

Notes

The Newsletter of Readifolk

Issue 6

Reading's folk song
and music club

Spring 2010

Wassail!

**Welcome
to another Readifolk
newsletter**

Rumblings from the Roots

At last the Stygian gloom of Winter has passed – and what an eventful start to 2010 we have had.

It was unfortunate that, because Reading was snowbound, we had to cancel the first guest night of the year on 10th January. David Ferrard, who was due to appear, has agreed provisionally to a return visit in December. Fingers crossed.

Despite being the coldest Winter for several decades there was always a warm welcome at Readifolk and our attendances held up really well, so thanks to all you loyal supporters.

Readifolk has an enviable reputation for supporting charitable events. In February several of our talented musicians took part in a fund raising event in aid of Save the Children, Haiti Disaster Fund in Sonning Common village hall. A total of over £1,000 was raised. Congratulations to Morag who arranged the Readifolk effort and to Alison and Danny McNamara, Chris Drawater, Ian Freedman, Lance Burns and Sara Daniels who performed at the event.

As usual, you will find independent reviews of all the recent guest

nights inside this edition of Notes. It is heartening that so many of them are enthusiastic and positive, and it helps us to get a clear idea of what sort of guests you like, as well as letting others know why they should come along to a Readifolk evening. The programme for the next quarter is on the back page and you will see that we again have an excellent array of talent lined up for you.

Readifolk on Facebook and Twitter

Finally, news for all you Facebook and Twitter fans, Alison McNamara has set up a Readifolk Facebook page and a Twitter news stream.

To see our Facebook page, you can find it via the TinyURL of www.tinyurl.com/readifolk, or just type "Readifolk" or "Reading folk club" into the Facebook search bar.

This gives Facebook members a chance to keep up-to-date with events at Readifolk, browse information about performers and other folk clubs in the area, folk music resources on the web and anything else that interests you, exchange your own news and views and share links, photos and videos.

For those who are unfamiliar with Facebook, visit www.facebook.com to join the site. To use the Readifolk Facebook page, follow the instructions above and click the button to become a "fan" of the page. Facebook pages are a mixture of content provided by the page administrators and contributions from fans.

To read our news on Twitter, visit www.twitter.com/readifolk, and if you use Twitter, we hope you will follow us and suggest interesting news streams for us to follow too. We are particularly keen to follow news of any performers or organisations connected with Readifolk.

Una & Colin

Contact us:

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The New Prohibition Band play Readifolk on 2nd May

Instruments of Joy

Taking a look at the instruments of the folk idiom.
This issue:

The Mandolin Family

Danny McNamara is a regular mandolin player at Readifolk. So, who better to tell us more about the CBOM...

CBOM is an acronym often used on the internet to refer to what we might otherwise call the mandolin family – the **C**ittern, **B**ouzouki, **O**ctave mandola and **M**andolin. Sometimes I think it's easiest to explain the relationships between these by referring to another family of instruments altogether – the violin family.

A violin is fairly familiar to most of us, with its four strings tuned in fifths to GDAE. The **mandolin** corresponds to the violin, with four pairs (or “courses”) of strings, similarly tuned to GDAE. The violin is played with a bow, permitting notes to be sustained, whilst the mandolin is typically played with a plectrum. The characteristic rapid movement of a plectrum across a pair of strings (“tremolo”) provides the mandolin with a comparable ability to sustain a note.

The original “Neapolitan” mandolin came from Italy and was gut strung with a round back. The form evolved with the introduction of steel strings around the early 1800s and then much later the emergence of the more familiar flat backed mandolin in the early 20th century. The switch to flat backed mandolins was primarily driven by the start of larger scale manufacturing by Gibson in the US.

Off-hand I can think of several Readifolk regulars who can be seen from time to time with a mandolin, including Doug, Ian, Chris and myself.

The bigger sister of the violin is of course the viola – same basic design, but larger and with a longer scale length, tuned to CGDA. The mandolin family equivalent of the viola is the **tenor mandola** – that is, four courses of strings, tuned CGDA. Not very much larger than the mandolin, the tenor mandola isn't always easy to spot straightaway. I can think of only one Readifolk-er who possesses a tenor mandola (and it must be due an outing sometime soon, Julian?).

