



# The San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers

starring

## Alasdair Fraser

May 17 at 7 p.m. Veterans Memorial Theatre, Davis  
May 18 at 7 p.m. Glaser Center, Santa Rosa  
May 19 at 1 p.m. Freight & Salvage, Berkeley

Publicity:  
**Karin Conn PR**  
**(415) 902-5800**  
[karinconn4@gmail.com](mailto:karinconn4@gmail.com)  
[Karinconnpr.com](http://Karinconnpr.com)

San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers:  
[sfiddles.org](http://sfiddles.org)

### The concerts

Three Northern California shows led by acclaimed Scots fiddler **Alasdair Fraser** fill the stage with more than 65 Bay Area musicians – on fiddles, cellos, drums, piano and more – playing tunes, songs, and dance rooted in the Celtic tradition.

### The players

**Alasdair Fraser** is one of the greatest exemplars of Scotland's fiddle-playing tradition, not only a virtuoso but a musical ambassador whose warmly expressive playing, mastery of his instrument, and deep understanding of the genre has taught and inspired musicians on both sides of the Atlantic.

Born in Clackmannan, Scotland, in 1955, Alasdair began taking classical violin lessons at the age of eight, enduring much teasing from schoolmates at a time when carrying a fiddle case around was considered far from cool.

Driven by the love of the instrument and the tunes he heard at home, he persevered, and his musical journey was underway.

In his teens, Alasdair played with dance bands and began gathering the compositions of great fiddling forebears including Niel and Nathaniel Gow, William Marshall, and James Scott Skinner. He went on to win – twice – the Scottish National Fiddle Championship and continued playing even as his studies led to work as a petrophysicist with British Petroleum, which brought him to California in 1981.

A few years later, Alasdair realized that he was in the wrong job and went on to follow his passion for music. He soon became a teacher as well as a performer. He is the founder and director of The San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers, the Valley of the Moon Scottish Fiddling School, and the Sierra Fiddle Camp, near his home in California. He also teaches fiddle courses on the Isle of Skye in Scotland and in Spain.

Alasdair's musical partnerships include duos with pianist Paul Machlis and guitarist Tony McManus, and with his acclaimed band Skyedance. He has also guested with The Chieftains, The Waterboys, Itzhak Perlman, and the Los Angeles Master Chorale, and appeared on innumerable television broadcasts. Alasdair with his fiddle have been featured in numerous movie and television productions, from Ken Burns documentaries to *Titanic*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, and *Treasure Planet*.

Since 2003, Alasdair has partnered with cellist Natalie Haas, restoring to contemporary prominence “the wee fiddle and big fiddle” partnership that flourished in 18th-century Scotland. Their debut album, *Fire and Grace*, was voted ‘Album of the Year’ at the Scots Trad Music Awards 2004.

Alasdair says, “The San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers may look like an orchestra, but it’s really an unruly mob of rabble-rousing, anarchistic musical adventurers and explorers. Playing this music fills us with joy and we can’t wait to share it with you. It’s a grand ceilidh, where you can come and tap your toes, dance in your seat or in the aisles, and share in that joy.”

**Barbara MacDonald Magone, piano (San Diego):** Barbara was born and raised in Detroit, in a community of transplanted Cape Bretoners. Her

father was the late John A. MacDonald, a Cape Breton fiddler and founder of the Five MacDonald Fiddlers. Her mother was born in Boston of Cape Breton and Irish parentage and was also a pianist. Her experience includes teaching and performing at The Festival of American Fiddle Tunes in Port Townsend, Washington; The California Traditional Music Society Summer Solstice Festival, the San Diego Folk Festival, Valley of the Moon Scottish Fiddling School, Celtic Week at Ashokan, New York, the Gaelic Roots Festival at Boston College and the Rocky Mountain Fiddle Camp. The Boston Globe wrote of her: "She is one of the most sought-after Celtic accompanists in North America; powerful yet sympathetic."

**Pate Thomson, fiddle, and Judy Thomson, piano (Berkeley):** Pate and Judy Thomson have been a part of the Scottish Fiddlers since the beginning in the mid-1980s. Some would say they are the heart of the organization (no pun intended when referring to Pate, who in his professional life is a cardiologist). Judy Thomson for decades has been the group's house pianist. Pate played violin as a child but didn't take it up seriously until he attended a workshop with Alasdair and was "wowed." As a veteran of years of Scottish Fiddlers concerts, he says, he's noticed the audiences are also wowed. "They are always on their feet by the end of these concerts."

**Caroline McCaskey, fiddle and cello (Mountain View):** Caroline is equally at home in the worlds of traditional and classical music, in large part thanks to her musical upbringing as a member of the San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers. A multi-instrumentalist who plays viola, cello, and musical saw in addition to violin, she is the 2019 U.S. National Scottish Fiddle Champion and a two-time International Musical Saw Champion. She is a composer and arranger, and the creator and head of AltStringsAcademy.com, a learning community for amateur adult string players who are ready to build their technique, style, and musicianship skills.

