

Notes

The Newsletter of Readifolk

Issue 9

Reading's folk song
and music club

Winter 2010/11

Welcome

to another Readifolk
newsletter

Rumblings from the Roots

Welcome to the Winter edition of Notes. With this edition we welcome in another New Year and we wish you all a very happy and successful 2011.

The quality of our newsletter has been widely recognised and we have received many compliments from far afield. We have noticed several clips from our reviews appearing on artists' web sites. This recognition enhances the status of Readifolk - so a big pat on the back for our editor, Stewart, and for the many contributors to the newsletter.

We look back with much satisfaction on another very successful year for Readifolk. We have had many outstanding performers at our Guest Nights and it has been heartening to see so many regulars at our Singers and Theme Nights.

There were several developments of note during the year:

- In July Reading Community Radio launched its internet broadcast service, Reading4U, on www.reading4u.co.uk. Readifolk has been involved in this venture from the start and broadcasts an hour-long programme, the Readifolk Hour, on Fridays from 8 to 9 pm. From January this will be from 7 to 8 pm. The presentation and content of our broadcasts have been remarkable and we congratulate our band of programmers - Alison, Clare, Stewart, Ian, Malcolm, and Danny - for maintaining such a high standard. It is hoped that in the very near future a radio licence will be awarded to

enable Reading4U to broadcast on air. This would allow us to reach a larger audience and encourage newcomers to the club.

- You can now find us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/readifolk) where you can join our many friends and share views and news on all that is going on at Readifolk. If you have a mind to, you can also tweet on Twitter (www.twitter.com/readifolk). Thanks to Alison for setting up and managing both of these sites.

We look forward to further Readifolk success in the New Year:

- Firstly, we say goodbye and many, many thanks to our outgoing webmaster, Julian, who set up our web page several years ago and has managed the site with great commitment ever since. We hope that Julian will return to Readifolk whenever his travels allow. We welcome our new webmistress (is that the correct term?), Alison, who has bravely volunteered to manage our website in the future.
- It's bon voyage to Clare and Malcolm who are off on their long-term travels. Malcolm has bowed out of his role as our regular MC, and we thank him for many years of excellent service to the club. We have been fortunate to find a group willing to fill the gap left by Malcolm - welcome to Alison, Janet, Ian, Danny and Doug who now share the MC duties. Their input adds to the overall variety of our Guest Nights.
- You will find the new programme of events for the first quarter of 2011 on the back page of this newsletter. We are delighted to have been able to book some really outstanding newcomers to the club and to welcome back some of our all-time favourites. As usual, we have included several Singers and Theme Nights in the mix, so there should be something for everyone to enjoy. If you want something to do on New Year's eve (31st December), you can listen to a preview of all our Winter programme events on the Readifolk Hour on Reading4U.

Una & Colin

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A stripey t-shirt will be appearing at Readifolk on 20th March, along with Jez Lowe and an evening of Geordie songs and wit.

Folk Heroes

Another potted history. This time Steve Bingham digs up some background to:

The Watsonsons



If you are lucky enough to get to see the Watsonsons in the near future what you will see is an informal but highly polished performance. The core of the group is Mike and Norma Waterson and Martin and Eliza Carthy; they will be joined by numerous relations, friends and probably whoever any of them are working with at the moment. The music you will hear will be traditional English songs with a strong emphasis on Yorkshire, alongside some of the best contemporary songs that lend themselves to the Watsonsons' style of unaccompanied singing.

The Watsonsons are one of the longest established groups on the folk scene. They started playing skiffle in their Hull secondary school. By 1964 Mike, Lal (Elaine) and Norma Waterson with their cousin John Harrison had dumped the American skiffle repertoire along with the instruments and chose to sing traditional songs mainly from their home area. They tried a couple of names for the group, the Mariners, and the Folksons, before settling for their family name. Their first album *Frost and Fire*, released in 1965, was awarded Melodymaker album of the year. The album drew heavily on the traditional carols of South Yorkshire. In 1966 they released two further albums *The Watsonsons* and *A Yorkshire Garland*. In 1968 the first phase of the Watsonsons career came to an end when Norma left to take a job as a DJ in the exotic setting of a radio station on Montserrat.

By 1972 Norma had returned to the UK and the Watsonsons reformed. Bernie Vickers replaced John Harrison but for some reason this did not work out and by the end of the year Bernie had been replaced by Norma's husband Martin Carthy. This line-up released three influential albums, *For Pence and Spicy Ale*, *Sound Sound Your Instruments of Joy* and *Green Fields*.