Moving up the size range, we get into murky waters. Next up from the tenor mandola is the **octave mandola**, known in the USA as an octave mandolin. The internet is teeming with pseudo-scholarship about what, historically, this instrument is and isn't, but as Wittgenstein said, meaning is use, and if you asked for an octave mandola in a music shop in the UK today you'd get an instrument with the same basic form as a mandolin, bigger in body and longer in scale, tuned one octave below the mandolin (again, GDAE). To make life complicated, however, some players would tune this to GDAD.

Closely allied to the octave mandola is the **bouzouki**. Originally the bouzouki is a Greek instrument, with its characteristic round back (similar to that played for us recently by Brian Miller) and popular in the playing of Rebetiko music. What is called a “bouzouki” these days in the context of British folk clubs is related to this original Greek instrument, but is not the same. Received wisdom has it that during the 1960s, as we all ventured abroad on package holidays, so Irish folk musicians (notably Johnny Moynihan of Sweeney's Men), brought Greek bouzoukis back to Ireland and began to experiment with them. The result of this experimentation is what is sometimes known as the Irish bouzouki – the bouzouki of the folk club.

The metamorphosis from Greek to Irish bouzouki involved a number of changes – typically, the bowl-back was changed for a flat-back, the surface became bigger and a standard eight string (four courses) format was settled upon (the Greek original came in both six and eight string variants). There is no agreed standard for the tuning of this bouzouki, however – GDAD is

probably most common, with GDAE and ADAD also popular. Sometimes the lowest two courses are “octave strung” – that is, they feature a pair of strings tuned an octave apart (as opposed to “unison strung”, where they're tuned together). To my mind octave stringing can lend a mediaeval or middle eastern exoticism to the sound – but it makes it very hard to stay in tune!

So the question you're bursting to ask is, what's the difference between an octave mandola and a bouzouki if they were tuned the same (say, to GDAE or GDAD)? The answer is very little, except for the size of the body and the scale length. The scale length of an octave mandola is usually in the range 50 - 58 cm, whilst that of a bouzouki can be 66 - 69 (even greater for “long scale” instruments).

Just for fun, we should also add the **mandocello** to the pack. Strictly speaking, the mandocello corresponds to the ‘cello, and is tuned an octave below the tenor mandola (CGDA). In truth, however, in the hands of most modern exponents, a mandocello is simply another large-bodied, four-course, long-scaled, flat-backed instrument that is tuned to the preferences of the owner. Phil Beer and Steve Knightley of Show of Hands, for example, play (what they call) mandocellos tuned to GDAD. How would one distinguish those from bouzoukis? I wouldn't begin to try!

In general, whilst the mandolin and tenor mandola are suitable for playing melody, the bigger instruments are better suited to playing chords. The longer the scale length, the more true this is. Similarly, the bigger the body, the bigger the boom!

And the **cittern**? These days the term “cittern” is a multi-purpose label covering all sorts of mandolin-like instruments with eight, ten or twelve strings. (There's a story in folk circles that John Gahagan once went round a 1980s Glasgow folk session offering a bunch of tin whistles to the few in the room who'd neglected to bring their citterns...)

What got me into these instruments? I go back to something mentioned earlier – that slightly mysterious, lute-like jangle that flashes through with these instruments. I was struck by it at first in the playing of Show of Hands, and then got hooked on the playing of people like Andy Irvine and Donal Lunny (not forgetting James Fagan). Watch Andy Irvine playing The Blacksmith on the internet, or listen to Irvine and Lunny playing on Mozaik's “Live From The Powerhouse”, and I defy you not to be intrigued.



Mummy Bear, Daddy Bear, and Two Little Bears. Or more accurately, a bouzouki, an octave mandola, a flat backed mandolin, and a round backed mandolin.

Guest Night Reviews

**Were you there? Tell us what you think.
If you weren't, this is what you missed.**

The views expressed here are entirely those of the reviewers, and are independent of the Readifolk organising team.

Wendy Arrowsmith

In the early 1970s (when I first started attending these things), *Wild Mountain Thyme* was no longer a song you could get away with, even at a policy club. It was both too 'old' and too 'shared' and, perhaps, too hackneyed. How times change! Wendy Arrowsmith's encore on 24th January was just that and as a measure of how far we've come, it became a simple, beautiful closer that we all shared because we all knew it. So ended an evening in which we all warmed to her unassuming manner. Her voice is strong and yet capable of shading, her guitar style is spare, not too fussy, and generally provides a



good platform for the song. Her writing is always interesting, even if some songs were slightly better focused than others.

