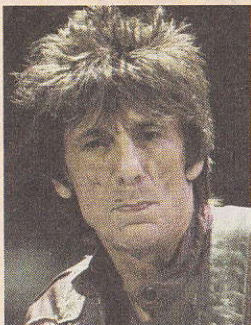


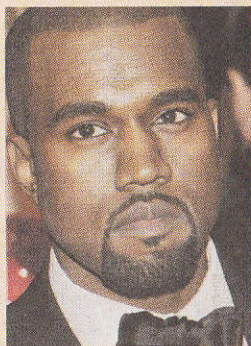
curtainup

faces of the week



RONNIE WOOD

At 65, the rock-and-roll hellraiser is just one a year younger than the dad of his new bride Sally Humphreys, but hey ho, what's a 31-year age difference between newlyweds? All the same, some are predicting that the nappies she'll inevitably be changing won't belong to any baby.



KANYE WEST

He's got a "bun in the Koven" - knocked-up

A series of New Year concerts in China has been a challenge for the RSNO, but they've been received well, especially when playing more obviously Scottish melodies

THE players of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and their conductor Peter Oundjian ushered in the New Year with the familiar strains of The Blue Danube on Monday night, but the setting was far from traditional. This was the brand new, bright red concert hall in the fast-expanding city of Shenzhen, southern China, decked out with crimson hangings, and fluttering with as many Chinese flags as there were Union Jacks.

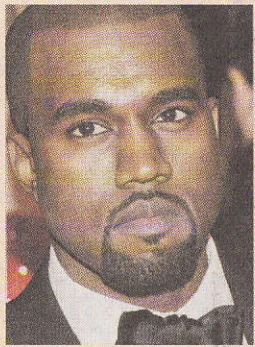
With a kilted sextet from the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland serenading astonished Chinese listeners as they arrived in the foyer, it felt like a little piece of Scotland had taken root amid the gleaming skyscrapers of one of China's wealthiest cities. Oundjian's musical mix gave the same feeling, combining impeccably stylish Viennese classics with rugged Scottish repertoire, and it had the concert's large Chinese crowd gripped. That might have been down to the event's novelty value, but any such thoughts were dispelled when the audience spontaneously rose to their feet for a hearty rendition of *Auld Lang Syne* - in Mandarin. It's a song valuing friendship and good times in China, too, I was assured.

It was a Hogmanay like no other - as strange and startling as it was exciting. And it was the centrepiece of the RSNO's five-stop tour of China, which kicked off on 27 December and also took in Guangzhou and Beijing, and concludes with visits to Tianjin tonight and Macau on Saturday.

Two days before the New Year celebration concert in Guangzhou the RSNO performed a more serious programme of Mendelssohn's *Scottish Symphony* and Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, with Peter Maxwell Davies's witty *An Orkney Wedding, With Sunrise* allowing Chinese listeners a close encounter with Scotland, as young piper Iain Crawford processed through the audience to the stage with bagpipes resounding.

For the orchestra's chief executive Michael Elliott, the RSNO's China tour is an important project at a time of change, marking both his arrival in August 2011, and also the first season from new





KANYE WEST

He's got a "bun in the Koven" - knocked-up Kim Kardashian. Some "kouldn't kare less", but not the media, already reporting that Kim won't give birth live on air, or Twitter, helpfully pointing out that it'd be a bad idea to name the baby Rosemary or Fred.



SIDSE BABBETT KNUDSEN

Two more sleeps until Borgen returns to liven up Saturdays with the ongoing domestic and political dramas of Birgitte Nyborg, the "world's sexiest prime minister" and perhaps the only one depicted having sex on a kitchen counter. No spoilers about season two, but some good news: season three's already been filmed.