In the 1980s Lal left the group because of ill health and was replaced by Mike's daughter Rachel. When Lal recovered, the group continued as a five-piece. Lal died in December 1998 but despite this the group continued to work through the 1990s and into the 21st century. They were joined by various Waterson sons and daughters and gradually evolved into the family unit that is still occasionally seen today.

The influence of the Watsonsons as a group on the English traditional music scene should never be underestimated. The album *Sound Sound Your Instruments of Joy* was particularly ground-breaking as it contained religious songs which helped to revive interest in this type of material. Their reliance on songs from their Yorkshire roots has encouraged others to look more closely at their home areas and sing more local variants of well-known songs. Their influence has been increased by the activities of each member through their work as solo artists and in numerous combinations.

Lal Waterson has acquired a cult status through her song writing, particularly the two albums she made with her son Oliver Knight. The first of these, *Once in a Blue Moon* was released in 1996 and the second, *No Bed of Roses* was released posthumously in 1999. She also recorded a number of albums with various family members. There have been at least two tribute albums made by performers from outside the family.

Mike Waterson is a recognised ballad singer and songwriter. His songs *Three Day Millionaire* and *Rubber Band Man* have been recorded by a number of artists.

Martin Carthy was a well-known singer/guitarist before he joined the Watersons. His work with Dave Swarbrick, Brass Monkey and several other partnerships continues to this day. Norma has made several albums and through her choice of material has helped to bring several new songwriters to the attention of the public. Currently the best-known of the Waterson spin-offs is Waterson:Carthy with Norma, Martin and their daughter Eliza.

Most of the Watsonsons' recorded material is available in one form or another. The best place to find out about them is the Topic Records web site www.topicrecords.co.uk. If you can afford it, I would recommend the box set *The Mighty River of Sound* but if not



Family portrait: Saul Rose (married to Eliza's sister), Martin and Eliza Carthy play; Norma and Mike Waterson seated

The Definitive Watsonsons is well worth getting. Other recordings to look out for are those by Blue Murder - a sort of folk super group (the Watsonsons with Swan Arcade), The Waterdaughters, and Lal and Norma's album, *A True Hearted Girl*.

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.

Jon Fletcher Band

26th September



Sunday the 26th of September saw The Jon Fletcher Band performing at Readifolk with Malcolm Smith doing his usual excellent job as MC.

A word first, though, about one of the floor spots. John Kelly turned up with

his harmonium and a look that would have been more at home as a member of ZZ Top than in a folk club, but the moment he started to play you knew that here was something special. He has a distinctive look, a distinctive voice and a wonderful style (it seemed to be the night for individuality). His version of *The Lakes of Pontchartrain* held the audience spellbound for its whole duration. He is planning a tour in Autumn 2011 and Colin and Una were so impressed, that I am able to tell you they have booked him to appear at Readifolk on 18th September.

The Jon Fletcher band is a family affair. They consist of Colin Fletcher on stand-up bass and guitar, Jane Griffiths, Colin's wife, on fiddle and Jon himself on mando-cello and guitar.

I am always impressed by people who dare to take a song and make it their own. To develop a style and a sound that is distinctively your own must be the mission of any performer in whatever musical genre. Jon Fletcher has achieved that in droves and even though I didn't "like" everything he did on that evening, I came away respecting him, and that is more important. For example their version of *Black Is The Colour* - before I heard it for myself I could not have imagined a blues version of this traditional folk song. The Jon Fletcher band did it though, and did it well. My personal favourite for the evening was *Cuckoo*. I suspect this was a traditional song although the evening was liberally peppered with self-penned songs tending toward a jazz style. It was this jazz style that was not to my personal taste. As I say, you know when you've got a good band when you can say what they played wasn't my cup of tea, but I respect them anyway. As well as being great musicians, they created a friendly atmosphere that contributed in no small way to the success of the evening. Jon returns to Readifolk on December the 12th as part of Magpie Lane. I will be there.

lan

Isambarde

10th October

People who did Modern Maths at school in the 60s and 70s will, of course, have immediately grasped the significance of the date when Isambarde visited us. 10 10 10 is a neat little binary configuration that translates into decimal as the number 42. Douglas Adams later explained how this number turns out to be the ultimate answer to Life, The Universe, and Everything (although he was less forthcoming about what the actual question was). But you had realised all this for yourselves, hadn't you? And that was why you came along this evening, quite reasonably expecting something unexpected to happen. And what happened was that we were roundly entertained by what appears to be a typographical error (do you think someone should tell them?).