Her first half was a veritable mixture of styles, including the unaccompanied (Burns' *John Anderson My Jo*), to open tuning (her *Archie & Daisy*, a song about her grandparents' courting sung to a very natural melody), to historical songs of her own (although the *Riding Officer*, a tale of a smuggler village, had lyrics that needed to be worn in a little). But it was in the second half that I felt she really warmed to her performance, opening with an unaccompanied lullaby in her strong but subtle voice, and with beautiful natural ornamentation. It can't be easy to fall asleep to such a treat of a song! Once she picked up her concertina to sing a beautifully paced *Brisk Young Sailor*, the evening took off for me, and we were treated to a terrific version of the *Cruel Mother* sung in a rhythmically unmeasured voice over a pulsing guitar accompaniment for which the DADGAD tuning was ideal. Again we had some very nicely judged melodies to set her own material, particularly the *Lass o' Gowrie*, and she returned to Burns to end her set with the *Braes o' Killiecrankie*. This the whole audience clearly enjoyed, not least one intrepid visitor who had made it all the way from Bedford (!) - Readifolk publicity must be doing something right!

Allan

Tandara Mandara

Tandara Mandara (pronounced a bit like "abracadabra") is an Oxfordshire trio, comprising Jim Greenan (accordion), Ben Smith (fiddle) and Chris Gardener (double bass) who took us on a wonderful musical tour of Eastern Europe. The band was formed when Jim returned from teaching in Serbia where he acquired a taste for Eastern European music and the linguistic gymnastics of the Slavic languages. The accordion/double bass/fiddle trio is a common format in Eastern Europe and Jim set out to form his own band to reproduce its sounds. First, he enrolled Chris, a piano player who, amazingly, agreed to learn the double bass

and then he found their brilliant fiddle player, Ben.

There was no doubt this music was very different to the English, Scottish, Irish or American songs that form the staple diet of our guest nights. Tandara Mandara is one hundred per cent authentic Eastern European, with songs from Russia, Moldavia, Hungary, Macedonia, Poland, Bosnia, Serbia and Romania. Once I got over the fact I couldn't understand a word that was being sung, I surrendered to the happy-sad music, which is a back drop to so many films, *Schindler's List*, *Fiddler on Roof*, and such like. The music was relentless and captivating, with each song explained enough to gain a glimpse into its meaning. This often left us in a state of wonder: for example, the Bosnian, "Please don't make a noise when you come down from the balcony wearing your clogs as it reminds me of my dead mother." The topics ranged from an Imam's daughter watering the garden, handkerchief dancing with beard pulling, to gypsy girls (usually called Cinderella), interspersed with amazing facts, like "Pushkin's mother was black". Although we heard of unfamiliar characters in strange languages and different melodies, the underlying themes were the ones we know well; English Folk music is not the only genre where unrequited love and death form the mainstay of the subject matter!

Altogether a different evening. The struggle through the sub-zero temperatures of Berkshire only added to the atmosphere. By the way, roughly translated, Tandara Mandara means "blah, blah, blah", something you say if you can't be bothered... I'm glad I bothered!

Robert

Norah Rendell & Brian Miller

"North American unknowns", (their words not mine), made a very impressionable appearance at Readifolk on Sunday with their foot tapping, head nodding, Irish Folk Music and Brian's apparent obsession with lumberjack songs from American mid-west/Irish folklore.

Norah and Brian came across as very friendly and quickly established a good rapport with their audience. The patter between each piece was at times quite witty but was generally historically informative and entertaining dialogue.

As the great granddaughter of Irish emigrants to New York in the late 1800's I was particularly interested in the story telling and history behind each song; I love Irish music anyway and found it so fascinating and informative. Not only was I entertained but educated also!

Norah and Brian



are obviously passionate about their music, which was very obvious in the way they played their instruments. The multi talented duo sang beautifully, played flute, guitar, penny whistle and (new to me) the bouzouki.

In addition to the "history in song", Norah and Brian played three Irish jigs, Norah on wooden flute and Brian accompanying on guitar whilst the audience enthusiastically tapped feet and fingers, nodded heads bringing forth enthusiastic applause from a well attended Readifolk audience.

