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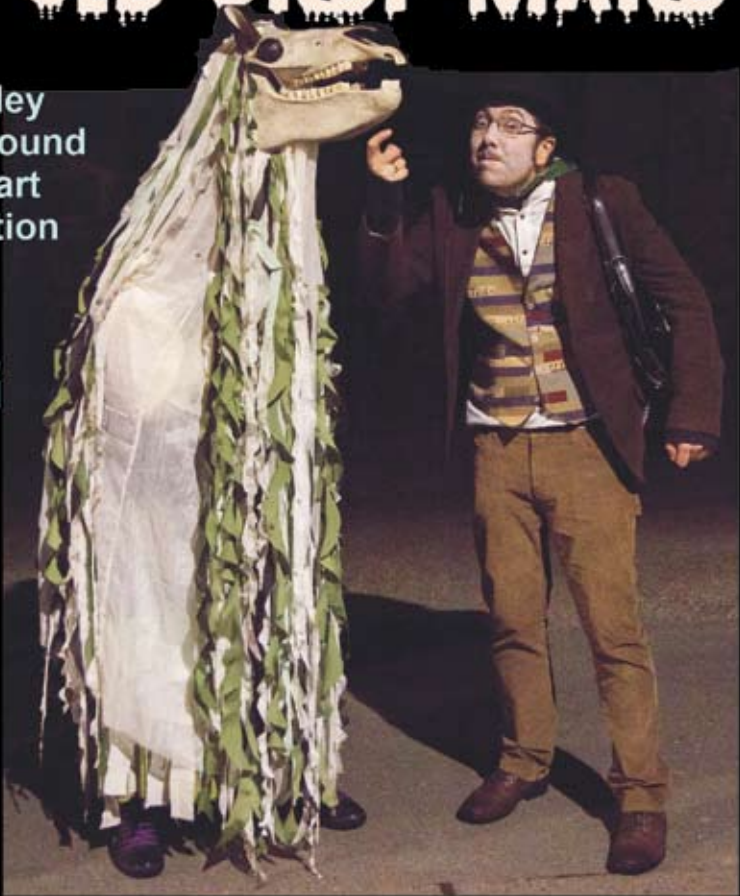
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CO-EDITORS

John Foxen

editor@devonfolk.org.uk

Colin Andrews

Bonny Green, Morchard Bishop,

Crediton, EX17 6PG

01363 877216

admin@devonfolk.org.uk

All diary dates, events, club &
other listings to:

diary@devonfolk.org.uk

All advertising enquiries &
copy to:

Anne Gill

01803 290427

adverts@devonfolk.org.uk

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Brian & Sheila Chappell

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Hele, Exeter, EX5 4QA

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subscriptions@devonfolk.org.uk

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Finding Tom Pearse's grey mare	4
Musical boost for Widecombe Fair	8
Dartmoor celebrates 40 years	11
Bill Murray's vegetable battle at the Goosey Fair	14
In with both feet.....	17
Footnotes	18
Contacts: Dance, Song, Morris & Display, Festivals.....	19
Regular Events: Weekly, fortnightly, monthly	24
Specific Diary Dates	28
Contacts: Regional, National, Bands, Callers	32
Devon Folk Committee	34
Devon Folk News.....	35
Spotlight on the Scene	
The Olde Plough.....	37
Exeter Folk Club	38
Morris Matters.....	41
A life in morris	42
Reviews	44
Afterthought.....	50

EDITORIAL

AT LAST (hopefully) the search is over! Someone has volunteered to take over the editorship of What's Afoot. Mind you, I had to go all the way to Whitby to find him, where at a chance meeting at a song session I met a retired journalist who had moved to Tavistock.

Apart from the diary and listings which I'm still looking after for the time being, John Foxen will have put together most of this issue. I trust you will give him as much support as you have to me over many years.

Colin Andrews

OUR thanks to Colin Andrews for all his hard work over the years. As a newcomer to this county, I look forward to meeting and hearing from the folk fans of Devon.

John Foxen

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Cover photograph: Jim Causley as Tom Pearse. Photograph by Ian Atherton

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Grey Mare's ghost stalks Sticklepath

The tragic tale of Tom Pearse's horse has a happy ending in Dartmoor. John Foxen reports with pictures by Ian Atherton

THE song *Widdecombe Fair* was brought vividly to life for dozens of Sticklepath children when Halloween was given a Devonian twist.

Instead of the usual trick-or-treating, they followed a large band of musicians round the north Dartmoor village seeking the ghost of Tom Pearse's grey mare.

The song tells us the poor old horse was ridden to death by seven people who were intent on merrymaking but still haunts Dartmoor where her shrieks and groans and rattling bones can be heard at night. So why should she be tempted down to Sticklepath?

To find her owner, say villagers Derek Moore and Mike Gilbert, who devised this amazing piece of interactive street theatre. They believe a Tom Pearse who is buried in Sticklepath is actually the man who lent his horse to the characters mentioned in the song.

They also point out that all these characters have family names that are well known in the area around Sticklepath. So they decided to reclaim the legend of the Grey Mare from Widdecombe and bring it back home.

So as the children, called "Seekers" for the night, made their way round the village, Bill Brewer, Jan Stewer, Peter Gurney and the rest right down to Uncle Tom Cobbley from Spreyton all made an appearance. They popped up here and there to give the kids clues to where the elusive phantom mare might be found.

Eventually, the seekers met the ghost of Tom

Pearse, who bore a remarkable resemblance to Jim Causley – if Jim had been dead and buried for nigh on 150 years. Then the ghost of the grey mare appeared.

Here, Derek and Michael had borrowed from the Welsh tradition of the Mari Lwyd, where a horse's skull is carried around town on a pole.

Derek said the hardest part of a highly complicated exercise had been sourcing a horse's skull. The one he got had probably been chewed on by foxes because the jaw bone was missing.

But this was brilliantly recreated in papier mache by Hillary Gillespie, a puppeteer with the legendary Sticklepath Fireshow. She was still working on it right up until the last minute. It was handed over to its animator, Sarah Miller at 6pm on the night – just as the children were assembling for the hunt.

Sarah, a dancer with Cogs and Wheels, did a terrific job of bringing the mare – which she nicknamed Bessie – to life and reuniting it with her former owner, Tom Pearse.

There was a magical end to the first part of the evening when mare, owner and the penitent riders all disappeared up the path to the moor, promising to return next year.

Actually, they returned a little sooner, popping up outside the Finch Foundry once the children had gone home to bed, and acted out a mummies play, specially written for the occasion, in the Taw River and Devonshire Inns.

