

What's Afoot

The official magazine of **Devon Folk**
dance song music Morris

**COVID CRISIS
NEWSLETTER
WINTER 2020**

LIKE most of the country, this magazine has been scuppered by the pandemic. With clubs and festivals closed, we've lost our advertising and sales outlets. But some events have carried on via the internet and some folk have made the best of things. This newsletter, with a round-up of what's been happening despite the crisis, is being sent free to subscribers with the promise that like the Mary Ellen Carter we will rise again.



Seagull snatches prize from horses

YOU see plenty of seagulls at Sidmouth but not usually giant-size and carrying a flaming torch. But this is no ordinary year and Sydney Scavenger brought glory to the Sidmouth Steppers in this year's horse trials and helped close the virtual festival. Details, page 2.

Picture: KYLE BAKER

Home alone Jim finds inspiration

THE Covid crisis can't crush Causley. Despite being locked down and seeing the best part of a year's gigs melt away, Jim has been inspired to go into home recording and produce two new CDs.

The first is *Cyprus Well II*, a sequel to his 2008 album of settings of poems by Charles Causley. A few of the tracks are songs that didn't make the original collection but the rest were created this year. They can be bought or downloaded now from Jimcausley.co.uk.

The second album, only at the pre-order stage as What's Afoot goes to press, is a counterpart to 2010's *Dumnonia*, a collection of lesser known Devon songs. *Devonshire Roses* is packed with old favourites such as *The Bell Ringing*, *Tavistock Goosey Fair* and *What About A Little Drop O' Cider*.

While *Cyprus Well II* features just Jim, although multi-tracking on vocals, accordion, and piano, *Devonshire Roses* boasts contributions

from Devon's fabulous fiddlers Nick Wyke and Becki Driscoll, Matt Norman from Okehampton on banjo, mandolin and mandola plus South Zeal's Mariners Away shanty crew.

How did he do it? "I started by using GarageBand which comes free with Apple computers and is very simple to use, then I progressed to Logic. There are similar simple programmes for PC such as Cubase. I have been pleasantly surprised by how much I have unconsciously picked up just from watching over the shoulders of recording engineer friends.

"I was recommended a very reasonably priced and excellent Samson USB vocal microphone. I have a five-octave USB keyboard for piano parts and a Focusrite Scarlett audio interface for acoustic instruments such as my accordion.

"The 'collaborations' are a piece of cake! I

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simply record the bare bones of the track; piano, voice, maybe accordion. My own personal trick has been to start every song/track with a simple piano part to the metronome which I can sing along to and discard later.

"I send the finished base track to a musician friend then they play along with it and record their part on their own computers. They send their part back to me. I simply paste that audio file into my project and Bob's your uncle!

"When I've got all the parts together, I play around with them (I believe the professionals

call it "mixing"!)" until I've got it sounding how I like it (reverb, EQ, compression, panning etc) and that's it basically. Very simple and actually in many ways, a lot less fuss than going to a studio and battling with a third party, ie a recording engineer who often has their own tastes and agenda.

"Also, recording at home means you can play around and keep doing takes until your hearts content without boring anybody else! In a nutshell, you have a lot more creative control which I have discovered I like very much.

"My home-recording tips would be: don't be scared, just get stuck in!"

SETH LAKEMAN put a huge amount of work and love into his concept album *A Pilgrim's Tale* to commemorate Plymouth 400 then Covid put paid to the celebrations and planned concerts. But he did manage a live recording of his work at St Andrew's Church, Plymouth, before lockdown. You can buy the double album from his website sethlakeman.co.uk.

Seagull snatches the prize from horses

SIDMOUTH Steppers found one small consolation in the cancellation of their town's folk festival.

For many years the north-west side had been talking about entering the popular Horse Trials but come the day had always been too busy dancing on the front and round the town.

No such distractions this year so when the virtual Horse Trials were announced, Alexa Baker, the Steppers' publicity officer, whipped up a costume – not a horse but one of the town's notable regulars, a seagull.

She admits it was done as a joke: the seagull's head was a bucket with some deely boppers, a far cry from some of the elaborate entrants of other years. But Sydney Scavenger swooped in to take first prize in the contest.