www.readifolk.org.uk

It would be easy to assume that Isambarde named themselves after the inventor of the industrial revolution, especially since their first album was called Brunel's Kingdom. But he spelled his fore-name without an e - Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Maybe this was an error like Google's, who, too late, realised they had inadvertently mis-spelled the word googol when they registered their name. Or perhaps it is a device to imply tradition, like 'olde worlde'. Or are they trying to convey a secret message hidden in their name; is 'Isambarde' an anagram? Let's see - 'bare maids'; 'I made bras'; 'a dame's rib'; 'strewth - moving quickly along....' 'Same drab I' is definitely wide of the mark, but 'a bard is me' seems rather more promising.

So Isambarde is (possibly) an anagrammatical trio from Coventry, comprising Chris Green on rhythm guitar, and other fretboards, Emily Saunders on fiddle and whistle, and Jude Rees on oboe and shawm. I seem to remember that a melodeon made a cameo appearance, too, but can't for the life of me remember if it was in the hands of Jude or Emily. All three of them provided vocals and quips, the latter of which bounced back and forth between the audience and performers with impressive alacrity.

But their collective wit, sparkly though it is, is the least of it, not overshadowing their abilities to present some really great music in between the banter.



Songs included plenty of traditional and original material. Typical of this were *Old Maid in a Garret*, sung unaccompanied, in which Chris manfully took the line about wanting a wee fat man to make his own deary; *Private Green*, a self penned song about World War 1, and *My Thing is my Own*, a piece of Olde Englishe ribaldry.

This was an evening engineered for our delight.

Stewart

Moveable Feast

24th October

Moveable Feast is exactly what it says: "moveable" as the line-up changes to fit the venue and style of music needed, and a "feast", catering for all musical tastes. Our line-up comprised Mitch (vocals/rhythm guitar), Di (fiddle), Tony (thin electric "single bass") and Jane, one person orchestra on flute, accordion, saxophone and clarinet. Yet, despite this flexible approach, the four musicians had an excellent rapport and their delivery was smooth and confident. The evening consisted of contemporary pieces by Mitch interspersed with traditional songs and tunes. My own view of "tunes" is they can sound very repetitive - but not with Moveable Feast! The way they swapped between instruments produced a lively variation and our feet were soon tapping.

To say the band is eclectic is an understatement. Wherever Mitch travels, he writes a song. The evening was a musical tour, starting out from a pub in Branscombe, Devon, under A *Blanket of Stars*. From there, we went to south London (Peckham), where the band has its roots and then to the City, to meet *The Good Old City Boys*, the bankers "drinking all the money and making all the noise". In contrast, *The World Cannot Afford the Rich and the Poor* reflected on the casualties

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of economic mismanagement. Next, we travelled to Paris for the *Waltz of the Luxembourg Gardens*, over to Ireland to *Walk to Lough Hyne* and then across the Atlantic for some bluegrass at *Cripple Creek* and *Prayers to the*

Rain, inspired by the Indian Reservations. A smattering of Oregon-inspired Klezmer music added to the ethnic mix. *The Tango of Sexual Power*, not only took us to South America but also satirised the leaders of recent wars, Thatcher, Galtieri, Saddam Hussein, Blair and Bush. Perhaps Mitch's next song will be inspired by the Readifolk gig and his experience of Reading's one way system.

This was a lively and original evening, covering many musical traditions with an original and contemporary twist. We had fun but as Mitch's lyrics are often subtle, Moveable Feast also provided us with food for further thought.

Robert

Leon Rosselson

7th November

Leon Rosselson is surprisingly uncharismatic when he performs, his voice being quieter and more reserved than it probably once was when he started performing over 50 years ago. Unexpectedly, he seemed rather shy in front of our Readifolk audience, and some of his songs were introduced by little more than mumbles, though he was charming and chatty to speak to afterwards. Now in the latter part of his eighth decade, he can be forgiven all this, and still merit our attention. And when we listen, we find that his songs are brim-full of content; he is one of the cleverest songwriters you will ever see.

