. In more recent times it has been the subject of research and collection, in an effort to prevent the loss of this rich seam of our nation's culture. Scottish music and song, along with Irish music and song, is envied the World over but the sad fact of the matter is that for many years it was seriously neglected, understated and, worst of all, unrecognised by a large section of Scotland's population. Scottish traditional music is regrettably held in much higher esteem in many other parts of the World than here in Scotland! If this statement seems an exaggeration then be aware that many professional musicians from the traditional music scene in Scotland have to seek much of their income in Europe and elsewhere.

SCOTTISH MUSIC – “THE MYTH”:

Regrettably, much of what was presented in the 20th Century as Scottish traditional music, certainly amongst the lowland communities of Scotland (but also beyond), was in fact ‘music hall’, which invariably portrayed the ‘drunken Scotsman’ image (Harry Lauder and Will Fyffe are examples of such music hall entertainers), while film-makers seemed convinced we all lived in a ‘Brig O’ Doon’, heather-clad misty glen where everyone dressed in tartan. Radio and, later, television continued to promote this myth and wrongly presented ‘music hall’ as the definitive music of Scotland and, apart from pockets of rural communities, such as North-East Scotland, most of the population was brain-washed into believing the music hall antics, plus Scottish songs performed by ‘operatic’ style singers, was the real music of Scotland. Alongside this and in a token gesture to real Scottish music the inevitable tartan-clad piper was wheeled out for ceremonial occasions; the Highland regimental pipe bands marched around in strict tempo; and ‘Rabbie’ Burns was (and still is) dragged screaming from his grave each January for the annual drunken ritual. No serious thought was given to the music the piper played (as long as it was Scotland The Brave and later Flower of Scotland); or the fact that the military music had lost much of its originality after being outlawed in Scotland; or that the seriously important work of Burns as a collector and songwriter was being ignored and the ‘Celebration Supper’ used, in the main, as an excuse for drunken excesses. Who hasn’t been to the Burns Supper from Hell?

Television did little to stop the rot and caused further damage with their interpretation of Scottish music through ‘The White Heather Club’ and later ‘Thingummyjigs’, which were pumped into almost every Scottish livingroom on a weekly basis. This was ‘brainwashing’ in a big way!

THE INHERITANCE:

The result of such seriously misleading representations of Scottish music has been disastrous on our Scottish musical culture and quite simply, with the exception of pockets of ‘resistance’ in specific rural areas and amongst isolated communities, such as the travelling people, Scotland’s real music and song was in serious decline until the ‘folk revival’ movement of the mid 20th Century. Folk clubs sprang up, the first Scottish music festivals followed and people with vision, such as Hamish Henderson, became heroes of the day.

The above comments may be seen as a simplification of the overall picture but clearly indicates that real Scottish traditional music seriously lost ground to ‘music hall’ and the totally blatant and embarrassing ‘shortbread box’ image which Scotland was to achieve – and which virtually replaced our wonderfully rich musical culture! Changing this appalling image became the lifelong struggle of a few, with their ranks being swelled as more and more thinking people searched for their roots. The fight has been a long hard struggle (an obsession even) for many of us to make even the small impression achieved

to date but there is still a long, long way to go. The average 'woman/man in the street' is in the main totally unaware of Scotland's real music and when confronted with names such as Eric Bogle, one of the most influential Scottish songwriters of several recent decades, singer Jean Redpath, M.B.E., or Dick Gaughan, our most influential revival interpreter of ballads and political songs, then their response is likely to be "Who?".

WHO IS TO BLAME?:

Much of the fault lies squarely at the feet of the media – press, T.V. and radio – who pay scant attention to real Scottish traditional music, with the possible exception of BBC Radio Scotland who broadcast specialist programmes, such as Travelling Folk, Pipeline, The Reel Blend, Celtic Connections and Take the floor, but at the same time have deliberately removed presenters of the calibre of Jimmy McGregor and Ian Anderson, previously broadcasting to the all-important 'wider' audience during daytime transmissions, as distinct from the specialist programmes listed above, which mainly attract the 'converted'. Why compartmentalise Scottish music of any genre when it is well able to sit alongside 'popular' music, as in Ireland - a nation with a greater national pride in its traditional music than Scotland? But while some blame can be directed at BBC Radio Scotland, most of the commercial radio stations, Radio Clyde and Radio Forth in particular, either totally ignore real Scottish traditional music or make a token gesture with a 'Heather and Haggis' type programme, which brings us neatly back to 'The White Heather Club' and 'Thingummyjigs'. The Scottish press show little interest in traditional music, except perhaps during Celtic Connections and The Edinburgh Festival Fringe, plus a few token album reviews. There are currently a few good television presentations, mostly directed at Gaelic viewers (although invariably transmitted at 'dead' viewing times), but there is little else from television that inspires or is likely to attract the all important 'wider' audience.

POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY:

For years there was no political desire to further the cause of Scottish culture, music and song in particular, and in fact if we go back in history it becomes clear our music and song was actively discouraged and even outlawed by governments of the day. Since the resumption of a Scottish Parliament there have been encouraging signs of a growing awareness of Scottish traditional music in the Scottish Parliament and, thankfully, some M.S.P.s are quite knowledgeable on the subject. This must be encouraged and real Scottish traditional music has to be presented centre stage and no longer allowed to play second fiddle (excuse the pun!) to Opera and Ballet each time the Government purse is opened. Many of us in the Scottish traditional music scene are able to enjoy all aspects of Scottish arts but are also in no doubt that real Scottish traditional music is one of the most important elements of our culture. Story-telling, dance, poetry all have their place of

course but Scotland's music and song must be available to everyone – some will of course reject it, as is their right, but it should at least be accessible.

IN CONCLUSION:

The real music and song of Scotland is something to be proud of and we should all shout about it from the roof-tops! Who can do so better than the media and our politicians?

Many of those involved in making the music have the expertise but are rarely consulted and so often it is those with little or even no knowledge at all that are asked to speak on our behalf.

There is a very active music industry in Scotland, supporting the many remarkably talented Scottish musicians and singers and contributing very seriously to the Scottish economy. The artists and the industry are both crying out for more recognition and support, including increased public performance opportunities which would not only assist the industry but would raise the profile of Scotland's traditional music and make the music more accessible to all.

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'Ian Green;
Managing Director of Greentrax Recordings Ltd.

THE IAN GREEN/GREENTRAX RECORDINGS STORY:-

Ian Green was born in Forres, Morayshire, in 1934, son of a head gardener who played the Highland bagpipe. 'Bothy' style nights were common in the 'Green house' and Ian got his first introduction to traditional music at an early age. The family moved to Edinburgh, when Ian was 14 years of age, and there Ian served his apprenticeship as a gardener. He was called up for National Service at 18 years but chose to sign on for three years in the regular army and served in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in Korea. On leaving the Army in 1955, Ian joined Edinburgh City Police and subsequently served 30 years in the force, retiring as a Police Inspector late in 1985.

During his police service Ian developed what has since been described as 'an obsessional interest' in traditional music, especially the music of Scotland, and he became an avid collector of 'folk' recordings. He was a founder member of the Edinburgh Police Folk Club (which became affectionately known on the folk scene as 'Fuzzfolk'), guiding it successfully for 10 years. He was also one of the founder members of the Edinburgh Folk Club (which still meets to this day and recently celebrated its 30th Anniversary); he is a former committee member of both the Traditional Music and Song Association of Scotland and Edinburgh Folk Festival and for 10 years was a co-editor of Sandy Bell's Broadsheet magazine (one of the few traditional music publications of the time). Over the same period Ian and long-standing friend John Barrow also promoted concerts in Edinburgh and had the distinction of presenting the first Edinburgh appearances of The Bothy Band and Clannad. He later also served on the Board of Directors of Edinburgh Folk Festival for several years.

In the late 1970's Ian set up Discount Folk Records, a mail order and festival stall service, which achieved a worldwide reputation for quality service and the ability to supply difficult to obtain 'folk' albums. In those days Ian and his wife, June, could be seen at many of Scotland's folk festivals, tending their huge selection of albums and offering informed advice to their many regular customers and visitors to Scotland. Inside Ian, however, was a burning ambition to be involved in the actual recording of Scotland's many talented musicians and singers.

In 1986 Greentrax Recordings was launched, funded solely by Ian who elected to take the maximum lump-sum from his police pension for this purpose. During the first five years Ian re-invested all profits in the company and drew nothing in the way of earnings, thereby ensuring a sound financial base to the company. Ian's wide reputation for reliability and good service with Discount Folk Records and his huge involvement in the Scottish traditional music scene stood him in good stead and the company got off to the best possible start because of the wide interest generated by the media in Ian's new venture.