It was probably just as well that the children

A Young Tradition



MARE AND HER MEN: From left, Bill Crawford, Bill Brewer (Steve Mathewson), Jan Stewer (Ian MacAvoy), Grey Mare (Sarah Miller), Derek Moore, Tom Pearse (Jim Causley), 'Arry 'Awk (Jacob Powell), Daniel Whiddon (Mike Gilbert) and Peter Davey (Keith Beeby). Peter Gurney and Tom Cobleby are in the pub



MASTERMIND: Derek Moore



MELODY FOR A MARE: "Bessie" is serenaded in the Devonshire



UNMASKED: Sarah Miller with Bessie



LEADING LIGHT: Derek Moore with the children

A Young Tradition



MUSIC OF THE NIGHT: *Does this musician play only in skeleton keys?*

weren't about for the play in which the seven riders were portrayed as personifying the seven deadly sins with their vices, such as Sloth and Gluttony, contributing to the sad demise of the mare. The entertainment offered the best in the British tradition of bawdy humour – particularly when Lust took to the stage.

The evening ended in best folk fashion with a rousing singaround in the Devonshire.

Derek and Mike hope to make this an annual event and judging by the reaction on the night this would certainly be a popular move.

There was a lot of support from villagers who acted as stewards as the procession trailed round the village or allowed their homes to be used as calling posts during the quest, supplying sweets, cakes and drinks for the seekers.

In return for their hospitality, the helpful householders were given soul cakes (introducing the children to yet another old custom).

Many respected members of Devon's folk music community also lent their time and talents to bring the show to life and make it a great night. Some, like Bill Murray, took acting roles, while others like Mark Bazeley of the Dartmoor Pixie Band, were content to join the musicians and play Mike Gilbert's processional tunes.

Some purists might object to the mingling of very different traditions to create something new. Others – and I am firmly in this camp – will say that the important thing is to develop a sense of community and give young people a taste of the excitement so many of us had when discovering folk music and customs.

Perhaps other villages in Devon might follow suit, either reviving forgotten traditions or celebrating an aspect of their local history.

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January 11th Club Night

February 8th Club Night

March 8th Guest Night

Vicki Swan & Jonny Dyer

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A fair field full of folk

Songs of ploughboys and sheep-shearing have a special resonance at this historic moorland event.

WHILE sticking firmly to its roots as a moorland agricultural show, Widcombe Fair has become a splendid event for fans of folk music.

Alongside the terrier racing, the bale-tossing, the sheep-shearing contests and the pony competitions, the musical content has steadily grown over the years. And 2017 saw the fair hosting three stages for the first time.

In addition to the beer tent, which houses the main stage, there was also a stage on the village green (the original site of the fair) and a constant stream of musicians playing in the garden of the Rugglestone Inn. There was a strong line-up featuring names such as Jim Causley, Bill Murray, Carl Allerfeldt, Rob Murch and Geoff Lakeman and up-and-coming bands such as Windjammer and Lazy Divide.

The fair, always held on the second Tuesday in September, is hugely popular. Despite the crowds it is easy to move from one musical event to another – taking time on the way to see agricultural attractions or browse the country-life stalls or admire the dancing of Dartmoor Border Morris.

It was established as a rural market in the 1800s and the tradition has carried on and thrived thanks to the hard work and dedication of the villagers. But the growth of the folk music element over the past 10 years is mainly down to the energy and enthusiasm of Jayne Boswell, who is passionate about rural life and music.

“We have been running the big session for five years,” said Jayne. “Before that, it was more informal with just my group, Banned From The Moor, playing in the marquee.”

During the past five years she has managed to persuade a host of artists to perform for free

at the festival – akin to herding cats without offering them cream – and now even has a waiting list of would-be performers. For this year’s three-stage epic she organised a highly complicated timetable and managed to make musicians stick to it.

“I’m very grateful to all those who have performed,” she says. “And especially to the Rugglestone Inn which has sponsored the main stage and means we can have a professional sound man there.”

The Rugglestone also hosted an excellent

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Widcombe Fair



MAIN STAGE: Above, duet concertina wizard Geoff Lakeman entertains the crowd.

Left, Windjammer show what they can do

Below, Banned From The Moor keep the music rolling through the night

All pictures courtesy of Evie Gotham Performance Photo



Widcombe Fair

Monday night session before the fair which was absolutely packed yet maintained a high musical standard.

“For the most part, the people who attend the fair are not dedicated folk fans,” says Jayne. But they appreciate good music and there was plenty on offer from Mariners Away, Bollards, Go Tell Alice and Slow Burn Blues Band.

Jayne was particularly pleased with newcomer Steve Jenner, who had the difficult task of being the first person on the main stage at 10am

Another favourite act of hers was the Squeazy Geezers, a melodeon and accordion band thrown together for the occasion from members of the Wreckers Morris Band and friends. They even got their five seconds of fame in a TV news item about the fair.

Her challenge now is to do even better next year. So it's worth making a date in your diary for this splendid event.

John Foxen



CALLING THE TUNE: Jayne Boswell

Picture: Evie Gotham Performance Photo

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Fantastic at 40

The festival founded by renowned musician and dancer Bob Cann celebrated its ruby anniversary this August with hundreds of people dressing in red for a celebration ceilidh with the Dartmoor Pixie Band. ALAN QUICK reports

IT WAS fourth time lucky for Matt Norman at the 40th anniversary Dartmoor Folk Festival at South Zeal near Okehampton from August 11-13.

Folk music, song and dance enthusiast Matt, from Bristol, was declared the adult Dartmoor Step Dance competition champion for 2017 after a hotly fought competition.

Matt, formerly from South Zeal and Exeter, had won the title in 2008, 2011 and 2015 and now equals competitor Lisa Sture, from North Devon, who has also taken the title four times.

Matt danced on the wagon in front of a record crowd in the final at the festival.

The Dartmoor Step Dance sees dancers perform on a 15-inch square board to try to out-step the previous contestant.

Alice Knight, 14, from Farnborough, Hampshire, the junior winner of the title, explained she had watched the competition over several years and learned the steps at workshops at the festival.

Edward Selwood, 11, of South Zeal, was the Dartmoor Broom Dance Champion. He attended his first broom dance session five years ago. Dartmoor Broom dancing involves dancing with a broom, or rather over a broom, and is for primary school-aged children.

It was 40 years ago that the festival was founded by the late Bob Cann, who lived in the parish of South Zeal. He had the dream of a folk event on his doorstep that would help to revive and preserve the music, song and dance traditions of Dartmoor.