MC for the evening was Ian whose rapport was fun and witty. Ian, accompanied by Lance on guitar, gave us an entertaining floor spot. The trio of Ian, Lance and Bob performed *Folk Singers Sing Through Their Nose* with great entertainment value. Bob's floor spot solo rendition of *Walton Bay* (a nautical shanty) was brilliant; I love to listen to his lovely melodic voice and again his songs always tell a tale.

Despite Danny's poorly Mandola, he and Chris (on guitar) managed a floor spot before the mandola had a relapse! We wish the Mandola a speedy recovery!

The whole evening whizzed by and only too soon we were packing up to leave. Keeping my ears open and with a bit of eavesdropping on the audience I can report that I heard a few "wows", "that was great", "I thoroughly enjoyed that" and "what a brilliant evening".

I suspect that the "North American unknowns" will be unknown for not much longer. Need I say more!!!

Yvonne

Mistaken Identity

I suppose I've known *The White Cockade* for most of my life. I can even remember when it was considered novel to interchange the melody or words with *Pinball Wizard*. However, I've rarely heard it sung as well as it was this evening.

Mistaken Identity are a group of four "mature" men who sing a varied repertoire of traditional, 50s-70s pop and compositions from Van Morrison, Neil Young etc. They sing unaccompanied for the most part, with occasional help from a guitar and/or percussion. They are an entertaining group with a good line of patter and gave us an enjoyable evening. Their introductory numbers came in with a bang and set the mood for the rest of the night.

The song arrangements were almost all simple block harmonies, à la Coppers or church music and, as such, were best suited to traditional songs. Their version of *Bold Wolfe* was one of the best I've heard. However, I feel they could have been far more adventurous in their arrangements of pop songs and contemporary compositions. There was very little in the way of syncopation, canon etc., and the harmonies could have usefully been more adventurous when dealing with these non-traditional genres. Paul Simon's *Slip Sliding*, whilst enjoyable, had a solo singer on the verses with the others joining in on the chorus. Since the audience was also singing gustily at this point, any arrangement the group



might have worked on was largely obscured.

The intonation in all the songs was good and the mid- and upper-range voices were pleasant and strong. I'm afraid the same could not be said of the

bass, which was weak and had a rather shallow quality to the sound. The group had just come back from a successful gig in Amsterdam, and maybe his voice was suffering a bit from this, but it was quite noticeable, particularly in the pop songs where a deep sonorous bass would have been really effective.

However, the above are minor points when compared with the quality of the evening's entertainment. I enjoyed the singing and would happily listen to them again.

Bob

Lynne Heraud & Pat Turner

I never fail to be surprised by the power of music and song to both move and transport me. The day before Lynne Heraud & Pat Turner's appearance at Readifolk I spent a couple of hour's worth of car journey discussing the value of importance of making and listening to music with my fourteen year-old niece. We seemed pretty much to agree that the prospect of fame or wealth – while not unwelcome – were fairly low on our respective lists; more important were the opportunities that came for expressing, communicating and sharing experiences; for moving, or being moved by, others.



Lynne & Pat's night at Readifolk really underlined this for me (though, to be fair, most nights at Readifolk do this). It was a real pleasure to see Malcolm back at the helm; Anne and Britt, representing two thirds of 3 2 1 (which comes out rather satisfyingly at 2 1 4)

played a couple of lovely tunes, and Alan as ever performed with great originality and emotional intensity. Bruce from Nettlebed packed an emotional punch too, which though I've seen him a few times before, was for me heightened by the intimacy of Readifolk and the additional connection that becomes possible between performer and audience when there's no microphone to be seen or heard.

Lynne and Pat combined funny and sharply observed self-penned songs with more traditional fare and certainly connected with their audience – there were many smiles to be seen and plenty of singing-along throughout the night. Their original material covered themes to do with the joys and otherwise of encroaching middle age and had, besides their good humour, an integrity that came from the honesty of their observation and delivery. I enjoyed it very much, but the real highlights of their performance that night came for me late on in the second half with two songs: Lynne's *Regret* and Pat's *Black Ship*, which spoke of pain and loss, and had an emotional weight and heart that really moved me, with that strange force that music & song sometimes carry.

Gary

Moonrakers

Moonrakers are a four piece band from Oxford consisting of Jon Bennett (guitar, mandola, vocals, whistles and bodhran), Liz van Santen (fiddle), Jo Daley (vocal), and normally Anna Lockett on Celtic harp, who pulled out, and had to be replaced at short notice by Julia, and this last minute alteration sadly hindered them putting on a first class performance, the harp being such a central piece, although Julia did a good fill-in job under the circumstances.

