

Notes

The Newsletter
of Readifolk

Issue 25

Reading's folk song
and music club

Spring 2015



KARA bring acoustic folk with a Russian
twist to Readifolk on **10th May**

Folk Heroes

A mainstay of British television in the 1970s, Steve Bingham looks into the history of

The Spinners

For much of the 1960s and 1970s, a group comprising three white men and one black man was the most popular folk act in Britain. What was it that propelled the Spinners from their cellar folk club beneath a restaurant in the centre of Liverpool to their own Saturday night television series and a place in the heart of the nation?

The Spinners got together in their Liverpool folk club in 1958. They were originally a five-piece band with the singer Jackie McBride.

Jackie left in 1960 and later emerged as part of the popular female duo Jackie & Bridie. That left the line-up of Mick Groves, Tony Davis, Cliff Hall and Hughie Jones that stayed together until they retired in 1988.

They came from a variety of musical backgrounds. Mick and Tony had performed in jazz bands and skiffle groups around Liverpool for a number of years. Cliff taught himself guitar by accompanying country records he heard on the American Forces radio network and Hughie was an aspiring singer/songwriter. Their early material was mainly the American standards of the skiffle groups but they were encourage to include sea shanties and English traditional songs. They started collecting songs from around Liverpool. Many of these songs were traditional but some, like *In My Liverpool Home* were recently written or adapted from other parts of Britain. Cliff, who had once told Mick that West Indians living in Britain liked all kinds of music except for that of their homeland, had rediscovered his Jamaican and Cuban roots and added songs he had heard there. Hughie added some of his own compositions including *Ellen Vanning* and *Marco Polo* both of which sound as if they have come straight from the English tradition.

By 1963 they were working a lot in and around Liverpool with regular trips to fulfil bookings in London and other parts of the country. They were persuaded to take a chance and booked St George's Hall in Liverpool for a full-scale concert. The event was a sell-out and they took the decision to give up their day jobs and become a full time band. By this time they

had recorded two albums, the first with Bill Leader and the second with Peter Kennedy, but they now signed with Phillips Records who released eight more albums. In the early 1970s they changed record labels to EMI and continued to produce successful albums. In all they made over 40 albums.



Regular appearances on radio programmes like *Cellar Full of Folk* and *Country Meets Folk* on the *Light Programme* (later *Radio 2*) brought them to

the attention of BBC television where appearances on different variety shows led to them being given their own series on BBC1. Most of these television programmes were either broadcast live or recorded in front of a live audience at the Octagon Theatre in Bolton, Lancashire. The series ran for seven years until 1978.

Their mixed ethnicity never seems to have been a problem. It is said that it reflected the advanced state of the multi-cultural society in Liverpool in the late 1950s. It never stopped them from working and there are no horror stories of refused admittance to venues that some artists seem to have experienced. In fact the warmth of the friendship between the group's members was a part of their charm.

So what was it that got them to the top and kept them there for so long? I think it was partly the light touch they had with a song that enabled them to switch from a comedy number to a serious song without jarring the audience, and partly the warmth of the relationships within the group. It was also their ability to work an audience which turned the largest concert hall into a family get together with everybody being encourage to join in and play their part. Even the round singing, for which they were often parodied, was great when you were a part of it.

Unfortunately, searches on Amazon and Apple reveal that very little of the Spinners' material is available on CD or for download. There is a certain amount on YouTube which will give you a taste for the group if you don't remember them.

News and Stuff

Everyone is welcome to join in with **Folk At The Global**, a new session at the Global Café in London Street on the second Wednesday of each month; regular Readifolk attenders will know this as 'the bar downstairs', and they will also recognise the organisers, Danny, Ali and Chris, who regularly feature on the floor at Readifolk. They describe it as an open-floor folk musicians' sing-around come-all-ye session. "Bring your voice and/or instrument. Sing us a song. Play us a tune. Traditional or contemporary. Go fully acoustic or use our PA (set to don't-wake-the-baby for authentic folk intimacy). Stand up. Sit down. By one, by two, by three." The sessions run from 8.30 till 11.00, and it's free, though you are encouraged to buy stuff at the bar.