Instead of performing on the seafront, the horses – and other creatures – had to enter a one-minute video. Here, Alexa had a secret

weapon. Her son Kyle is a professional photographer and he produced a very amusing video of Sydney (Alexa) led by Steppers squire Liz Clode flapping round a deserted Sidmouth doing what seagulls do best: making a lot of noise and stealing food from holidaymakers.

See the video at facebook.com/sidmouthsteppers/videos

Sydney got another outing at what would have been Sidmouth's finale. Although the annual torchlight procession along the seafront that traditionally closes the festival was cancelled, a small group held a socially-distanced, scratch event.

As the picture on our front page shows, Sydney was there with a banner proclaiming victory. Will our seagull return next year, when with luck we'll be back to normal?

"I hope so," said Alexa, "but I'll make a better head. That bucket was so uncomfortable."

One foot in the groove

IT'S heartening there are many opportunities for young people in the folk world. The children's festival at Sidmouth, NYFTE and the New Roots contest at St Alban's are fine examples.

But those of us at the other end of the age scale can feel left out so it's good to hear of an acoustic songwriting competition aimed at the over-50s. The contest, which is being run by talentistimeless.com, features Devon's own

Phil Beer as one of the judges. The rest of the panel includes Johnny Coppin, Boo Hewerdine and Saskia Griffiths-Moore.

The organisers are looking for original acoustic style songs recorded on a video or audio file (phone recordings are accepted).

Entries are being accepted between February 1 and 28 but it's a good idea to get in early by pre-registering at www.talentistimeless.com

Devon festivals pin their hopes on 2021

AS WE went to press Chippenham announced that it was dropping plans for a "normal" event next year. The organisers fear that even by the last weekend in May, a full-scale festival might not be possible and are now looking at organising a smaller, Covid-safe event.

Chippenham is a huge festival and took a big financial hit with this year's cancellation. Obviously the organisers can't risk paying for venues, marquees and stars without being absolutely sure the event can take place.

Devon's first festival is Teignmouth in June. Festival secretary Anne Gill said: "Plans are under way for Teignmouth Folk Festival over the weekend 18-20th June but the final decision will rest with the local council. We hope all the artists we booked for this year will be available to perform in 2021."

South Brent's folk day is scheduled for Saturday 3 July, subject to being Covid safe. The folk committee also has plans for a Spring Ceilidh on Saturday 27 March with Spinach for

Norman but this will be subject to whatever restrictions are in place.

Devon's biggest festival, Sidmouth, had to move online this year but hopes to return for the week beginning July 30. The organisers said: "After having to cancel the 2020 Festival, the most urgent priority was to raise sufficient funds to cover our 2020 losses to be able to get through to the 2021 event."

They thanked all their supporters who had rolled over their tickets to next year, all those who donated and joined the Crowdfunding campaign.

The weekend after Sidmouth, belongs of course, to Dartmoor, which hopes to return next year on the 6th to 8th of August. The festival committee are monitoring the coronavirus situation and announcements on the 2021 festival will be made in due course.

If you booked tickets for 2020, they will automatically roll over to 2021, or if requested, refunds will be made.

Morris sides who danced through the crisis

ONLINE sessions have helped musicians and singers but there's no real equivalent for morris dancers. We spoke to two Devon sides who kept within the rules and got some practice in.

Plymouth Morris practise at St Mary's Church Hall, Tamerton Foliot, which had been Covid assessed. The side drew up a risk assessment which was rigorously checked by musician and retired solicitor Greg Yates. He said: "We had gallons of hand sanitiser, our temperature was checked as we walked in, everyone held onto their own stick and the dancers stayed as dancers and separate from the musicians.

"We had one group of six musicians who were spread out round the hall so there was more than two metres between them. There were two groups of six dancers, one from eight till nine, the other from nine till ten. When lockdown was eased off in the summer, we did lots of garden practices but didn't dance out."

Farewell to Shammick Acoustic

THE Covid crisis and health problems have forced Tom and Barbara Brown to call time on Shammick Acoustic, their Combe Martin club.