By reputation, Leon Rosselson is probably best known as a protest singer, and anyone who has been involved in marches, rallies or demonstrations since the 1960s may well have come across him with his guitar, inspiring people to raise their voices against injustice, oppression, nuclear weapons, religious zealots, and more. The current economic situation is fertile ground for him, as are the frustrations of the middle east. But by far the largest part of his work, and of his performance, is about more every-day concerns, starting this evening with a song



about how the mobile phone isn't always an aid to communication. He also sang about the hollowness of ambition, growing old, dying, and about love ("All my songs are love songs").

Comparisons with Jake Thackray are unavoidable: they both deliver witty songs of pithy incisiveness, ranging from the sentimental to the profound; both served time as English teachers, and both cite iconic French singer Georges Brassens as a major influence. Both of them are also

frequently juxtaposed to the likes of Brecht, Coward and Lehrer. But a comparison with Thackray must be tempered with the differences: Rosselson is generally more cheerful, and certainly more politically engaged. His songs are more optimistic. Whereas Thackray was interested in wry observations of the otherwise mundane, telling us what he sees, Rosselson goes one step further, by inviting us to imagine that things don't have to be this way.

His lyrics are extraordinarily clever and telling; he never wastes a note without putting a syllable to it - lines such as "I chose the best and brightest words and taught them how to dance" or "The stairs are beginning to rattle / And the rats are beginning to stare" or "There were times when silence hung in the air like glass / Words beat their wings but they could not pass" are wonderfully satisfying to listen to.

Despite singing songs of depth or political dimension, he seems able to do it without any tedious 'attitude' that is crucial in much contemporary culture; in fact he seems not to have an attitude at all - he just sings; it's as delightfully uncomplicated as that.

Stewart

Sara Grey & Kieron Means

14th November

Having seen Sara and Kieron at Whitby, we were delighted to find that they were coming to Readifolk as we had greatly enjoyed their music and the fact that they



gave context and social history along with the songs - an enjoyable way to find out more about American history. I would thoroughly recommend looking out for Sara's presentation on Songs of The Western States if you want to find out more about songs and history from the American Past - hopefully she will present it again at some festivals next year.

The mother and son duo obviously enjoy performing together and both display a real love for the music, which they performed with sensitivity, skill and humour. They played a varied range of songs from the American civil war, the western frontier, gospel music and mixed rousing songs with slower more thoughtful and emotional songs which showed their range. Before each song Sara or Kieron explained the origin and context and we were held enthralled by the pictures of American history presented to us.

They started their first set with a rousing American version of the traditional song *Rambling Boy* and very quickly established an excellent rapport with the audience so that everyone was joining in the chorus. Sara's singing was clear and engaging allowing us to hear the words and get involved in the story of the songs. Sara skilfully played the banjo and led the vocals with Kieron providing sparse but effective accompaniment on the guitar and providing harmonies.

Kieron took the lead on *Boll Weevil*, a song from the Southern States about a great threat to the cotton harvests, showing that it was not just Sara who had the ability to put across a story in a song, as he performed with feeling and musicality.

There were songs from more recent American history including written in the 1960s by Si Kahn - *Walking Down the Road* about the struggle of black people.

We were also treated to a selection of songs from Western America. *Goodnight-Loving Trail*, a song about the cowboys on the cattle trail which ran from the Texas panhandle up into Wyoming. My favourite was about an unusual woman, Belle

Star, a female outlaw who led a very interesting life which ended violently, which was a Woody Guthrie song.

The end of the second set came too quickly and they finished their second set with *Sandy Boys*, about men who worked in the logging camps in Virginia. The song was about a logger who courted a girl, the daughter of a logging baron, dressed as a ghost (a bugaboo), again getting excellent audience involvement and very appreciative applause.

Hopefully they will return to Readifolk in the future so we get the chance to hear more of their huge range of American songs.

Paula & Jeff

Sylvia Barnes & Sandy Stanage

28th November

For Sylvia this gig was a bit of home from home, though she describes herself as a Glasgow girl and now lives in Dollar, just across the Firth of Forth. Why so? Well, she lived for 22 years in Berkshire, and was regularly to be seen and heard in the local area, with her husband Jim or in the band Scotch Measure. She won the Scots Singer of the Year award at the 2006 Scots Traditional Music Awards, and no wonder, for she has a great voice. At one time she sang with the Battlefield Band. Knowing this, and having heard the beautiful guitar



accompaniment of Sandy Stanage on Sylvia's website, I was eager to see this duo in performance.