LEE RANDALL

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For the orchestra's chief executive Michael Elliott, the RSNO's China tour is an important project at a time of change, marking both his arrival in August 2011, and also the first season from new music director Peter Oundjian. And according to Elliott it's worked, boosting morale and confirming the orchestra's place on the international stage. "We have a successful track record in Scotland, but we're working in an international business, and to compete we have to be seen as good both at home and overseas."

The tour's destination chimes well with the Scottish government's agenda encouraging links - both economic and cultural - with China. It's a fact not lost on Elliott, although, as he points out, the Sino-Scottish relationship wasn't the driving force behind the tour. "It's a coincidence as far as I'm concerned, but to mount a tour like this, we need healthy support from the Scottish Government's International Touring Fund, so I couldn't have contemplated it if I knew it wasn't going to be high on their agenda."

Quite apart from the colour and spectacle of the concerts themselves - and the RSNO players and Oundjian have supplied plenty of both - behind the scenes, simply making a tour like this happen is a mind-boggling feat. Assistant stage manager Michael Cameron is one of the tour's unsung heroes, with the responsibility of getting the orchestra's instruments (everything from violins to double basses, harp and timpani) not only to China, but also from venue to venue once inside the country.

"I've done a lot of tours, but never one quite as extreme as this," he says. After driving the equipment from Glasgow to London on Boxing Day, he saw it onto a cargo plane before himself hopping on a flight to Hong Kong, then following the precious items by bus, taxi and train to the first venue, the Xinghai Concert Hall in Guangzhou.

And that's without taking into account the demands of China's notoriously



New acquaintances



stringent bureaucracy. As Chinese promoter of the Guangzhou and Shenzhen events Hu Zhong Xi says, the government watches everything.

"In China, all commercial performances need to be approved by the Ministry of Culture - every concert, every programme, every conductor and soloist, every general manager of an orchestra. But things are getting easier - they won't really disapprove unless you're performing religious music, or unless it's a group coming from Taiwan, Japan or Norway, where China has cultural tensions."

Once in the country, it's hard not to be aware that you should be following the rules. In one incident that raised a few smiles (and eyebrows), concert-hall ushers held aloft glowing green signs forbidding photography even while the RSNO were in full flight. On the up side, though, you might end up being passed between four or five ushers to ensure a safe journey from the foyer to your seat.

The RSNO's concerts have drawn appreciative and

curtainup

'It's where I felt most at home with the record'

Living in a caravan on Eigg has helped busy Fence stalwart Johnny Lynch to focus on a new album, writes **David Pollock**

MAIN: the Royal Scottish National Orchestra perform in Shenzhen; **BELOW LEFT:** Peter Oundjian encourages the audience to join hands for Auld Lang Syne **BELOW RIGHT:** the RSNO also performed in Beijing Pictures: Daniel Pollitt/Getty

祝大家：
快乐
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交响乐团2013新年音乐会



IT'S the Saturday before Christmas, and the third annual instalment of Kid Canaveral's Christmas Baubles show is not long under way. The Edinburgh and Anstruther-based indie-pop group have taken a leaf out of their close friends at Fence Records' book by promoting their own music through a mini-festival comprised of like-minded musical accomplices on the same bill. Glaswegian guitar virtuoso RM Hubbert is on stage at the moment and Edinburgh's FOUND are along next with a set of heavy, experimental psych-pop, although sadly the latter's planned special guest, Fence founder King Creosote, won't be joining them.

Upstairs in a darkened alcove as far from the music as possible, Johnny Lynch waits to step into KC's shoes. Although the haunting, rustic rock of Kenny Anderson is the sound Fence is most closely associated with, those who know the Anstruther label know it's Lynch who does most of the moving behind the scenes.

It's a situation Anderson acknowledges, says Lynch, and the pair have recently become equal partners in the business as a result. We're here to speak about Lynch's forthcoming

weird way I do kind of feel like I'm a part of all the bands we've released."