At Readifolk Towers, we don't remember any problems arising when Ben & Jerry, the ice cream maker, decided to call one of its flavours Cherry Garcia, in tribute to Jerry Garcia. However, Early Bird Foods & Co., based in Brooklyn, is not having an easy time over its choice of name for a breakfast cereal called Haulin' Oats. American duo Hall and Oates, who were at the peak of their fame in the 1970s and 80s, are suing the manufacturers for trademark infringement. We'd contend that it would be hard to get them mixed up - we thought Hall & Oates, while moderately tasty, were ultimately somewhat cheesy.

We know that many of you folkies can't wait for Reading Rock Festival to begin, so we thought we'd better tell you who the headlining acts are this year. Some would say that Mumford & Son fit into the folk music category (or at least are heavily influenced by it). However, also appearing are Metalica, who don't.

The Readifolk Radio Show has been incorporated into the Blues & Roots Radio schedule for several months now, and the internet station is increasing its reach across the world. Based in Canada, it has recently launched itself further afield, and, to reflect the increasing



A roundup of news snippets, information and disconnected folk jottings.

number of UK based programmes it hosts, it now has offices in the UK, and a UK web address - www.bluesandrootsradio.co.uk - where you can find its full schedule.

Farewells and Thanks

Dallas Taylor - died 18/1/15 aged 66. Former drummer with Crosby, Stills and Nash, and later, when Neil Young joined them, he played on their major breakthrough records. Ill health forced him to leave the music business, eventually requiring a liver transplant in 1990. He subsequently became an addiction counsellor, treating musicians and celebrities.



Pearl O'Neill - died 21/2/15 aged 60.

Pearl and husband Tony were the main organisers of Maidenhead Folk Club. She was an excellent singer and performed solo, in the duo Port & Brandy, and with

Tony as part of the harmony group Top Shelf. Probably best remembered for co-hosting sing-around sessions at various festivals, including Towersey, Chippenham, Stanford in the Vale and White Horse, where her lively rapport and friendly encouragement earned great respect.

Roy Palmer - died 26/2/15 aged 83. A prolific writer of more than 30 books on folksong and folklore, he liked to place songs in historical context to bring out their social commentary. He also helped found the Midland Folk Centre, and was involved in some of the BBC Radio Ballads series.

Contact us:

Una for bookings and coming events una@readifolk.org.uk

Colin for publicity, coming events and the mailing list colin@readifolk.org.uk

Stewart about the newsletter stewart@readifolk.org.uk

Alison about the website ali@readifolk.org.uk

Ian about the radio show radiofolk@readifolk.org.uk

www.readifolk.org.uk

Photograph by Bob Hambleton

Shows Worth Seeing

Previewing the new season of guest nights coming to Readifolk.

On **12th April** we welcome the dynamic trio **Barber, Taylor, Reed.**

What they say:

Flawless vocal harmonies underpinned by spellbinding, interweaving instrumental arrangements on guitar, mandolin, fiddle and banjo with superb skills as audience communicators, and a repertoire spanning



contemporary folk, acoustic blues, swing and more.

What others say:

"Superb live performers" - *Broadstairs Folk Week.*

"Kevin Barber & Mark Taylor are long-standing friends of the Willows, and with the addition of Amy Reed on fiddle, their already amazing brand of world-class acoustic roots and Americana has been kicked up to a whole new level" - *Famous Willows Folk Club.*

What we say:

We have heard so much about this trio from Brighton and can't wait to see them live at Readifolk.

Hear more:

www.barber-taylor.co.uk
www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IK8NaervUA
www.youtube.com/watch?v=qoWguVtQnTO



The very exciting young trio **Granny's Attic** visit Readifolk on **26th April.**

What they say:

We play a range of English, Irish and Scottish traditional music as well as some of our own



compositions. We each play a variety of instruments with our main line-up being melodeon/concertina, guitar and fiddle/mandolin.