**Renata Bratt, cello (Santa Cruz):** Cellist Renata Bratt has performed with the SFSF since 2004 and lives and teaches in Santa Cruz, CA. Rolling Stone dubbed her an "ace performer" for her work recording and touring with alternative rocker Cindy Lee Berryhill's Garage Orchestra. She has

taught classical styles, jazz improvisation, and fiddling at international string workshops including Alasdair Fraser's camps, Southern Hemisphere International School for Scottish Fiddling in New Zealand, the New Directions Cello Festival, Wintergrass, the Mandolin Symposium, ASTA, MENC, and Suzuki institutes. Her string orchestra compositions, arrangements, and fiddling cello books are published by Alfred, Ludwig Masters, Keiser Southern, and Mel Bay. Renata received her Ph.D. in Music from UC San Diego.

**Rob Godfrey, vocals, fiddle (Oakland):** Like many of the Scottish Fiddlers, Rob returned to music as an adult, rediscovering the violin after a 30-year absence. He joined the Fiddlers when his son began to play violin, and, as he says, "performed with us every year until he ran away to join the university." Regularly featured as a soloist singing songs (sometimes in Gaelic), Rob says, "What I value most in Scottish fiddle music is how deeply the melodies affect me; but it's hard to separate the unique philosophy of the fiddle club from my love of the music. An amateur playing by heart, I can sit next to a concert violinist or youthful prodigy on stage; and we each bring something important to expressing the music."

**Janette Duncan, fiddle (Santa Rosa):** One of the founding members of the San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers, Janette has been a performer and fiddle teacher in Sonoma County for 35 years. She began playing the violin at age 9, and though she earned a bachelor's degree in Music from Sonoma State University, she gave up classical playing while in college. She branched out into other genres with local fiddler Tim Rued. When Alasdair Fraser moved to the Bay Area and started playing and teaching, she focused on his Scottish fiddling style and remains an active and devoted member of the Fiddlers.

**The San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers** formed in 1986 around a nucleus of musicians devoted to learning and playing the joyous, moving traditional music of Scotland. Now numbering around 200 members, it is an inclusive group with members who play not only fiddle but cello, bass, percussion, piano, and guitar – as well as the occasional flute, harmonica, and, in one case, the musical saw.

A core group of members has remained from the beginning, while new players, often in their teens or younger, join every year. The “fiddle club,” as longtime members call it, offers instrumentalists of all ages, backgrounds, and levels of proficiency, to play with and learn from each other. A significant number of young players have gone on to study at Juilliard, Berklee, and other renowned music conservatories, and have established themselves in professional careers. But they always consider The San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers to be their musical family.

The San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers meet monthly to play their favorite tunes and learn new ones. Their repertoire over the years has expanded to include the music of Brittany, Galicia, Scandinavia, and North America while remaining rooted in the Scottish fiddle forms of dance, pipe tunes, and song.

The highlight of the Fiddlers’ year comes each spring when, under Alasdair Fraser’s direction, the group rehearses for and presents this three-concert series in the greater Bay Area.

**#####**

## **FOR CALENDAR EDITORS**

**What: The San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers** starring **Alasdair Fraser**

**The San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers** starring **Alasdair Fraser**. You may find it hard to sit still when you hear more than 60 musicians on fiddles and cellos (plus piano, drum and guitars) play tunes that range from the rousing and danceable to soothing and romantic. Led by Scottish fiddle icon Alasdair Fraser, the adventure begins in Scotland and then branches out to embrace the musical traditions of Brittany, Galicia, Scandinavia, Cape Breton and more. Tapping toes, dancing in your seat or even in the aisles is encouraged! **May 17** (Davis), **May 18** (Santa Rosa) **May 19** (Berkeley).

### **When/Where:**

**Friday, May 17, 7 pm**  
**Veterans Memorial Theatre**  
203 E 14th St, Davis, CA 95616  
**Phone:** (530) 757-5626

**Tickets:** \$32-\$35; under 12 free (accompanied by an adult)  
<https://sfiddles.org/>

**Saturday, May 18, 7 pm**

**The Glaser Center**

547 Mendocino Ave, Santa Rosa, CA 95401

**Phone:** [\(707\) 791-1843](tel:(707)791-1843)

**Tickets:** \$32-\$35; under 12 free (accompanied by an adult)

<https://sfiddles.org/>

**Sunday, May 19, 1 pm**

**Freight & Salvage**

2020 Addison St. Berkeley 94704

**Phone:** 510-644-2020

**Tickets:** \$30 advance; \$35 door

[thefreight.org](http://thefreight.org)

**More information:** <https://sfiddles.org/>