

## **Ben the Hoose: Large Biography**

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Ben the Hoose is a duo featuring fiddler Kenny Ritch from Orkney and guitarist and songwriter Bob McNeill from Glasgow. They are based in New Zealand. Their music is a spirited interpretation of the dance music of Scotland; uniquely rhythmic and energetic, they embody the modern Scots tradition.

The idea for Ben the Hoose came at the beginning of 2005 when Kenny and Bob discovered their shared passion for the music of Scotland, and a common desire to play it to audiences in a modern, accessible style. Kenny's fluid, vibrant fiddle playing and Bob's rhythmic chording and precise counterpoint are a perfect marriage of styles. Their live performances feature a wealth of traditional Scottish tunes as well as modern compositions, music from movies, and Bob's original songs. Bob has won two New Zealand Music Awards for his solo albums, most recently 2004's *Turn the Diesels*.

Ben the Hoose released their debut album *The Little Cascade* in October 2006. It has since won Best Folk Album of 2006 at the New Zealand Music Awards. The album is a collection of the passionate playing and inventive arrangements that has made Ben the Hoose such a live success. It features modern and traditional dance tunes from all over Scotland, two original songs by Bob, and a haunting, New Zealand-inspired version of Robert Tannahill's *Gloomy Winter's noo awa*. The title track is a six-part reel written for Highland pipes by Pipe Major George S. McLennan during the First World War. McLennan, a prisoner of war in Germany at the time, is said to have composed the tune while unable to sleep because of a dripping tap.

*The Little Cascade* was recorded in Kenny's adopted hometown of Rangiora in Canterbury, between June and September 2006. It was mixed in Wellington, where Bob now lives. The album is dedicated to Kenny's daughter Evie, who arrived halfway through the recording, with several of the noisiest, most demanding sets still to be played. Evie encouraged the lads to finish the recording, provided her name appeared prominently in the sleeve notes.

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## **Kenny Ritch: Biography**

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Kenny loves Orkney. It's where he grew up, it's where his family is, it's where he acquired his funny accent, and in particular it's where he learned to play the fiddle. His father, a renowned Orkney accordion player, first introduced Kenny to traditional music back in 1982, but it took another eleven or so years for him to realise that the fiddle was actually pretty cool.

A respected player both at home in Orkney and in New Zealand, where he moved in 2001, he has a dark and exciting style bringing energy and authenticity to dance tunes from all over Scotland. He is strongly influenced by the new generation of Scottish fiddlers: Gordon Gunn, Jonny Hardie, Gavin Marwick, John McCusker, and their contemporaries.

Kenny makes excellent mince and tatties and now lives in Rangiora with his wife Anna, daughter Evie, and dog Tash. Tash occasionally leaves the room when Kenny starts playing. Hopefully you won't.

## **Bob McNeill: Biography**

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Bob McNeill moved from his native Glasgow to New Zealand in 1998 and has established himself as one of the country's foremost singer-songwriters. He has twice won the Recording Industry of New Zealand Tui award for 'Best Folk Album', most recently in January 2005 for his second album *Turn the Diesels*, released in August 2004. His songs have been featured in New Zealand on National Radio and TV1, and covered by top Scottish artists such as Emily Smith.

Bob is one of New Zealand's top accompanists of Scottish and Irish music. He plays bouzouki and open-tuned guitar, and is widely respected for his rhythmic style, delicate counterpoint and subtle chord selection. He regularly works with touring musicians from overseas who have mislaid their regular accompanist.

Bob is a popular guest on the folk festival circuit owing to his prowess with bacon sandwiches and any dishes involving tatties. He also makes a spectacular red wine sauce and unusual pastas with a Celtic flavour.

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