



## MURIEL JOHNSTONE

I have been lucky enough to have had an extraordinary life in traditional Scottish music and dance. What started as a hobby as a child dancing in Miss Hughes' class in Saltcoats, Ayrshire, has taken me from Scotland to the United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Africa and across Europe. Who would have thought it possible to have such a life-style - busy and varied including teaching (both music and dance), performing, playing for classes and dances, recording and composing? Not I! On top of that, I have travelled extensively visiting places I only once dreamed of seeing and the final icing on the cake has been meeting so many marvellous people.

As a dancer, after ten glorious years of dancing with Miss Anne Hughes - a gifted teacher of children - where I was thoroughly grounded in the technique of dancing, I continued to dance all through University and then as much as possible given the restraints of three children! I actually gained my 'Prelim' when

I was still a student. The examiner was Miss Milligan! Many years later, after years of juggling playing against dancing, I got the opportunity at Duns & District Branch to take my Full Certificate. My first teaching was in the Eyemouth class of Duns Branch. It is hard to decide which activity I enjoy more; I am very lucky to be involved in both.

Over the years, I have enjoyed some wonderful musical liaisons with many talented musicians, most recently with outstanding fiddler Keith Smith. The variety of instruments and styles of playing brought by all of them has provided my education in playing Scottish music, especially for dancing. It is hard to say who has been the biggest influence but the process started at a very early age with my mother Dorothy Johnstone (also a pianist); my first band engagement was with Bobby Crowe (accordion) who introduced me to 'the dots' and from whom I learned a huge amount in the seven years I was in that band (Jim Lindsay was also a member of Bobby's band); another colossal influence is Alasdair Fraser (master of the fiddle) who encouraged me to abandon the printed copy and live dangerously!

In 1988, with the help of Bill, the fledgling company "Scotscores" released its first recording - "Dancing Fingers". There are now 25 CDs on the Scotscores label.

Composition is one of my favourite pastimes. A recent rough count suggests there are way over 1,000 MJ tunes! Many of these have been commissioned to provide music to honour people in our world of Scottish Country Dancing or for specific dances. Scotscores has also published 8 books of music containing many of these tunes with yet more to come.

I would find it impossible to pick out my most memorable moment, favourite place, strongest influence, greatest excitement, biggest disappointment or funniest experience but I think there is a book to be written with a special chapter describing how, along the way, I have met and wrestled with many strange and wondrous piano-shaped objects that resolutely refuse to help you sound like the musician you are supposed to be!

Although music and dancing take up a large slice of time and devotion, there are other loves in my life - family, golfing, cooking, reading and spending time with friends - never enough!