We were treated to a wide range of songs, from comedy to tragedy, from traditional to modern. The audience, always up for singing choruses, found the words of the mainly Scottish songs a bit of a challenge at times, while Sylvia was fully at home with the language. There were songs about the

supposed sexual prowess of millers; drunkenness; a were bride (spooky); the frustration of being married to an old man (a bit too close to home?); cowboys... cowboys? Ah, yes: there was a fine performance of Archie Fisher's *Mountain Rain*, and Sean Mone's *Rosalita and Jack Campbell*, which has a bit of a kick to it. There was also Brian McNeill's *Clementina Walkinshaw*, about the sad common-law wife of Bonnie Prince Charlie, whom it appears he treated very badly: this song helps to dismantle the romantic image of Charlie, who emerges as a thoroughly unpleasant character. We also had Frank Harte's *Lonely Waterloo*; *Geronimo*, a great guitar instrumental from Sandy dedicated to the late Jim Barnes; a fine rendition of *Glenlogie* (or *Bonnie Jeannie o' Bethelnie*); and *The End O't*, a Violet Jacob poem set to music by Sandy Stanage: this last had the tingle factor, and was the outstanding song of the evening for me. I just had to get the CD.

Sylvia has a great rapport with her audience, which in this case included a number of personal friends from her Berkshire days. Sandy's accompaniment was accomplished and sensitive. All in all, this was a great evening, enhanced by some really good floor singers and musicians, including 3-2-1 with extra Dave, Sara Daniels, Danny and Chris with extra Bob, and Alison and Dave. MC Danny managed the whole thing impeccably.

Malcolm

David Ferrard

5th December

I remember my first single malt whisky. At the time I had thought that all whisky tasted like the familiar blends, so when my friend handed me a glass of something warming on a cold

night, in front of an open fire, with the troubles of the world locked far away outside closed doors, it wasn't quite what I was expecting. Pronounced flavours of smoke and peat filled my senses, and I became aware that behind them was something more subtle, more complicated, more enduring and fulfilling. Something that needed understanding in order to appreciate. Whisky had newly discovered qualities I had previously been unaware of.

It seems to me that David Ferrard has a voice like whisky - it's a rich and mature voice that carries the oaken flavour of folk music from a couple of generations ago. His natural singing voice would probably be a bit deeper than the one he presents in his songs - he often seems to be at the upper range of his register - and he incorporates a vibrato (or do I mean tremolo?) that folk singers seldom employ these days. I'm prepared to bet that, with his carefully measured delivery, sensitive songs and good looks, he is gaining quite a following. Certainly there were several unfamiliar faces at Readifolk this evening who had come to see him.

Having looked at his website prior to his visit, I had anticipated a repertoire which would include quite a lot of protest songs exploring us to ban the bomb and stand up for our rights. I enjoy that aspect of folk music, though inevitably it will not attract some people. But this was more complicated than that - he can sing a protest song without your realising that that was what it was; no blatant lectures here, but a subtle presentation of a point of view.

Most of his songs are drawn directly from personal experience, and much of his writing reminded me of Harry Chapin - all his songs were short stories. As a Scot with an American mother, whose accent has permeated further into his speech than his native one, he is well placed to tell us about the conflicts of dichotomy.

Originally booked to play Readifolk in January, but unable to because of Reading's snow-bound state, he just snuck in in between December's snow storms instead. It was a long awaited appearance which left flavours to savour.

Alistair



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

The Right to Copy

Who owns a traditional song? "No one" would seem to be the obvious answer. But that doesn't stop people claiming rights to them.

If you look through the Paul Simon Complete Songbook, you'll find a transcript of his 1966 song *O'Clock News / Silent Night*. As an LP track, the piece consists of a recording of a news bulletin reporting war, murder and mayhem, juxtaposed over the Christmas carol *Silent Night*. This carol comprises the only real musical content of the piece, and so in the songbook the carol is all that is transcribed, together with the rather surprising information "Words and music by Paul Simon and Art Garkunkel" at the top of the page, and a copyright "All rights reserved" claim ascribed to Paul Simon at the bottom. Presumably the track's novel arrangement means that the piece is considered to be an original work. But one has to wonder what publishers of church hymnals make of that.