Barbara writes: "We'll try to have a get-together when the C-19 problems are over, but otherwise, that is the end of a wonderful 18 years of Shammick Acoustic. Thanks to all of

Winkleigh Morris went one better and actually managed safe dance-outs in the summer. Colin Andrews said: "We had a dozen dances that we adapted for four or five persons so we could dance with a side and a musician. In some cases we had two sides well separated.

"In place of any hands around or swings or face to face we had some special long sticks and we put the two points together and danced around each other with the sticks just touching.

"In handkerchief dances, instead of a face-to-face, we did a turn on the spot without actually touching each other and side-by-side we did on a diagonal.

"We were able to maintain quite a good distance throughout our dances.

"We danced out at the Two Bridges Inn on Dartmoor, Simmonds Park at Okehampton and in the car park of the London Inn at Morchard Bishop. The pub was closed but we got a better audience than some of our regular evenings."

you who have supported us over the years, and to Phil and Cynth McGuinness, late of the Top George, who started us off on this journey, and to Chris and Debbie Batchelor at the Pack o' Cards, who have been such brilliant hosts over the past 11 years. But it's not the end of the music – keep playing, singing and listening!"

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

DAVE DENFORD

DAVE DENFORD who died in May, will be remembered by many for his singing at The Kings Arms in South Zeal during the The Dartmoor Folk Festival weekend and at other celebrations during the year. Often, he would sing with his wife Shirley or support her in the choruses of lovely songs such as *The Water is Wide* or *The Cuckoo's Nest*.

Born at Exbourne near Okehampton, he delivered his songs with a strong voice and beautiful, warm, natural Devonshire accent that was so pleasing to the ear.

Dave had a tremendous knowledge of rural crafts, agricultural trades, caving, rock climbing and the like. He was a founder member of The Dartmoor Rescue Group, champion blacksmith and, for many years, set up the fireworks for the fantastic Sticklepath Fire Show.

He sang with Mariners Away and acted with the

DAVE MASHFORD

DAVE MASHFORD, who led the band Silver And Gold which played for dancers across Devon for 40 years, passed away in October aged 70.

Silver and Gold played their final gig at Tavistock Town Hall in November 2014 after a distinguished run which included many appearances at the Sidmouth Folk Festival.

Dave, who played piano and accordion on stage, was also a church organist. He lived in Millbrook, just over the border in Cornwall, and for 50 years was organist at the church in Antony, not far from his home.

In the Seventies and Eighties he played for the Devon-based ISCA dance team. He died after a

ADRIAN FOSS

ADRIAN FOSS, musician and former dancer with Plymouth Morris, died of pneumonia in November, aged 82. Friends described Adrian as a real stalwart of the side, always ready to turn out even when he could no longer drive.

A former social worker in Wales who had danced with Cardiff Morris before becoming one of the founding members of Isca Morris. He was also a ceilidh caller as well as a mountaineer and a keen sailor. When he and his wife Jenny retired to the West Country, he ran a boat chartering business for a few years.

In 2000, he joined Plymouth Morris as a dancer until about 10 years ago his hips and knees

New Year's Mummers and the St George's Day Pace Eggers. He also played bodhran and sang with Walter Shortage and the Hosepipe Band all over Devon and once in Germany. Dave learned some of his songs from local people – *Mortal Unlucky Old Chap* and *The Seven Drunken Nights* come to mind – but he was always on the lookout for songs that suited his style. To me, his singing of *John Barleycorn* and *Bring Us A Barrel* will never be matched. It was always a great pleasure to be with and sing with Dave.

Bill Murray



battle with cancer but with his wry sense of humour, he deflected sympathy with the words: "Well, I'm better off than my clients!" Dave played the organ for many funerals.

When his cortege passed through Millbrook, some friends gave him a folk-style send off with accordion music and morris dancers in top hats decorated with green.

started giving him trouble so he began playing melodeon for the side..

A friend said: "He was very committed to the morris and would turn out all the time." Adrian was taking part in Plymouth Morris's quiz nights on Zoom until the week before his death.