Thanks to the efforts of Bob, his family and friends, and lately his descendants and a strong committee, together with the support of an

army of volunteer stewards, the festival has grown into one of the top family-friendly folk events in the South-west.

This year it included a packed programme of events and activities suitable for all ages, including a hugely successful children's festival which ran alongside the main event.

On Saturday afternoon the Dartmoor Fayre was opened by Wendy Beard, wife of the late Tony Beard, who compered the Sunday evening Music Hall for many years. This well-known entertainer, called "The Wag from Widecombe", was a favourite presenter on BBC Radio Devon.

Mrs Beard said it was a "great honour" to be asked to open the Fayre.

She added: "I had the great pleasure of meeting Bob and Joyce Cann, who with great vision brought the Dartmoor Folk Festival alive with all the old traditions including step and board dancing as well as all that goes with such an event, and it's wonderful to see their family keeping up the tradition.

"Tony was MC for the festival music hall for more than 30 years, until with failing health he had to step down.

"I know how he so very much enjoyed meeting you all every year and, with the closing of each year's festival, would mark the date in his diary for the next one."

She was "very touched" that four of their grandchildren had been asked to take part in this year's Music Hall and said: "Tony would have been so very proud of them, as I am."

Tony and Wendy's grandchildren, Oliver, Edward, Heather and Jeremy appeared in the

Dartmoor Folk Festival



Youngsters show off their skills

One of the many fine things about Dartmoor Folk Festival is that it involves and enthuses young people – and it's vital to interest the next generation in the music and customs of this county if we want to keep these traditions alive. Above: the contestants in the final of the broom dance, with Edward Selwood, the winner, in the centre. Below: the South Zeal Steppers show what they can do.

Pictures by ALAN QUICK



Dartmoor Folk Festival

Music Hall performing, along with other tunes, Blackbird, which they played at Tony's memorial service at Exeter Cathedral in January.

The 40th anniversary of the festival was celebrated with a historical display.

The Mayor of West Devon, Cllr Jeff Moody, who attended the festival on Saturday and Sunday, said that the festival was "at the heart of the community" and he was pleased to be able to attend and help present awards.

Shirley Bazeley, president, daughter of the late Bob and Joyce Cann, said: "It has been a fantastic festival with a real celebratory atmosphere.

"It all went so well and everyone is so friendly. Bob and Joyce would be so proud that we have held the 40th festival."

She added: "Hours of work are completed behind the scenes to make sure it all runs smoothly and I would like to thank everyone involved, the association which runs it and the volunteers. We couldn't do it without you all.

"Thanks also to everyone who comes along and we hope you all had a great time."

Mrs Bazeley said she was thanked by one festival-goer.

She explained: "I found it quite emotional but this man came to find me to say it was the 'most family-friendly event he had been to'.

"He said it was unique in that aspect, and I think he was right."

Alan Quick, publicity officer, said: "An action-packed programme was arranged and we had a great anniversary festival.

"Entertainment was arranged for the whole family to enjoy, whether it was to taking part or simply sitting and watching, all very modestly priced, some were totally free, so there was something for everyone.

"The festival is deeply rooted in the heart of the Dartmoor community and is keeping customs and traditions alive.

"Since it was founded the festival has grown so that it can invite some of the best folk artists around, whilst maintaining its reputation for being a relaxed, friendly and traditional event.

"The festival provides a huge economic

boost to the area with shops, pubs and bed and breakfast establishments, local suppliers and exhibitors generating tens of thousands of pounds into the local economy.


"This year's festival was one of the most well-attended, some of the concerts seeing sell-out audiences, and the weather was rain-free so all the outdoor activities went ahead as planned.

"The campsite had more than 200 pitches, the craft tent was busy throughout and the caterers were also kept very busy.

"The festival exceeded all expectations. It has been an absolutely fantastic weekend."

Performer Keith Donnelly said it was "the best little festival on the planet".

Festival association chairman Jason Rice thanked all those involved in making the event a success and all those who attended, confirming that the 2018 festival would be held on August 10, 11 and 12.



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How singer Bill really suffered for his art

We've all joked about performers being pelted with vegetables but it did happen to Bill Murray when he tried to keep an old tradition alive

BILL was halfway through the first verse of *Tavistock Goosey Fair* when a bit of carrot hit him. "I kept going," he said, "then a bit of cucumber hit me in the ear. But I pressed on."

The popular Dartmoor singer was on a one-man mission to keep music live at Tavistock's annual fair and ensure that its anthem could be heard as well as the constant barrage of pop music from the swings and roundabouts.

In a sort of musical "beating the bounds", he'd been round the pubs, singing *Tavistock Goosey Fair* and had a good reception. "I always asked permission of the landlords first," he said. "some were a bit surprised but they let me go ahead. The public even stopped talking in Wetherspoons to listen to me."

The trouble began when he started singing in Plymouth Road, which had been closed to traffic and lined with stalls.

He had thought he was standing in front of a fast food stall and not causing a problem when he struck up – Bill, as most people know, has quite a powerful voice – and quickly started attracting a crowd.

But he was standing in front of a stall belonging to Daniel Marston, purveyor of vegetable dicers and Daniel had been just about to begin his



© Performance Photos

Picture courtesy of Evie Gotham
Performance Photo

spiel to attract a crowd. Daniel took exception to someone "stealing his pitch", as he saw it, and called to Bill to move on.

Bill didn't realise what was happening and gamely carried on singing. Then Daniel took the offensive, using bits of his vegetables, diced for demonstrations, as ammunition. "I just kept on," said Bill, "and the crowd got bigger. They thought it was hilarious. It's just a shame no one was there to video it."

In fact, the competition between singer and slinger probably drew a bigger crowd than Daniel would have got on his own.

Bill carried on to the end of the song then went up to chat to Daniel. He even bought one of the dicers and they parted on good terms.

"It was a bit unexpected," said Bill. But he was undaunted. "I went on to the bus stop at the end of Drake Road and sang to the queue there. It's a bit of a captive audience. They can't run off when they're waiting for the bus to take them home."

His one-man crusade takes a bit of courage – "People can get a bit worried when you suddenly start singing. Some look at you as though they feel sorry for you. But a lot of them enjoy it."

Tavistock Goose Fair is now dominated by

Tavistock Goose Fair

pop music but Bill has shown us a way to strike back. Maybe next year Devon folk singers can put together a flash-mob choir to storm the Goose Fair. All you need to sign up for the choir is a strong pair of lungs – and a strong tolerance towards flying vegetables.

A musical mystery

WE ALL know the song but who actually wrote it? Copies of the original sheet music in Tavistock Library show *Tavvystock Goozey Vair* was published by JH Larway of London in 1912 with words and music by C John Trythall.