What others say:

"It's wonderful to

hear a very young and talented band playing together with such conviction, originality and musicality. Their arrangements and compositions are bursting with fresh ideas and I can only describe Cohen Braithwaite-Kilcoyne's concertina and melodeon playing as virtuosic" - *S. Makoieve, Amazon Review.* "Great tunes, great arrangements, great energy, great stuff" - *Jon Boden, Bellowhead, BBC Folk Awards 2014.*

What we say:

This young trio were spotted by Readifolk 'scouts' at Broadstairs Folk Festival. They were nominated for the 2014 BBC Radio 2's Young Folk awards and their recently-released debut album received excellent reviews. This promises to be an exceptionally good concert.

Hear more:

www.grannysattic.org.uk
www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQmzIV4VWAY
www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBs-rTCvRBU



KARA a spirited acoustic folk quartet with a Russian twist entertain us **10th May.**

What they say:

From haunting mythical lullabies, to foot-stomping Russian dances and distinctive new material, KARA will deliver a spirited and warm performance.



What others say:

"Sensational. Absolutely marvellous" - *Brian Doran, Culture Show on Radio Dacorum.* "KARA's blend of traditional, contemporary and self-penned material has fantastic drive, energy and commitment. Daria Kulesh who adds a strong Eastern European flair is a charismatic and energetic front woman who is backed by a very capable band. They will be back" - *Bob Templeman, Chesham Folk Club.*

What we say:

We are sure that you will be enthralled by the energy, enthusiasm and musicianship of this band.

Hear more:

www.karafolkband.com

www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1KD6a1aWrs

www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5s0HQO670s



The legendary **Colum Sands** makes his first appearance at Readifolk on **17th May**.



What he says:

Colum Sands is a universal storyteller who draws on a long Irish tradition of poetic

musicality to weave songs for the world.

What others say:

"... Colum's gift is breaking down cultural barriers through choice words and eloquent music" - *John O'Regan, Rock 'n' Reel*. "An unforgettable, wonderful performer. I've just seen him play to 2500 people in the Australian National Folk Festival's biggest venue and make everyone feel as if they were sitting in his lounge room. He's warm, witty, moving and funny" - *Steve Barnes Director Fairbridge Folk Festival*.

What we say:

This is a rare opportunity of seeing this truly great, internationally renowned singer/songwriter. Don't miss it!

Here more:

www.columsands.com

www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Pns4Aq-RNs

www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHJvnWm_tnQ



Ninebarrow make their Readifolk debut on **31st May**.

What they say:

Ninebarrow are an award winning, Dorsetshire duo, who combine breath-taking vocal harmonies and melodies to create a rich blend of folk-influenced songs.

What others say:

"A fantastic duo!" - *Seth Lakeman*. "The Everly Brothers of British folk doesn't even get close to describing them, but it's a start - you would need to add inventiveness, boldness, presence and

tons of charisma" - *George Papavgeris*.

What we say:

This young duo are making a big impression on the folk circuit. Their live performance is a must!



Hear more:

www.ninebarrow.co.uk

www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDDB7Usktuw

www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1KoH_TYv9c



On **14th June** we welcome **Commonground** to the club.

What they say:

Commonground are a folk band with the distinctive sound of harmony vocals accompanied by concertina, guitar and strings. With material extending from traditional songs and tunes to contemporary material they are equally at home on a concert stage, at a festival or in a traditional folk club.

What others say:

"Commonground have proven to be a perfect blend of musicality and voices matching their consummate skills to well crafted arrangements of tunes and song. It's really heart warming to see a solid, traditional approach to music from these four seasoned performers" -

Bob Berry, Chippenham Folk Festival. "A combination of superb versions of some lovely traditional songs, along with fiery tunes and four really, really nice friendly guys, gave us a night that we will want to experience again soon" - *Mike - The Anchor Folk Club*.