Rather more infamous, at least within folk music circles, is Paul Simon's alleged plagiarism of Martin Carthy's version of *Scarborough Fair* (or, as Carthy is now apt to call it, *The Elfin Knight* - see Issue 2 of Notes). Carthy has been known to express his discontent that Simon didn't allow any credit for the history and tradition of the song, once again claiming authorship rights to it when he arranged the traditional song in counterpoint with one of his own to form a supposed canticle.

When the Animals recorded the traditional song *House of the Rising Sun* in 1964, played as a blues number, their management advised them that if they were to publish their names as arrangers of the music, then they would be entitled to a writer's royalty from the song. Unfortunately (so the story goes), there was only space for the name of one of them on the record label, so, being alphabetically first, Alan Price became solely credited with arranging the song, and thus the only one to receive such royalties from the sale of their record. Lead singer Eric Burdon has often chewed a wasp in public about that. Yet Alan Price himself, when interviewed recently on the radio, said that he believed the song to date back to the sixteenth century, when it was about a brothel in Soho. The song has travelled to many countries, and has several variants, many of which will have directly contributed to the Animals' version. This leads one to wonder just how many people, reaching through history, could make a claim to a share of those royalties, and to ask whether such copyrighting has a place when applied to traditional songs.

In contrast to this, when Ewan MacColl recorded a version of the song *Lord Randall*, which had been taught to him as a boy by his mother, he was also advised to add his name as arranger to the writing credits. But he refused, reasoning as a matter of honour, that he should not be rewarded for what his mother had done for love. However, on hearing Ewan's recording, the Spinners also recorded it, and they were not so coy about copyrighting it. As a result, not only were they able to claim a royalty from their own recording, but whenever Ewan MacColl sold a record of the song that his mother taught him, he had to pay a royalty to the Spinners, despite his recording pre-dating theirs. Conversely, when Bob Dylan used it as the basis for his song *A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall*, few people felt unease that this wasn't anything other than an original work which drew from the past.

But when Led Zeppelin recorded *Black Mountain Side*, several people were quick to notice the similarities between Jimmy Page's guitarwork, and that of Bert Jansch on his recording of *Blackwater Side*. At one point Jansch's record company, Transatlantic, prepared a lawsuit against Led Zeppelin's management, but this was abandoned as the costs escalated. In some ways, it seems a pity that legal action was planned against the adaptation of a traditional song by a (then) contemporary supergroup. After all, Jansch himself had learned it, probably from Anne Briggs, who is thought to have brought it from Bert Lloyd, and so it goes back... That Jansch felt aggrieved that his version of a traditional song had been used

elsewhere seems as much at odds with the nature of a traditional song as does someone's desire to claim some sort of ownership of it. Probably much depends upon whether *Black Mountain Side* can be considered as a distinct composition from *Blackwater Side* - has the traditional song inspired or influenced the creation of the later song, or has it simply been copied? It would be nice to think that Page was recognising, learning from, and paying tribute to his roots, rather than 'stealing' from the past. In any case, in a broader perspective, it seems unlikely that rock music would sound the way it does if it hadn't been influenced by folk music.

And after all, Woody Guthrie said "If you want to be original, just steal from the best".

A Song Worth Singing

Auld Lang Syne

Malcolm Smith indulges in some Scottish tradition...

This well-known song is often attributed to Robert Burns, but certainly existed before he found it and added extra verses. He sent a copy of the original song to the Scots Musical Museum with the remark, "...an old song, of the olden times, and which has never been in print, nor even in manuscript until I took it down from an old man". The Scots title Auld Lang Syne (note the pronunciation: 'syne', not 'zyne') means 'old long since', or 'days gone by', and the song is clearly an appeal to remember old friendships.

The Scots custom of singing the song on Hogmanay or New Year's Eve appears to have started a long time ago. It has since spread to other parts of the British Isles, and around the world. The song is now commonly sung in many countries not only to celebrate the start of the New Year, but at other occasions, too. In the UK, these include the closing of the annual TUC conference, and the end of the Last Night of the Proms, where Auld Lang Syne is sung by the audience.