Who was C John Trythall? Says Bill: "I have spent 40 years trying to find out. The best answer I've been given was from Marilyn Tucker: 'The man who wrote *Down pon Ole Dartmoor*.'

"That is also the title of my CD of songs and music from the northern slopes of Dartmoor."

The only other song attributed to Trythall is *The Dinky Farm Nigh Burrator* but Bill has yet to find a recording or words and music. For some

time he thought Trythall might be a pseudonym for folklorist Charles Hey Laycock who lived in Moretonhampstead in 1909.

Says Bill: "Now Moreton just happens to be almost exactly 13 miles in the right direction from Merrivale Bridge where the terrible accident happened and as the song goes ...'So us 'ad to trudge 'ome thurteen mile fr'm Tavvystock Goozey Vair.'"

But Bill's friend, the historian and author Ian Mortimer, uncovered a Charles John Trythall who was born in Plymouth on 8 March, 1864, the son of a Cornish railway cashier.

Trythall held down various jobs as an accountant or railway cashier and eventually moved to London where he worked for the railways. But there is no evidence that he had any musical training or that he is the Trythall who wrote the songs.

On the song *Down pon Ole Dartmoor*. Ian Mortimer points out: "Why is it DOWN upon Dartmoor? Anyone in Devon talks about being UP on Dartmoor.

"One reason is that the song is written from the perspective of being in London, which is probably the only place from which one speaks about going 'down' to Dartmoor. In this context, the 'ole' seems to relate to somewhere he has left. And C John Trythall had indeed left the area, to go to London in 1889."

Trythall returned to Devon when he retired and lived in Torquay, where he died on February 10, 1936. Ian says that his will makes no mention of a piano so we have no proof of his musical interests.

Bill is convinced that if Trythall did write the song then he must have had some connection with Charles Hey Laycock and wonders if perhaps Laycock gave him the song.

It's a mystery that might never be solved no matter how much diligent research is done in the archives.

As Ian Mortimer points out: "It's amazing how many official details one can find about early 20th century people without being able to get any sense of their character or interests!"

John Foxen

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A FEW days ago I was honoured to be invited to the 30th Birthday celebration of Spinach for Norman, a band I am lucky enough to occasionally call for. Held at Matthews Hall, Topsham, it started with a lovely Italian meal for past and present callers and band members, followed by a rocking ceilidh with many familiar faces from dances and festivals.

A small hiccup occurred when their mixing desk died not long before the start, but a very helpful man who was doing the bar said: "I've got one of those at home, would you like to borrow it?" Nothing was going to stop this gig.

With Eastern European influences and spot-on timing, their music never fails to impress, and moreover get you dancing. Thank you Spinach for 30 years and here's to many more. Keep crushing those nuts, guys!

As I was enjoying myself dancing, it occurred to me that since the demise of Great Western Ceilidhs there haven't been many regular, high energy ceilidhs in Exeter. I strongly believe we need to start something, as the punters are definitely out there. Suggestions, anyone?

One dance Spinach's regular caller, Pam Hayes, often calls is Alunel (or Alunelul), a Romanian dance otherwise known as the Nutcracker. I had heard different meanings for this name, so I did some research. Alunel means Little Hazelnut (in Romanian, Hazelnut is alună, or alun, and -el is a suffix denoting a diminutive, often meaning "boy"). In Romania, Alunel is an endearing term for a young man, possibly suggested by a slang meaning of hazelnut: testicle.

One thing that always surprises me at non-beginner dances (like Spinach's 30th) is the number of old tropes that are called, and the enthusiasm with which they are received. The Willow Tree, La Russe, Bottoms Up... Everyone knows these dances, yet the callers still walk them through and dancers still enjoy the walkthrough (and the dance). Why? Who enjoys being taught something they already know? Is it because the walkthrough is just another turn through the dance, or is it an opportunity to show off what we know? Maybe it's a shibboleth

(look it up) identifying experienced dancers? Following on from this, why do dancers enjoy doing the same dances over and over again? I think the answer is a mixture of frequency and reason for dancing.

Those who dance regularly (once a week or more) don't like repeating dances, which is why they turn to things like Contra, where there is much more variety. They dance at least in part because they enjoy the choreography. Dancers who dance less frequently (say once a month) do so for the social experience, letting their hair down with friends. They don't care what the dance is, and to an extent they like dances they know because the familiarity adds to their social experience. Why do you dance?

The Gender Free bandwagon (which I freely admit to riding, or even occasionally steering) seems to be going great guns. When some eminent (UK) callers were asked what the biggest change in folk dance would be in the next 10 years, most said "Gender Free Dancing". Exeter University Folk Society now calls all its dances Gender Free, as do Warwick, Sheffield and possibly many more. The Bristol Contra Series is called Gender Free, and next year's IVDFD will be mainly (or possibly completely) Gender Free.

This has generated some kickback, mostly (but not exclusively) from older men. Some of this is down to misunderstanding ("I don't want to dance with other men" – well fine, no one's saying you have to), but some down to historical perspective. Women generally don't mind dancing with the same sex, but men do (or at least more so).

This is partly down to the imbalance of sexes in older generations over the past 60 years or so, leading to women dancing together being acceptable through necessity (even today most folk dance clubs have a predominance of women members). Another factor, I believe, is that for very many years dancing was a courtship ritual.

For anyone brought up in that environment, the ritual and the social mores around it must surely still affect their perspective. Whatever the reasons, the world is changing...

Footnotes

CHANGE OF VENUE

THE fortnightly music sessions (2nd & 4th Wednesday) in Exeter run by David Goddard have now moved from Royal Oak to the Globe, Newtown.

A few years and at least one landlord ago this pub was the venue for Barry Lister's song session, which has now been at the Twisted Oak, Nadderwater, for some time.

NOW FORTNIGHTLY

EXMOUTH Folk Dance Club have changed from weekly to fortnightly meetings on the first and third Thursdays of the month at Withycombe Methodist Church Centre. They do not meet during the summer months.

A BOWL OF THE BEST

WHEN the "Single Gloucestershire" project was launched in recent years the aim of this ground-breaking initiative was to gather together folk songs and tunes collected in that county and then to make people aware – not only within the county but also nationwide and worldwide – of the rich variety of material available.

The result has been the website, www.glostrad.com, achieved with Heritage Lottery Funding and the combined efforts of more than 50 musicians and singers, together with transcribers, archivists, IT specialists, sponsors, and many more.