They arrived in rather a rush, and I can't help but feel that if they had arrived earlier and composed themselves, more



feeling would have shone through, though they did get better and more harmonious as they went along. Their music has a mostly mediaeval/Celtic feel to it.

Our MC, Malcolm, and floor singer Alison, warmed up the evening after some anxious moments with strings. Then the guests started with *Both Sides the Tweed*, followed by *Northern Coast*, a wistful, melancholic love song, a deeply felt original tune penned by Jon, and this shone out, - 'memories traced in the air'. Julia was obviously struggling with a harp tune written by Jon, but then showed her real virtuosity in delightful performances of *Dancing Feet* and *Musical Priest*. There was also a lively performance of *Go Move Shift* (Ewan McColl), which allowed everyone to join in. *Freedom Train* showed the virtuosity of Liz's violin, and she was a rock-steady backbone throughout the performances. *Carolan's Draught* was a lovely performance by Julia on harp, and Jon on whistle.

In the second half, rousing numbers by Janet, and then the Westlanders with their unusual didgeridoo, got us off to a good start. Moonrakers began with *Rosie*, a lilting tune on harp and penny whistle. *Albion Heart* (The Albion Band), showed the vocal talents of Jo. There were other well known songs, such as *Carrickfergus* and *From Here to Clare*. Less well known ones such as the lively *Strands of McGillegan* with nice mandolin, violin and vocal work, and a jolly tune *Le Poulet Huppe*. *The Man Who Couldn't Sleep* (Colum Sands), was an amusing little ditty. Then two good sing-alongs, *All the Tunes in the World* (Ewan McVicar), and *Down by the Lagan Side* (Tommy Sands), a good one to end an enjoyable evening on.

David

The Askew Sisters

I expect The Askew Sisters are a bit fed up with reading about how young they are. It seems to have become a tradition in all pieces written about them, as if the author was not expecting it. But there is a longer tradition of young people taking a rightful place in the music world, so it really shouldn't come as much surprise to find it is still so; I wonder if Mozart ever got fed up with being reminded about how young he was.

Happily, their age has nothing to do with it now; the Askews are old stagers. Having started performing at 11 and 14, they are many years into their career, during which they have gained heaps of acclaim, both for their performances and their CDs. So we don't need to talk about how young they are anymore. How short, maybe, but not how young (I wonder if Beethoven ever got fed up with being reminded about how short he was).

Instead, let's consider their maturity. This was their second visit to Readifolk, and previously, a couple of years ago (several venues back), we could, with some justification, refer to them as 'girls'. But this time such diminutive appellations would be vastly inappropriate. They have cast away their girly haircuts, and as well as their more mature appearance has come a maturity in their performance. Whilst they have always clearly had talent in abundance, their playing now - Emily on fiddle and Hazel on melodeon - is more confident, and their arrangements more sophisticated. Hazel, who takes on the main singing duties, has a depth and assuredness about her alto voice which now has a strength to fully convey an

emotional richness that may have been somewhat tenuous before. Alas, in Readifolk's unamplified setting it was often a little swamped by their instruments, which is a great shame, because it is clearly a voice worth listening to.

Coupling many of their songs with tunes, they opened with *The Dusty Miller/The Presbyterian Hornpipe*, and went on with *Valentine/The Turtle Dove*. It was clear at once that their performance is now underpinned by their greater experience. Later in their set came a high point with *The Bonnie Bows of London Town* (a version of *The Twa Sisters* featured elsewhere in this newsletter) with an arrangement that was profoundly dark and haunting. *Through Lonesome Woods* - the title track of their latest CD (which alas, had not arrived in time from the distributors to be available on the evening) - and *If I was a Blackbird* both come from the archives of collector George Gardiner, as do songs such as *Sweet Lovely Joan*, which are featured on the collaborative album *The Axford Five*.

In coming years, as their careers develop, they will unavoidably be compared to Spiers and Boden. They occupy much the same musical territory, presenting well researched songs, mainly traditional English ones, on fiddle and melodeon with a dynamic quality that makes an old song burst with new life. Such comparisons may be frustrating to them, but it does mean that if traditional songs are being nurtured by people who take such care of them, then we need have no qualms that the future of music is only going to be The X-Factor, and they will rightfully be able to take their place as creative musicians, rather than just as players.