Fence is a collaborative organisation, as evidenced by things like Kate Lazda and David MacGregor of Kid Canaveral's assistance in running it and the fact Lynch is taking the band Eagleowl (who also have an album due on the label) with him as both support act and backing group on his upcoming tour. Yet the new album was recorded in near-isolation on Eigg, where Lynch now lives in a caravan with his partner Sarah, an Eigg native, while they wait for their house to be built.

"It's where I felt most at home with the record," he says. "We had the use of this cottage which looks out over the sea, and it was just the perfect recording space, the window frames the sea and the surrounding mountains on the mainland. It's where I knew I wouldn't have any distractions." He says this and right away points out that he was organising Fence's Eigg-based Awaygame festival during the recording period, but that

records of the last five years. It's a weird four-track album which Steve, I guess, engineered more than produced. The way they captured the sounds, it's just really warm, really odd sounding."

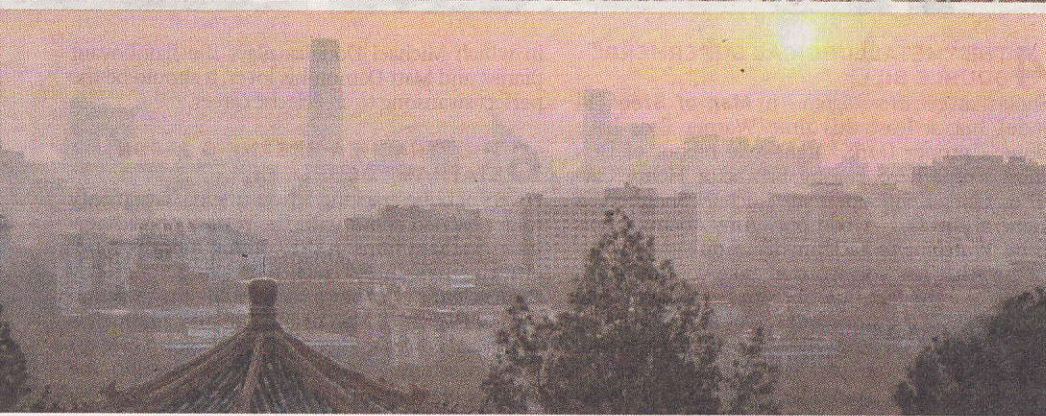
The pair recorded the bulk of the record in ten days on Eigg. "I've seen Steve play on his own and with his band, but also with Slow Club and Euros, with Cate Le Bon and Gruff Rhys and a bunch of others, and he's someone who's a really collective-minded player. He's also quite a no-nonsense guy, he's just like, 'Let's get on and do it.' He forced me to play a lot of the instruments on the record, he's got me doing drum machines, weird keyboards, guitars, all the singing.

"He came from exactly the right place, recording wise. It's about the weird little sounds in there, on repeated listens you can hear these things, these little interludes. None that would turn you off, I don't think. They can be quite abrasive, but they're not horrible to listen to. It's not a nasty record, and it's not like [he adopts a smug, looking-for-a-reaction tone] 'listen to these'. It's really well rounded and I'm pleased with the way it came out. Really chuffed with it."

Everything beyond this tour and a spring packed



Picture: Ed Fielding



enthusiastic audiences – as they should, with ticket prices far above what we'd cough up in Scotland. To get into the Shenzhen New Year gig, you'd have needed to find between £50 and £170 per ticket. But audiences seem not to be the super-rich. Most look like middle-class families with a genuine interest in what they're hearing. And judging by the number of youngsters waving their arms around to the RSNO's music, the next generation of Chinese musicians is likely to be, not pianists in the mould of superstar Lang Lang, but conductors.

The RSNO musicians, however, have been surprised by some of the audience's more subdued responses. "We were warned that Chinese audiences weren't that enthusiastic," says violinist Susanna Lowdon, "and there's been a bit of a reserved reaction when we play the Mendelssohn *Scottish Symphony*, for instance."