One of the aims of the Greentrax label was to give highly talented but unrecorded Scottish musicians and singers an opportunity to reach wider audiences and the success of some debut albums exceeded all expectations. Many notable albums have been released and Greentrax has won several awards, including the B.B.C.

Radio Scotland/Living Tradition "Album of the Year - 1994" award and the "East Lothian Business Achievement Award" in 1997, for good business practices and export achievement. In 1998 Greentrax Recordings launched its G2 label, to enable the company to further diversify, and in the same year Scottish Television highlighted the Company and the lifelong involvement of Ian in traditional music in their "Artery" documentary series.

Artists with debut albums on Greentrax who have gone on to very successful musical careers include Catherine-Ann MacPhee, Margaret Stewart, Ian Hardie, Burach, Deaf Shepherd, Robin Laing and Shooglenifty. Greentrax continues to release a high percentage of debut albums.

A successful record label must also have a core of established artists and the label has been fortunate in attracting many professional and internationally known artists, including Aly Bain, Eric Bogle, Dick Gaughan, Jean Redpath, Isla St. Clair, The McCalmans and Natalie MacMaster (Cape Breton). Not only professional artists placed their faith in Greentrax, however, because the company has been involved in projects with Scottish Television (the "Aly Bain and Friends" series); Edinburgh International Festival ("Folk Songs of North-East Scotland"; "Scottish Harps", "The Song of The Gael" and "Music of The Pipes - Pibroch"); the Traditional Music and Song Association of Scotland ("The Nineties Collection - Volumes 1 and 2"); the Everallin Film Company ("The Tree of Liberty"); Freeway Films ("Mairi Mhor"); the S.T.U.C. (Centenary Celebration Album - "If It Wisnae For The Union", which includes such international stars as Run Rig, The Dubliners, Dick Gaughan and Christy Moore) and The Highland Festival (The "Songhunter" project and "The Captain's Collection").

Greentrax currently has over 300 albums in its catalogue and through hard work and perseverance has established distribution in Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada, U.S.A., Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, Holland, Denmark, Belgium, Norway, Taiwan, South Africa, The Czech Republic & Poland, in addition to the United Kingdom. Most of this was negotiated at the hard bargaining table of 'Midem' (The World Record Exhibition held annually in France) where Greentrax is represented each year. Several successful licensing agreements have also been negotiated at Midem.

For the first 7 years, the company was run solely by Ian Green but in recent years additional members of staff have been recruited and currently Greentrax has two full-time and two part-time members of staff. Marina Wilson is Royalties and Accounts Administrator and Office Manager; Cath Mack is Promotions Administrator; June Green is a Director and does part-time work on Promotions and Publicity; Pat Clark is Warehouseman and Packer; while Ian is Managing Director.

Early in 2001, the 15th Anniversary of the Company, Greentrax Recordings took over the distribution of Alasdair Fraser's highly regarded Culburnie label and licensed the entire catalogue for the territories of the United Kingdom, Europe and the Rest of the World, except North America and Australasia. Ian has always admired the music of Alasdair Fraser and the Culburnie label so the association

was to the benefit of both Greentrax and Culburnie. By coincidence, Culburnie also celebrated its 15th Anniversary in 2001.

Greentrax celebrated its 15th Anniversary in great style and the culmination of the celebrations took place on Saturday, 27th October, 2001, when Greentrax staged a concert in the Queen's Hall, Edinburgh. The concert showcased many of the top Greentrax artists, including Dick Gaughan and Peatbog Faeries, while Culburnie were represented by Alasdair Fraser, who flew from the U.S.A. specially for the concert.

Greentrax Recordings has maintained a close association with Canada in recent years and Canadian artists on the Greentrax label include Natalie MacMaster, Slainte Mhath, Eileen McGann, Buddy MacMaster, Alex Francis MacKay, Brenda Stubbart, Margo Carruthers and recently The Cottars "Made in Cape Breton" album was licensed by Greentrax. Tony McManus recorded his "Pourquoi Quebec" album for Greentrax in Canada and recently sat in the producer's chair in a Canadian studio, recording the great Gaelic singer Cathy-Ann MacPhee, who now lives in Canada.

At 18 years, Greentrax is now regarded as Scotland's leading traditional record company. A high proportion of the Greentrax output continues to be debut albums.

"Scotland's Favourite Record Company" is alive and well in the new Millenium!

'Ian D. Green'