Stewart



You can help...

Fancy writing something for the newsletter?

We'll always need people who can review guest night performances with fresh insight. But alternatively, how about an article about an instrument you play or have a particular fondness for? Or perhaps you could transcribe a favourite song or two, giving us some background and history. Or maybe you could research the life and times of an essential folk singer.

And folk-related general interest articles, or other editorial could all help to enhance the Readifolk experience.

Whatever ideas you have we'd like to hear more, so contact Stewart - I'm often at guest nights, or you can email me - stewart@readifolk.org.uk

On Being a Singer

We are all singers, whether quietly to ourselves, when no one else is listening, or in front of an audience. No culture on earth is without song.

Janet Kent regularly sings for us at Readifolk, so you may be familiar with the extraordinary range of her voice. Here, she tells us how we can make the most of our singing voices, whether it is to join in with the next chorus song at Readifolk, or to add more gusto to your bath-time repertoire...

The human voice is one of the most fragile instruments, and you need to treat it well. I was lucky enough to meet Esther Salaman, a Professor of music at the Guildhall, who was my singing teacher.

She taught me how breathing and diction are so important, how our English language has so many mixed vowels and diphthongs, which are difficult to negotiate, and which impact our talking as well as singing. How a four month old baby who is screaming and yelling has mastery in vocal technique: his shoulders are back, chest expanded and tummy in. He gains strength as he screams, he does not tire – only the adults who hear him do!

The vocal lessons she taught me were invaluable for singing for hours without wearing out the voice.

Try this: Stand taller than usual, and proud! Feel extra space between head and shoulders and at your waist between your ribs and hip-bones. While standing like this, roll both shoulders, letting them both describe a circle – “over, back and down” – as though they are wheels. You may feel creaky between your shoulder blades. Don’t forget to breathe. After a minute or two, stop, relax, and re-think your tall position.

Now take a breath through the mouth with the back of your throat open. It is very important that the taking of the breath and opening of the throat is as one gesture. If the throat is fully open, then the intake of breath will be silent.

After several breaths and exhalations of this kind, take another breath, and, as you exhale, do not “pff” or “sss”, but instead make some light, rather high-pitched exclamations of happy surprise: “a!” “ala!”.

Make these sounds higher and higher, happy and light, and at each exclamation of happy surprise you will feel, I hope, the lowest muscles of your stomach, right down near the pelvic bone and groin area, jump to attention. If you put your hand there you will feel it. These are your

support muscles which you need right throughout your singing – and speaking – life. Whatever style of singing, folk, country, opera, blues, if you feel these muscles working for you, then the breath will meet the alerted vocal cords head-on. You will then feel no strain.

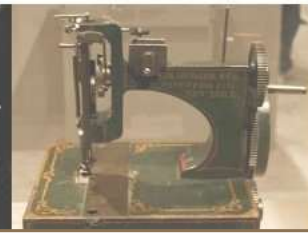
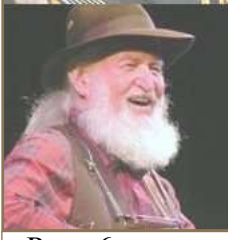
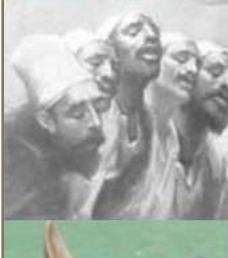
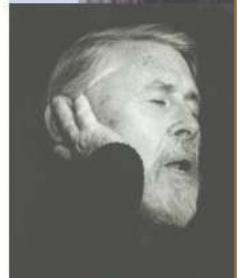
Esther also taught me to widen the breath as it enters the lungs and to breathe in, and feel the breath widen the lungs out. Always stand with your feet apart – the width of your hips.

It is usually a myth that you think you are tone deaf; only a very small minority of people are. However, if you think you are, ask someone to sing a pitch for you and try to match it. All you need to do is keep on practising your muscles until they have been regulated to sing on pitch. A singing teacher can usually help you a great deal.