What we say:

Alison and David Fenner will be known to many at the club, having performed in various guises over a number of years. In Commonground Alison and David join forces with Fran Wade and Kevin Bown to produce a unique sound that is sure to delight you.

Hear more:

www.commonground-music.co.uk



Our final Guest Night of the quarter is on **28th June** when **Andy Clarke and Steve Tyler** come to entertain us.

What they say:

Steve and Andy form an extremely versatile duo with a unique approach to traditional and contemporary songs and tunes. From powerful, driving tunes to beautiful haunting songs from their native Devon and beyond performed on hurdy gurdy, cittern, guitar and bouzouki.

What others say:

"Two musicians whose talents have long gone unsung" - *JRoots*. "Proper music with just the right amount of polish from a highly skilled duo" -

Living Tradition.

What we say:

Andy received great praise when he last appeared at Readifolk

as a solo artist. Here performing with Steve on hurdy gurdy we have an outstanding duo who are sure to delight you.



Hear more:

www.flaxey-green.co.uk/AndyClarke&SteveTyler.html

www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IXeKpHfSo

www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlhrqQWWy-g

A Song Worth Singing

John Barleycorn

In amongst the murderous canon of standard folk songs there is one song that tells not just of a survivor, but of someone seemingly indestructible.

Like a lot of traditional songs, *John Barleycorn* has slipped between musical boundaries, cropping up not just in the repertoire of folk singers, but also that of rock musicians, including Paul Weller, Jethro Tull, and perhaps most famously, Traffic, on their fourth album in 1970. However, the song had first appeared in print by the 16th century, and some scholars postulate that there is a link as far back as the Anglo-Saxons, whose mythical figure, Beowulf, bears a name that means barley.

Although what we see here appears to be a secular song, there are many claims to a more spiritual or mystical

meaning, citing corn gods, and making links to rituals such as that of the Wicker Man. With its theme of rebirth, some versions, including one

credited to Robert Burns, seem to allude to biblical dogma, with a first line referring to three kings from the east, and later referring to drinking the blood of John Barleycorn. At least one version names the three men in the first verse as Adam, Cain and Abel. Others also suggest a link to Osiris, an Egyptian god closely associated with the vegetative cycle of regeneration: fable has it that Osiris was murdered by his brother, who tore his body to pieces and scattered them over Egypt. Osiris' wife gathered the pieces together, and using her charms and powers, not only managed to give him life again, but also became impregnated with his future son in the process.



The version here is based on that published in the original edition of the ***Penguin Book of English Folk Songs***, as sung by a shepherd called Hayden from Bampton, in Oxfordshire, in the early 20th century. With just five verses, this is by no means the fullest version, with

others extending to nearly 20 verses, each detailing the indefatigability of John Barleycorn, no matter what apparent atrocities are dealt to him, finally demonstrating not only his inevitable rebirth, but his indispensability to both rich and poor.

Arrangement
ideas by Ed
and Linda

The musical score is written on a single staff in 4/4 time. It includes guitar chords for each measure: G, Dm, F, Am, G, G, Dm, G, Dm, F, Am, G, Dm, C, Dm, F, F, Dm, Dm, F, G, A, G, Dm, F, Am, G, Dm, C, Dm. The melody is in treble clef, and the lyrics are written below the staff.

There was three men came out of the west, Their fortunes for to try, And these three men made a
solemn vow, John Bar-le-y-corn should die. They ploughed, they sowed, they harrowed him in, Threwed
clods up - o-n h-is head, And these three men made a solemn vow, John Bar-le-y corn was dead.