In addition to various talks and presentations to schools and other organisations, one spin-off from the project is the publication of *A Bowl Of The Best*, a selection of 21 Gloucestershire songs from the Glostrad archives arranged for community and school choirs by Matt Norman, Sheila Macbeth and Veronica Lowe.

The book includes some well-known songs, several wassails and a couple of carols, all arranged in two, three or four

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part harmony. Some material comes from early folk song collectors such as Cecil Sharp and Percy Grainger, while several songs are from the collecting over the past 40 years by Gwilym Davies, one of the prime movers of the whole project.

There is certainly the potential for similar projects in other counties. Some such work is believed to be under way in Sussex, while in Devon, where Sabine Baring-Gould did most of his collecting, Wren have made his material available.

Details of the Wren archives can be found at www.wrenmusic.co.uk/en/Archives-Resources/ or by contacting the Okehampton based organisation at 01837 53754.

- We are happy to receive letters for publication. Send your comments to Devonfolkeditor@gmail.com

Devon Folk News

THE 2018 Devon Folk AGM will be held on 21st April at Chudleigh Community Hall. Further details will be available in the next copy of What's Afoot.

Mr J Hendon and Bideford Folk Dance Club have both generously sent donations and financial support has again been provided for the Dartmoor Folk Festival which proved to be very successful. Devon Folk is always grateful for donations which help towards the sponsorship of local events.

The next Devon Folk supported event will be the Music and Dance Workshop to be held at Chudleigh Community Hall on April 21, 2018. This is being organised by Mary Marker with a theme of Modern Playford-style Dances. Jean Foster will be the caller for the afternoon tea dance on the same theme.

Devon Folk Committee still has several vacancies and is always pleased to welcome new members to the committee. Full committee meetings are usually held in Exeter four times a year on a Saturday morning, in addition to the business meeting held after the AGM.

We will be producing a DL size publicity leaflet again in 2018. Clubs are invited to promote their activities in the leaflet which will be widely distributed across the county. A basic listing of up to 60 characters (not 60 words!) including spaces and punctuation costs £10. A small box advert costs £20.

Clubs will receive 20 copies for their own use – or more, on request.

The leaflet will be distributed by Easter. Please send listing copy with appropriate fee (cheques payable to Devon Folk) to admin@devonfolk.org.uk or post to Devon Folk, Bonny Green, Morchard Bishop, Crediton, EX17 6PG, as soon as possible.

Entries received after January 31 may not be included.

We will also be looking for new photos for the front cover, to represent music, dance and song. Please send any suitable photos for consideration.

DEVON FOLK MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

Please complete and return to the Devon Folk Membership Secretary, Mrs Sheila Chappell, 2, Penstone Barns, Lease Hill, Hele, Exeter, EX5 4QA

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Spotlight On The Scene

In the following pages we will be taking a look at some of the many different clubs and sessions around the county. In this issue, it's the turn of The Olde Plough at Bere Alston and Exeter Folk and Acoustic Music Club

Ploughing on for 15 years

THERE was something special to sing about at the Olde Plough in October when this monthly session celebrated its 15th anniversary.

Jane Musgrave and Mel Peters (pictured with Mel on guitar and Jane on English concertina) have set up quite a record. Their open mic evenings have run without a break throughout the years every third Sunday of the month.

Says Jane: "We keep going through the summer and even get a crowd for the third Sunday in December just before Christmas."

They admit they have been lucky with the landlords. There was strong support from the pub from the start and this continued when the Plough changed hands 10 years ago.

It seems incongruous to step into this picturesque 16th century pub and see microphones squeezed into a tiny performing area in the bar room. Jane says the session was acoustic for the first few years but eventually light amplification was needed to carry voices and instruments over the background noise.

Early in the evening there can be a bit of noise from diners but the atmosphere is always welcoming and the punters who come for the music are very supportive and appreciative.

Jane and Mel usually open the evening with a few songs or tunes (they also both play for Lodestone Morris of Tavistock) then invite other performers to take the stage.

The music on offer is quite varied, ranging from sea shanties to Americana, old ballads to comic songs and some singers' own compositions.

It is a very good place for a performer who wants to move up from singing in a session



to performing on a stage or to try using a microphone for the first time. It might not be such a good venue for a large band – and there certainly isn't room for a full drum kit.

However, quite a few people managed to cram into the performing area for a rousing jam at the end of the birthday celebrations.

Jane is particularly proud of the way these sessions have helped to develop the talents of people who had never sung in public before, singling out Lizzie Spiers as a good example.

"Lizzie had never performed before but she joined a ukulele band that started in the village as a result of our sessions. Now she sings and plays guitar and writes her own songs."

The session kicks off at around 8.30pm and it's worth arriving early to get a good seat. You could also sample the splendid food.

This is a performance night more than a session but there is also a jam session at the Plough on the third Tuesday of the month. For more details, contact Jane on 01822 840358.

John Foxen

ARE YOUR CLUB DETAILS UP TO DATE?

Please check listings and send any changes to diary@devonfolk.org.uk

If you don't tell us, we probably won't know.

Here's a relaxed venue for concerts and open nights

EXETER Folk Club has been running at the Victoria Park Tennis Club since February 2016, after we decided to leave our former club venue at the Ley Arms in Kenn.

It runs as both a concert and open singers' night venue. This is a very relaxed and intimate venue with probably the most comfortable seats in any folk club.

We aim to be very friendly, welcoming performers of all styles of folk and acoustic music to our open singers nights to perform acoustically without the use of PA. Of course, we also fully welcome non-performers to enjoy the evenings.

The open singers nights are held on the last Friday of the month at 8pm, unless otherwise advertised. We don't run in July and our December club night is brought forward. This year the Christmas party will be on the 15th

Cheaper than pub

We have a table-top bar offering a range of cheaper-than-pub priced alcoholic and soft drinks, including beers, cider, wines and more, all served, on most occasions, by our friendly barman.

For those wanting a hot drink we also serve tea and coffee with a biscuit included at a nominal charge. We also add our personal touch with some home-made baking, which has proven to be very popular.

Entry admission is only £1 for singer's nights (there is also the traditional raffle for £1 a strip).

The tennis club has its own moderate sized

car park but there is plenty of free street parking nearby. It also has disabled access and facilities.

We run on average seven concert nights per year, which are always held on a separate night from our open singer's nights.

At present, these are on the second or third Friday in the month. We book top quality national names and previous guests include Jim Moray, Martyn Wyndham-Read, John Kirkpatrick, Les Barker, Paul Downes & Mick Ryan, Steve Tilston, Jez Lowe and Pete Morton.

Concert nights always have a local support act. We have a concert ticket policy. All tickets must be reserved in advance, either by pre-payment (the cheaper rate) or pay on the door. At present, we only accept payment by cheque or cash.

