



## Sailing our Faith and Music to the Islands of Scotland

*FOR FIVE DAYS in early August 2001 a five-man and three-woman crew of musicians, poets and dancers toured the Western Scottish Isles from the harbour town of Troon to the pilgrimage island of Iona, aboard the good ship, Winefreda, aka "The Winny" – a superb wooden yacht launched around 1892.*

It started with a night passage under a starry full moon in which the waters that separate Ulster and Scotland were traversed. It ended with a wondrous unity feast on the Ross of Mull. The in-between was levels upon levels of spiritual blessing as we repeatedly were taken to "a place of nearness" in the realm on high.

Garry Villiers-Stuart is the owner of one of Ireland's oldest (and most special)

### *The Unity Feast in Nigel's barn*

sailing boats, the Winny. It was launched, around the Holy Year of 1892. This August it made a very special journey. On board was a group of musicians, Steve Day from Telford, Richard Leigh from Northants, Jody Koomen from Oxford, Poppy and Rosie Villiers-Stuart, Tim Rubidge from Northumberland, and Katrina from Malta (via Ireland). The purpose of this journey was to celebrate in music the Ancient Beauty and to make a song line between the many holy islands that exist in this sublimely beautiful part of the planet.

Our first stop was Holy Island (off Aran) where many of the Buddhists broke the routine of their retreat to come on board. Some were old friends of the Winny, and after the joy of our initial meeting, the sound of our gathering was sung, and sweet was that sound. Reluctantly we said goodbye to those beautiful souls and made passage for the Crinnan Canal.

The Crinnan canal cuts through the top of the Mull of Kintyre, the spit of land that effectively separates the lowlands from the highlands. Going through the canal, working the locks, pulling the ropes, was the occasions for many improvised sea shanties and impromptu drumming. The three other boats that shared that passage with us also got into the spirit of celebration. That night Poppy and Jody got into long and deep discussion with some Christians who were staying on a boat near by. The next day, as we sailed passed we sang a song praising all religions, and in response they danced on the fore deck.

The Winny's next port of call was one of the Garvollich Islands, the site of a deserted

monastery founded by St Columba. In a seventh century cell we chanted the Greatest Name to the spirits of the place, and later again Alleluia. The sun shone and the fragrant aroma of the island perfumed the inner and outer atmosphere.

Our next stop was Irraid, an island used by Findhorn to allow people to connect more deeply with their souls. We celebrated the setting sun with drum and chant. The next morning we travelled to Scotland's holiest island, Iona, home of St Columba's Monastery and burial ground to Scotland's ancient kings. We chanted the sweetest dawn prayers in St Oran's chapel. Never had the island heard the Greatest Name been chanted with such sweet devotion. Later on, across on the Ross of Mull, we met the Scottish contingent of singers. Gathered together by the enthusiasm of Christina St Clair, the Winny met Alex and Parviz Reid, and David Grant. The sun was shining, the sea was turquoise and Gaelic singing took us to yet another realm.

Fingal's cave was the next destination.

The Gaelic name of Fingal's cave translates into "melodious cave" and melodious it was that afternoon. As the Atlantic gently thundered and echoed Alex sang an ancient Gaelic longboat song., there was sweet fiddle music from Richard, a flute meditation from Garry, prayers from Poppy and Rosie and a soul-inspiring chant from all of us. The rising and falling lilting voices merged with rock and water to give praise for being alive.



*Piping the Winny to Fingal's Cave*

Our final meeting was celebrated in the form of a unity feast in the barn of old friends Nigel and Rosie Burgess. The readings from Rum and Bah'u'llah, the dance from Tim, the Gaelic songs from Christina and Alex, the fiddles, the boran, was such a celebration of the unity of religion. The enchantment was complete. All were deeply touched and found healing in their own way.

*Garry Villiers-Stuart & Steve Day*