1. There was three men came out of the west,
Their fortunes for to try,
And these three men made a solemn vow,
John Barleycorn should die.
They ploughed, they sowed, they harrowed him in,
Threwed clods upon his head,
And these three men made a solemn vow,
John Barleycorn was dead.
2. They let him lie for a very long time
Till the rain from heaven did fall,
Then little Sir John sprung up his head,
And soon amazed then all.
They let him stand till midsummer
Till he looked both pale and wan,
And little Sir John he grewed a long beard
And so became a man.
3. They hired men with scythes so sharp
To cut him off at the knee,
They rolled him and tied him at the waist,
And served him most barbarously.
They hired men with the sharp pitchforks
Who pricked him to the heart,
And the loader he served him worse than that,
For he bound him to the cart.
4. They wheeled him round and round the field
Till they came unto a barn,
And there they made a solemn mow
Of poor John Barleycorn.
They hired men with crab-tree sticks
To cut him skin from bone,
And the miller he served him worse than that,
For he ground him between two stones.
5. Here's little Sir John in a nut-brown bowl,
And brandy in a glass;
And little Sir John in the nut-brown bowl
Proved the stronger man at last.
And the huntsman he can't hunt the fox,
Nor so loudly blow his horn,
And the tinker he can't mend kettles or pots
Without a little of Barleycorn.



READIFOLK

READING'S FOLK SONG & MUSIC CLUB

Every Sunday 8:00 - 10:30 p.m.



Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC)

35-39 London Street, Reading RG1 4PS

PROGRAMME APRIL - JUNE 2015

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| 5 April | Theme 'Springtime' | <i>Let's welcome the coming of Spring with your songs on the subject.</i> |
| 12 April | Barber, Taylor, Reed www.barber-taylor.co.uk | <i>A dynamic trio offering flawless vocal harmonies and spellbinding instrumental arrangements on guitar, mandolin, fiddle and banjo.</i> |
| 19 April | Singers Night | <i>The usual format - a song, a tune, a poem, a joke or just come and listen and join in the friendly banter.</i> |
| 26 April | Granny's Attic www.grannysattic.org.uk | <i>A really lively and very talented young trio who are rapidly making waves on the folk scene.</i> |

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| 3 May | Theme 'Jollity Farm' | <i>Come and entertain us with your animal /farming songs. There will be lots of audience participation!</i> |
| 10 May | KARA www.karafolkband.com | <i>A spirited acoustic folk quartet with a Russian twist.</i> |
| 17 May | Colum Sands www.columsands.com | <i>This legendary Irish singer/songwriter draws on a long tradition of poetic musicality to weave songs that will entrance you.</i> |
| 24 May | Singers Night | <i>Another opportunity for you to entertain us. All standards welcome.</i> |
| 31 May | Ninebarrow www.ninebarrow.co.uk | <i>An award-winning duo who combine breath-taking vocal harmonies and melodies to create a rich blend of folk-influenced songs.</i> |

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| 7 June | Theme 'That's Funny' | <i>Funny Ha Ha or funny peculiar? You decide.</i> |
| 14 June | Commonground www.commonground-music.co.uk | <i>Commonground are a 4-piece acoustic group with a distinctive blend of harmony voices with concertina, guitar and string accompaniment.</i> |
| 21 June | Singers Night Plus a feature spot 'Magna Carta Through Song' www.magnacarta-throughsong.co.uk | <i>Come and join in another entertaining evening. As a bonus we have a performance by Jenny Lockyer and Matthew Foster of songs specially commissioned to celebrate the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta.</i> |
| 28 June | Andy Clarke & Steve Tyler www.flaxey-green.co.uk/Pages/AndyClarke&SteveTyler.html | <i>An extremely versatile duo with a unique approach to traditional songs and tunes performed with hurdy gurdy, cittern, guitar and bouzouki.</i> |

Admission: £6 Guest nights; £2 Singers & Theme nights

More information from our web site www.readifolk.org.uk

Una - 0118 9483145 or Anne - 0118 9613586

una@readifolk.org.uk

anne@readifolk.org.uk

Find us on Facebook www.facebook.com/readifolk and Twitter www.twitter.com/readifolk

The Readifolk Radio Show is on the internet every Wednesday 7 - 9pm and Friday 5 - 7pm
<http://blast1386.reading-college.ac.uk> click on 'Listen Live'. And now on www.bluesandrootsradio.co.uk