We do have plans to expand our concert nights, on occasion, by booking artists that require a larger venue, so we will be looking for a local hall or village hall.

We are looking at obtaining a modest lighting system for the future, which will be used for concert nights and possibly club nights and a little further in the future having a new sound system for concert nights.

For more information about the club please visit our website at www.exeterfolkclub.org, our facebook page @exeterfolkclub or email exeterfolkclub@outlook.com. We also have an e-mail newsletter that you can join to get the latest news and concert reminders.

The club's address is Victoria Park Tennis Club, Lyndhurst Road, St Leonard's, Exeter, EX2 4NX.

Martyn Cornelius

ARTICLES for What's Afoot can be submitted for consideration in any text format (doc, docx, odt, txt) but NOT jpg or pdf. The editor reserves the right to edit articles but will normally contact the contributor if major changes are required. Photographs or illustrations embedded in the text should also be sent separately.



Morris Matters



Old members asked to step forward

SIDMOUTH Steppers are calling on old members to join them again to help celebrate 20 years of clogging.

The side, which dances mainly North-west style, was formed in 1998 after the 45th Sidmouth Folk Festival.

Their current squire, Ruth Lewis, said: "We are having a big ceilidh and inviting all our past members along. We have lost touch with people over the years so it will be good to see them again."

But the Steppers are not confining themselves to one big event. Instead they will be doing things throughout the year and also raising money for a charity.

Their anniversary activities are still being finalised but it is known their day of dance will be based at Kennaway House, Sidmouth on



Picture courtesy of Kyle Baker Photography

Saturday July 21. More details will appear soon on their website: www.sidmouthsteppers.com

The site also gives details on joining the Steppers, who practise at the Guide Hut, Lawn Vista, Sidmouth, EX10 9BB, on Tuesday nights from 7:30 to 9:30pm.

Become a Cog in a music machine

"RINGS on their fingers and bells on their toes, they shall have music wherever they go" to misquote the old nursery rhyme.

Cogs and Wheels are aware that their musicians, who faithfully play for every practice in the winter and every event in the summer should be cherished, so they are looking for players, preferably acquainted with the Cotswold Tradition, to join them.

The side, together with their partners and supporters (who are known as "The Oily Rags" because they keep the wheels turning) are a friendly group, well-known at local hostelrys, folk festivals and other enjoyable events.

They are even venturing as far as



TIME OUT: Cogs and Wheels take a breather from performing at Dartmoor Folk Festival this year *Picture by Alan Quick*

France this year with the Okehampton twinning visit. If you play melodeon, accordion, fiddle or other folk instrument, please get in touch with Mike Palmer on 01647 433464, email mike@ssmail.co.uk and he will tell you more about the music and the dances.

I put on baldricks and my life changed completely

For JOHN BLACKBURN, Cotswold became so much more than just a hobby. Here, he reminisces about the many pleasures that dancing has given him

LOOKING back on my life, it can be defined by three distinct phases: that time before I danced when I watched sides such as Chanctonbury Ring and longed to join them. Then the major part of my life, more than 40 years, when I had the honour of being part of the Morris Tradition and latterly when I have retired from active dancing.

Make no mistake though, I dance frequently. I only have to hear the music and I am dancing again but this time I am dancing in my head. For me, once a dancer always a dancer. Even if I became totally immobile, I would always dance.

I was 32 when I moved to Devon and joined Barnstaple Morris Men. At that time it was a fledgling side, lucky to have Glenn Bower as foreman as well as many other talented members. Not least was Peter Bolt, who set many on the road to becoming lifelong musicians.

Long before I danced out I would dance up and down the kitchen practising the steps and dances I had learned that week from all the various positions. I was entranced and entrapped. Never would my life be the same again. I loved it, I loved the dances, I loved the Cotswold tradition and most of all I loved the camaraderie and comradeship.

Pep talk

I danced out for the first time in Braunton. Glenn Bower straightened my baldricks and gave me a pep talk before I joined the dancers. Some of those I danced with that day I still count among my friends.

Over the years I was with Barnstaple, I held the position of squire and in latter years foreman,

teaching the dances to the best of my ability. While I was squire, the committee arranged many legendary tours, inviting such sides as Cardiff, both men and ladies, Chelmsford, Blackmore, Angel and Wheatsheaf. These entailed tours of Exmoor, cream teas and ceilidhs, always finishing with great "Sings" at a suitable public house. Many members of these sides retain links with North Devon and with me.

Tarka

For a variety of reasons, after many years, Barnstaple Morris Men as such folded but some of the members went on to form another side, which became the mixed side, Phoenix

I thought I had finally hung up my bells but I was only 48 and could not say goodbye to Morris and stop actively dancing. I therefore started a new side in Bideford. This was Tarka, with many former Barnstaple members at its core. After its first winter practice season it was ready to dance out in its white kit and distinctive style based on various Cotswold traditions.

As with Barnstaple this was an outward looking side, which took part in visits to Landivisiau as part of a twinning experience. As a result of the generosity of Bear Street Pharmacy and its owner Phil Heming, in 2005 the side visited China. What an experience that was!

In latter years all going on canal boat tours meant for me cementing friendships. Tarka always had a great apres-Morris scene with singing, dancing and general merriment, a legacy from Barnstaple Morris.

Life moves on and after much consideration

MORRIS MATTERS



STEPPING OUT: Tarka, the side John Blackburn helped to create after Barnstaple Morris folded

after 22 years Tarka Morris decided to stop dancing as a side. Many of us were getting older and we felt it better to stop while we still felt we could be proud of our dancing.

When Glenn Bower straightened my baldricks and sent me on to dance, he changed my life for ever. Morris altered my life in so many ways and opened so many doors. It gave me many friendships and thanks to the encouragement of my first squire, Peter Bolt, I learnt to play

the accordion and melodeon. I still go to folk festivals, originally attending workshops on morris. I sing, am a member of a folk club and I call for country dancing, all of which are directly linked to my being a member of a Morris side.

Originally the title of this piece was to be "Life after Morris" but though I have stopped actively dancing, it still lives on in everything I do because it has enriched my life so much.

John Blackburn

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AURAL BORDERALIS HADRIAN'S UNION

FIVE-piece folk/rock band, Hadrian's Union were formed in 2010. As the name suggests, this is a collaboration by English and Scottish musicians.

There are strong connections to BBC Folk Award-winning Celtic band Whapweasel: former Whaps Robin Jowett on melodeon and keyboards and Malcolm Bushby on violin appear alongside current member Brian Bell on Bass. The line-up is completed by lead singer and guitarist, Stew Simpson and David Pratt on drums and keyboard.