But they put that down to unfamiliarity with the music. Violinist Paul Medd, however, voices an

understandable frustration about a Scottish group playing overseas: "I sometimes think what we offer as a Scottish orchestra is a bit of a curse. It seems like we're trying really hard with something like the Elgar *Enigma Variations*, to little reaction, but when we pull out something like Scottish reels the audience loves it immediately."

It's been an eye-opening experience for many in the orchestra on many cultural levels – from deciphering menus and quick lessons in Mandarin, to plucking up the courage for a bungee jump in a Guangzhou park.

For Michael Elliott, though, the RSNO's China tour remains a hugely significant moment for the organisation: "It's a big statement, and a big morale boost. Any tour is, but China particularly so. In some ways it's a very traditional project that we're bringing to China at New Year, but it still shows the ambition and innovation that we're bringing to our music making."

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It's a situation Anderson acknowledges, says Lynch, and the pair have recently become equal partners in the business as a result. We're here to speak about Lynch's forthcoming album *Secret Soundz Vol.2*, released on 21 January. It's a rich and textured record that maintains a strong pop sensibility by stepping back from Lynch the singer-songwriter, revealing him as an inventive studio composer.

Does he ever think Fence overshadows the fact he's a musician in his own right? "I can't ever see myself being in a position where I completely rely on my own music," he says enthusiastically (he says everything enthusiastically). "I find it funny describing myself as a musician, because I've never studied music. When I see players like RM Hubbert – that guy can play, he's an amazing guitarist. I think of myself just as a songwriter who gets away with it, working with actual musicians who can help me realise the songs live."

He seems happy being described as a label boss who makes music on the side, rather than a musician whose creative time is always being sucked away by other demands. "I love being involved in other people's music. I love supporting it and I love helping make that music a success. There's no better feeling, really, than having your taste validated, whether it's your own music or someone else's, so in a

looks out over the sea, and it was just the perfect recording space, the window frames the sea and the surrounding mountains on the mainland. It's where I knew I wouldn't have any distractions." He says this and right away points out that he was organising Fence's Eigg-based Awaygame festival during the recording period, but that



Picture: Ed Fielding

Johnny Lynch, better known as Pictish Trail

it never became overpowering. "I'd be recording during the day, then at night our meal would finish about 11, then I'd get back on my computer and go through all my e-mails. Then pass out and the next morning get back into it. So Eigg was good for keeping me disciplined."

The "we" here is Lynch and Steve Black, aka Welsh musician and producer Sweet Baboo, the only other person (bar an afternoon of accordion parts Anderson recorded) involved in the album. "I saw him at the Applecart festival in London," says Lynch, "and I told him I'd just written these songs but I was finding it difficult to know how to start, because it's quite a personal record, or certainly the heart of it is. I was listening to Euros Childs a lot at the time, there's one record of his in particular called *Face Dripping*, which is one of my favourite

guitars, all the singing.

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Everything beyond this tour and a spring packed with new Fence records is a work in progress, although Lynch speaks guardedly of a musician's retreat he's planning, a new EP in the autumn and possibly even a spin-off label from Fence. Until very recently the defining, Anstruther-based Homegame festival was dead, to be replaced by the new Eye O' the Dug event in St Andrews, but problems with venues at

the latter mean Homegame is back this April.

"It's back because Fence needs events. All of our records make money, we've not lost money on a single record, but as a label it's not sustainable." In this respect it's an extension of his own career, a collection of disparate avenues which adds up to much more than the sum of its parts. ● The Pictish Trail plays Celtic Connections at the Glasgow Art Club, 24 January; Adam Smith Theatre, Kirkcaldy, 25 January; The Tunnels, Aberdeen, 26 January; St Andrews University Students Association, 3 February; The Caves, Edinburgh, 21 February. The album *Secret Soundz Vol.2* is out on Fence Records on 21 January, see www.thepictishtrail.com.

For updates on Homegame 2013, and Kid Canaveral and Eagleowl's new albums, see www.fencerecords.com.