A raised larynx is a leading problem for singers. You will find that if you put your finger on your Adam’s apple and yawn, it will move up and back down. The lower position is where you need it to stay. Try to sing up a scale with your finger lightly touching your Adam’s apple; if it rises more than one half of an inch, then you will have some problems. A raised larynx will make your throat close, making high notes impossible. It will also make it hard to produce resonance, vibrato, etc. However, if you work with a vocal coach, you can usually correct this.

Singing teachers often say “Are you your voice?” They know that there are pressures on us to produce certain kinds of sounds. Recording has put a lot of pressure on singers who try and sound like the stars they have heard, rather than producing their own sound. Singing teachers try and help you produce your own individual voice, rather than copying someone else. You can remain with your own voice by “growing with your voice” – learning how to develop your voice-muscles as you go.

Finally, Jungian analysts relate healing and creative expression very closely. They say that singing and depression could not go together.



A Song Worth Singing

The Swan Swims Bonnie - or The Twa Sisters

Thanks to Bruce and Barbara for suggesting a closer look at this song. We've heard the disturbing tale of two sisters, in one form or another, from several guests at Readifolk recently, including Jerry Epstein & Ralph Bodington, Broom Bezzums and The Askew Sisters. It has also been recorded by many artists as diverse as Tom Waits, Clannad and Jim Moray.

There are many versions of this song, and similar songs exist in several European countries, too. In Britain, FJ Child collected around 30 versions (it's number 10 in his collection) and other collectors had over 100, although many of them no more than fragments. These versions come under many titles, such as *The Cruel Sister*, *The Miller and the King's Daughter*, *The Bonnie Milldams of Binnorie*, *The Bonny Bows o' London* and *The Berkshire Tragedy*. And there seem to be as many different tunes as there are recordings of the song.

The earliest known version was published in 1656. Many versions of the song are rooted in Scotland, and some of them tell of a "King of the North Country", which seems to imply that these versions, too, were formed at a time before the union of Scotland and England, which happened in the early 1700s.

At its fullest, it is a gruesome and, frankly, weird tale of two sisters. A suitor comes a-courting them, and when he prefers the younger one, big sister becomes jealous. She pushes lil' sister into a mill-race (or, in some versions, the sea or a river), drowning her. The miller then fishes out what he thinks is a dead swan from the water, only to find it

is the young woman. In some versions, the song ends there, sometimes with the miller being wrongly hanged or burned for the girl's murder.

So far, that's all fairly conventional folk-song mayhem and murder. But other versions continue: a group of passing minstrels take parts of the girl's body to make a violin or a harp. Some versions go into detail about body parts - hair or veins used as strings, her nose used as the bridge, fingers as tuning pegs, etc. But there is often a magical quality given to the instrument too, with her eyes and tongue being used to give the instrument sight and speech. In the version below, it is her breastbone that gives the instrument life.

And so, as the musicians are entertaining the girl's father, the instrument starts to play itself, and sings a song telling of the elder sister's misdeeds.

Occasionally, three sisters are cited in the first verse, and this may be because there is a very similar song, called *The Cruel Brither*, which has a near-identical first verse, and tells of a brother who murders his sister because he disapproves of her suitor.

The version here comes from *'The Scottish Folksinger'* by Buchan and Hall, first published in 1973. It is drawn from FJ Child's collection, with the tune being credited to "...the singing of Belle Stewart of Alyth", and it concludes the tale with the elder sister getting her come-uppance by being burned to death on a fire. Lovely.

Stewart

Arrangement by Ed

There were twa sis - ters that liv'd in a bower, Hi ho and sae bon - nie o And there
cam' a bonnie laddie tae be their woo-er And the swans they swim sae bon - nie - o