Unlike Whapweasel, the focus is on songs, rather than tunes. Influences range from The Levellers and Oysterband to Lindisfarne and Little Johnny England with lyrical lines similar to those the Oysterband might release.

With all those comparisons it can be hard to find something original and, while that might be the case for the most part, they do verge off into

more unusual territory on songs such as *English Eccentric*, which sounds like a cross between Stackridge and the song *Golden Brown* by The Strangers.

A few tunes help to make this album more eclectic. There are a number of good songs including a personal highlight, *Reason For Living*.

All in all, this is another strong addition to the classic folk/rock band sound.

For more information on the band visit: www.hadriansunion.co.uk

Martyn Cornelius

ALL MOUTH AND GREEN TROUSERS SHEFFIELD CITY MORRIS MEN

AS I found at Whitby Folk Week this summer, Sheffield City Morris Men are not only good dancers, they also boast a fine selection of singers. This CD reproduces pretty well what I imagine would be a typical apres-morris pub session, but with the odd morris dance interspersed among the songs and "Albert" monologue. So

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CD REVIEWS

don't expect anything too sophisticated – it's mostly good lusty chorus songs, some of which, like *Bring Us A Barrel* and *Rolling Home* are well known. *Glossop Road* will be familiar to those of us in Devon who knew Ken Hinchcliffe, himself a Sheffield lad.

Two tracks really did stand out: Mike Harding's *On A Sunday*, a powerful song about jobsworths implementing petty regulations, and the *Hark Hark* carol, given the full harmony treatment that would not be out of place in a West Gallery Choir repertoire.

This album is a worthwhile addition to my collection of CDs produced by various morris sides up and down the country.

Colin Andrews

SMILE IN YOUR SLEEP. LULLABIES OLD AND NEW Compiled by Anne Alderson

THIS CD is helping to raise money for the charity Operation Smile, which provides children born with cleft lips and palates in the developing world with free, safe transformational surgery.

Anne Alderson put it together in response to an inspirational presentation she heard by Dr Phil MacDonald, Smile's medical director.

Some songs are old favourites such as *Golden Slumbers* and *Hey Ho Little Fishes* but some may be less familiar. They make up an interesting collection of slumber songs to ease any young baby into the Land of Nod.

They are performed by Anne and friends who

were keen to help, such as Ingrid Temple and Anni Fentiman. The songs are accompanied by guest musicians Johnny Handle, Geoff Heslop Tom McConville and Barrie Temple.

Each artist has made her song her own or in some cases written one especially for the CD. I'm sure any young mother will find songs to enjoy listening to and then singing to her baby.

Carole Henderson-Begg

THE PASSING HOUR Mick Ryan & Paul Downes WildGoose WGS 417 CD

ONE is never going to be disappointed by an album featuring one of the most prolific songwriters over the past few decades with one of the most popular artists on the folk scene over the same period.

Actually, *The Passing Hour* is the fourth CD Mick Ryan and Paul Downes have recorded as a duo. They are joined on some tracks by Jackie Oates (vocals, viola), Kate Riaz (cello) and Martyn Bradley (concertina). Mick's voice is always very easy to listen to, gentle enough where necessary and powerful where a more forceful delivery is

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CD REVIEWS

appropriate.

Several of the tracks are, as one might expect, Mick's own, including the title song, *The Passing Hour*. One which particularly appealed to me was *Thankful Village* – the term given to some fortunate places where all their sons came home safely after the Great War.

I'd seen this description applied to a village in Derbyshire near where I had been staying recently.

Last Will, a joint effort from Mick and Paul based on a story from the Spanish Civil War, is also very powerful. The album also features songs from other contemporary songwriters, including *Adieu Old Friend*, from Steve Thomason, who was until last year based in Exeter. Traditional offerings include *The Lady Diamond*, and the rarely heard *Bartholamew Fair*, to a tune known in Welsh folk music as *Hunting The Hare*.

Enjoy this album from two of this country's most respected folksingers.

Colin Andrews

IT'S GRITSTONE FOR ME

Will Nobel Veteran VT161CD

I MET Will many years ago when he came to Torquay Folk Club with John Cocking and I was instantly taken with this lovely Yorkshire man.

This CD has a dry-stone wall theme throughout, and indeed Will is a dry-stone waller with an international reputation and both his son Cuthbert and daughter Lydia have followed in his footsteps and keeping up the family

tradition and join him on some of the 14 tracks. The memory you need to find the right stone for the right place in the wall is a skill in itself, as is unaccompanied folk singing, and all tracks on this CD are songs he has never recorded before. This CD is beautifully packaged and will be a treasured record for all his family and friends.

As for the overall picture, I would say this is a recording for the purists and lovers of traditional unaccompanied singers and for my wife and me there will always be a place in our hearts for this fast disappearing art form.

Steve Gill

ADZOOKS

Alison Frosdick and Jack Burnaby
www.alisonandjack.co.uk

WHAT a delightful album! Simply but effectively presented, the 11 songs and one instrumental have a laidback air that makes you feel you are sharing the artistes' enjoyment of their material.

Alison has a light, very melodic voice ideally suited to the songs, a mixture of traditional and her own compositions. Apart from one unaccompanied ballad, *The Cruel Lowland Maid*, the rest have attractive anglo concertina backing from Jack, who adds vocal support on some choruses.

Piano, guitar, mandolin or cello is provided on some tracks by Rupert Gillett. On the lovely instrumental, *Jamais Deux Sans Toi*, composed by French accordionist Stephane Delicq, Jack plays melodeon and Alison plays whistle.

All of Alison's compositions are interesting and good to listen to but *Lottesham Green*,

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based on a true story from the book *Ten Somerset Mysteries*, and *Windwhistle Hill*, a story of highwaymen who operated near Chard in the Eighteenth Century, really stand out, and deserve a wider appreciation.

Colin Andrews

SONGS FROM THE SIMPLY ENGLISH CARAVAN

Andrew Rouse NOR TCD 0005
simplyenglish.andyrouse.com

THIS is a most unusual album in many ways. Not least because Andy Rouse has been based in Pec, Hungary, for more than 20 years, where, other than lecturing at the university, he performs English folk songs, with local musicians Barbarci Bulcsu and Zsombor Horvath.

His folk roots, however, go back to the Jolly Porter club in Exeter back in the early Seventies and he still has family and friends in the area. One might expect prominent Eastern European

influences on the material but with a couple of exceptions this is not the case. Andy gives a distinctively individual treatment to many of the songs which would make the album stand out from those of other British folksingers, even without the predominantly fiddle and guitar accompanied that is quite distinctive but very melodic. I enjoyed the album on first playing, although surprised at some of the arrangements, but it grows on you with repeat playing.

Apart from one of his own songs, *The Red Barn Murder*, all the others are traditional, and many have gypsy connections.

John Barleycorn, the final song, is most unusually given a very slow and dramatic treatment rather than the usual jolly hearty style. The *Chinese Maiden's Lament* is a bit quirky but very enjoyable.

Oko Vela O Chavo is Bobby Shaftoe sung in Hungarian – the tune is instantly recognisable but I haven't a clue what the words are all about!

My favourite track is the song *The Maid And The Miller*, which leads into *The Maid Of The Mill* (The Miller Put Her Hand On...) then to a catchy



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CD REVIEWS

instrumental, *Laura*, which briefly morphs into a variation with Hungarian influence.

For more information about this and other albums and a little piece of foreign culture which is forever English, see Andy's website.

Colin Andrews

Outway Songster Cohen Braithwaite-Kilcoyne Wild Goose WGS422CD

ONE-THIRD of Granny's Attic, Cohen is on his own here and what a splendid job he has made of it. Quality throughout from start to finish.

His voice is very mature for his age, every word clear and powerful. His Anglo concertina and melodeon playing is up there with the very best around, JK included.

There are eight songs and three tune sets on his CD, making this a very lovely experience for the listener with a few traditional ones and to my mind the best formula for starting out on a solo career.

I don't think Cohen is going to have any difficulty in getting bookings around the folk clubs and festivals, particularly if he can communicate with the audience which is the hardest bit, as he has the voice and musicianship in abundance.

My favourite tracks are the *Harrogate Quadrille* set and the up-tempo *Country Carrier* which he sings very well. Maybe one small criticism is that he uses the same power in his voice throughout and perhaps a little variation in volume would enhance some of the songs.

Steve Gill

Poor Ellen Smith Rattle On The Stovepipe Wild Goose WGS419CD

IT'S ironic that on this album packed with splendid examples of Americana the stand-out track for me has its origins in Devon.

For here, amid familiar items (though some in unfamiliar versions) such as *Take Me Back To Georgia* and *Black Bottom Blues* (aka *Deep*

Ellum) is *The Devil's In The Girl*, which Cecil Sharp collected from the farmer William Nott in Meshaw on January 12, 1904.

Bert Lloyd's biographer, Dave Arthur, who provides guitar, banjo and vocals in the band, came across the lyrics in Bert's papers and wrote his own tune, which bears more than a passing resemblance to *Over The Hills And Far Away*. This version could easily slide into the "tradition".

Dave also provides an interesting new tune for the shanty made famous and probably deeply embellished by Bert Lloyd *Blood Red Roses*.

The rest of the album is firmly from the other side of the Atlantic. The musicianship is never less than excellent, as you would expect from guitarist and banjo player Dan Stewart and veteran fiddler Pete Cooper.

Pete is a tireless teacher so it's no surprise that the sleeve notes tell you when he goes into non-standard tunings such as AEAE for *Little Billy Wilson* and ADAE for *Swanoa Waltz* and *Julianne Johnson*. Nearly every Old-Timey album has to include a murder ballad and the title track

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CD Review

Poor Ellen Smith is a good one. There are also a couple of tunes that are becoming standards in British sessions: *Waiting For The Federals* and *Bonaparte's Retreat* alongside less familiar pieces such as *Dead-heads And Suckers* and *Walk Along John To Kansas*.

This album is a fine addition to the collection of anyone interested in Americana.

John Foxen

An Invitation To Dance Purcell's Polyphonic Party www.wetfootmusic.co.uk

THERE are some who say Playford has great tunes but needs a rock rhythm section to give it some energy. But Purcell's Polyphonic Party proves that you don't need electric bass or drums to produce music with power and elegance.

For the past two years at Sidmouth John Dipper, Vicki Swan and Jonny Dyer have been propelling dancers round the floor as a resident workshop dance band specialising in Playford.

This CD allows you to enjoy their music at home – and thanks to the helpful sleeve notes you can even practise the moves. For each track, dancers are told how many bars of introduction are given and all the repetitions.

If you don't dance, you can just wallow in the glorious sound. Vicki's nyckelharpa and bagpipes and John's viola d'amore add a new dimension to these tunes. One of my favourites tracks, *The Emperor Of The Moon*, benefits from Jonny's very tasteful piano playing.

This is a lovely band to dance to live but the bonus of a studio album is that they can multi-track and we get to hear Vicki's fine double bass playing as well as her flute and recorder.

Most of the tunes are from the Playford collections but John and Jonny have added second tunes to *Hare's Maggot* and *Maiden Lane* which could well find their way into sessions.

Devon folk do have a chance to catch up with two-thirds of the trio, Vicki and Jonny, visit Totnes Folk Club in March. See the advert in this issue for details.

John Foxen

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Contact Mary Marker
01626 854141



“OH NO! What’s he going to do next?” might be what an unkind caption writer would put on this picture from this year’s Dartmoor Folk Festival.

In this photograph Alan Quick has captured what could be taken for expressions of panic on the faces of virtuoso fiddlers Becki Driscoll and Nick Wyke as they accompany Jim Causley.

That’s certainly not the case here. When you are playing for someone like Jim, you don’t have to worry that he will forget the words or tune or suddenly change key without warning.

But at folk clubs and sessions it can be an entirely different story. Most musicians will have come up against the “singer” who asks if you can accompany them. You are pressured into saying yes and before you know it they have launched into a song without warning, possibly not the one you were told they were going to sing.

Desperately you struggle to find what key they are in and gamely try to keep up with them. At which point they realise they have pitched the song too low or too high, stop in mid-phrase

and look at you accusingly, saying: “You’re in the wrong key.” The audience now knows it’s all your fault so you try to look apologetic and start all over again as they change key at random and lurch in and out of time like the Tardis on LSD.

Afterwards the singer is congratulated for his/her bravery while their friends look daggers at you for spoiling a great performance.

And it’s not just singers who give musicians problems. So many morris musicians complain that they need telepathy to work out what the next dance is going to be. The dancers are too busy lining up to tell us what they are doing.

All right, musicians are not entirely blameless. Many of us have to admit that we’ve announced a tune then found it has gone completely out of our heads, leaving other musicians or dancers gaping at us and wondering whether the demon drink has finally taken its toll.

So pity the poor musician and remember the legendary Wild West saloon sign: “Please don’t shoot the pianist. He is only doing his best.”