- There were twa sisters that liv'd in a bower
Refrain: *Hi ho and sae bonnie-O*
And there cam' a bonnie laddie tae be their wooer
Refrain: *And the swans they swim sae bonnie-O*
- Oh sister, oh sister, will ye come for a walk?
And I'll show ye wonders afore ye come back.
- Oh sister, oh sister, pit your fit on yon stane
And I'll show ye wonders afore we go hame.
- So she's pit her fit upon yon stane,
And sae slyly her sister has pushed her in the stream.
- Oh sister, oh sister, come gie me your hand
And I'll gie ye my houses and half o' my land.
- Oh sister, oh sister, ye winna get my hand
And I'll still hae your houses and a' o' your land.
- Sometimes she sank and sometimes she swam
Until she has come tae the miller's mill dam.
- The miller he cam' oot and he looked intae his dam
Says, "Here is a maid or a milk white swan."
- He's lifted her oot and he's laid her on a stane
And three fiddlers spied her as they walked along.
- The first ane o' them's ta'en three lengths o' her hair
Says, "This'll mak' me strings for a fiddle sae rare."
- The second ane o' them, he has ta'en her finger banes
Says, "This'll mak' the fiddle some fine fiddle pins."
- But the third ane o' them he has ta'en her breist bane,
Says, "This'll mak' a fiddle that'll play a tune its lane."
- They've picked the fiddle up and it's they've gane on their way,
Till they've come tae her faither's castle that stood sae high.
- They gaed in and they sat doon tae dine,
When they laid the fiddle by, it began tae play its lane.
- The first tune it played: "There's my father, the King"
And the second that it played: "There's my mither the Queen."
- But the third that it played: "There's my fause sister Jean
And sae slyly she pushed me intae the running stream."
- Then up and there spak' her fause sister Jean,
Says, "We'll pay these three fiddlers and let them be gone."
- Then up and there spak', it's her father the King,
"I'll pay these three fiddlers tae play that tune again."
- They've built a fire that would near burn a stane,
And intae the middle o't they've pushed her sister Jean.

Readifolk Newsletter

This is a Limited Edition Collectors Issue of Readifolk Notes. It has been carefully assembled by craftsmen, and no expense has been spared to bring you an item to treasure over the years, and which will become a valuable asset worth millions (although we can't guarantee this - your investments may go down as well as up). Unbounded thanks go to everyone who has contributed to this issue. If I've nicked anyone's image copyright, let me know and I'll send flowers.



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 2010

<u>4 April</u>	Katriona Gilmore & Jamie Roberts www.gilmoreroberts.co.uk	<i>Nominated for the BBC R2 Horizon Award for emerging artists, Katriona and Jamie are an exceptional young duo, who combine the beautiful singing of Katriona with amazing guitar playing from Jamie.</i>
<u>11 April</u>	Mike Silver www.mikesilver.co.uk	<i>Mike has been writing, singing and playing music for more than 30 years. He is a consummate guitarist and his voice is full and crystal clear. His skill with an audience is outstanding.</i>
<u>18 April</u>	Theme Law & Order	<i>'Ello, 'Ello, 'Ello. What have we here then?</i>
<u>25 April</u>	Will Kaufman presents:- 'Woody Guthrie: Hard Times & Hard Travelling' www.myspace.com/willkaufman	<i>Will is a fine singer, guitarist, banjoist, fiddler and Professor of American Literature and Culture at the University of Central Lancashire. In this show he sings many Guthrie songs, interspersed with detailed historical commentary.</i>

<u>2 May</u>	The New Prohibition Band www.thenewprohibitionband.com	<i>On tour from their base in Berlin, this entertaining American trio play old time string band music, mixing originals with traditional standards.</i>
<u>9 May</u>	Singers Night	<i>Don't be shy, have a try. We'll make you very welcome.</i>
<u>16 May</u>	Paul Scourfield www.paulscourfield.co.uk	<i>Superb melodeon player and singer performing traditional and contemporary folk music from England, Ireland, France and beyond.</i>
<u>23 May</u>	Corncrow www.myspace.com/corncrow	<i>Well known as individual performers, Steve Hunt and Kim Guy combine as a new, highly-rated duo who play and sing traditional and contemporary folk songs in a distinctive style.</i>
<u>30 May</u>	Club Closed	<i>It's Bank Holiday/Festival weekend. Business as usual next week.</i>

<u>6 June</u>	Quicksilver www.quicksilveruk.com	<i>Hillary Spencer who sand with Artisan, and Grant Baynham, former resident songwriter on BBC TV's 'That's Life', are Quicksilver. Together they are musically breathtaking but also wickedly funny.</i>
<u>13 June</u>	Singers Night	<i>Another opportunity for you to show us what you can do.</i>
<u>20 June</u>	Craig Morgan Robson www.cmr-harmony.org.uk	<i>Together, Craig Morgan Robson bring a new dimension to the art of a-capella singing.</i>
<u>27 June</u>	Mick Ryan & Paul Downes www.wildgoose.co.uk/artists.asp	<i>Wonderful songs, wonderful singing with dazzling guitar accompaniment.</i>

Admission: £5 Guest nights; £1 Singers & Theme nights

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

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