Traditionally, while singing Auld Lang Syne, people cross their arms to join hands with the people next to them to make a big circle. The Scottish tradition is that this is done only at the beginning of the last verse, reflecting the meaning of the words "gie's a hand o' thine". It appears that when the Queen followed this tradition at the New Year celebrations at the Millenium

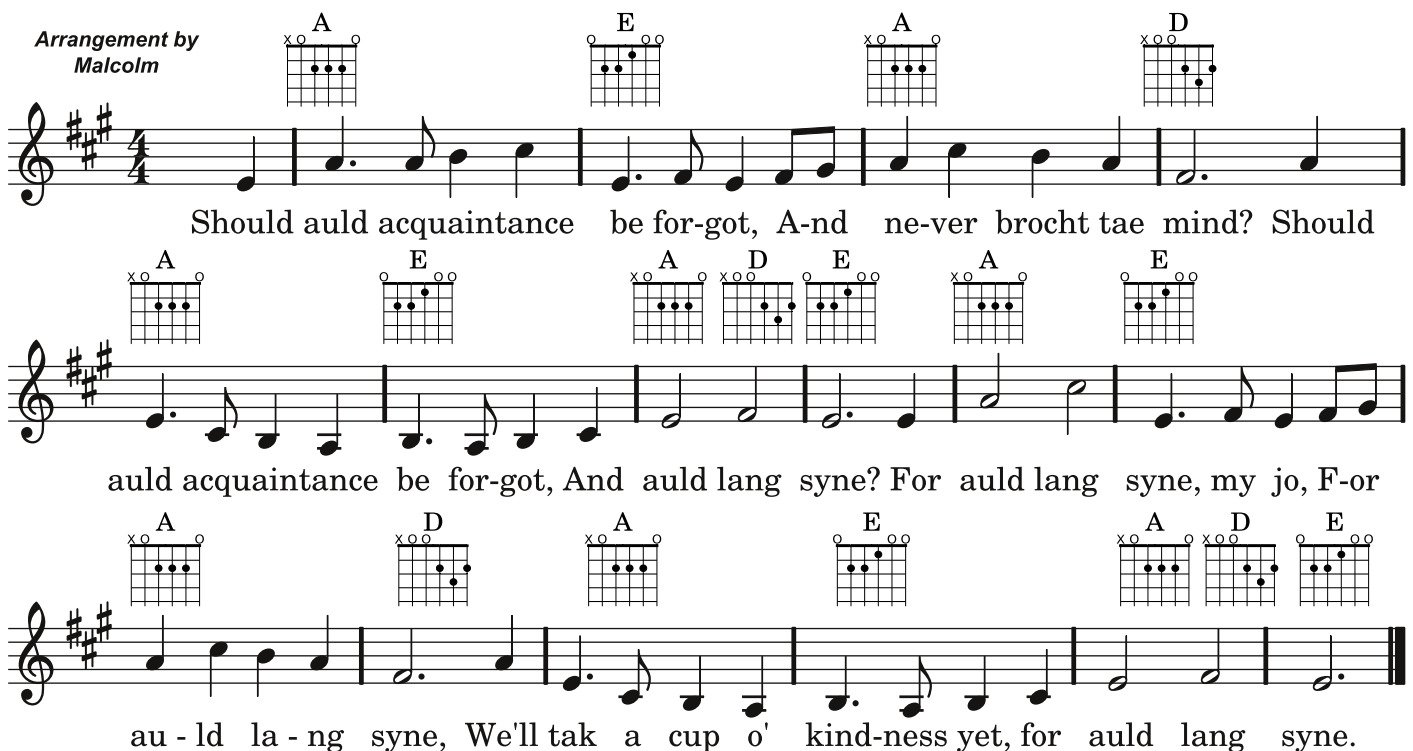
Dome in 2000, she was criticised by the English press for not joining hands at the beginning of the song!

It is not just in English-speaking countries that the song is known. In many countries, there are songs of farewell to the same melody. In France, the words are "Ce n'est qu'un au-revoir mes frères", signifying a farewell but a hope that the singers will meet again. In Japan, there is a song to the same tune called 'The Light of the Firefly', often sung at graduations, which praises a hard-working student who persists in studying even when the only light he can afford is a handy firefly.

Elvis Presley, Billy Joel and Jimi Hendrix have all recorded Auld Lang Syne, while Cliff Richard recorded The Lord's Prayer to the same tune. It appears that the song was sung as the British left India in 1948 and Hong Kong in 1997. Quite a reach for an old folk song.

However, the tune that is generally known is not necessarily the one that Burns heard, and at least one other tune is used for this song. Rod Paterson, who is known for his interpretations of Burns' songs, sings the song to the tune shown below. You can hear Rod singing it at Edinburgh Folk Club, on www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXj32bZZ-GI. He also sang it on one of the early BBC Transatlantic Sessions in 1996.

Arrangement by Malcolm



Should auld acquaintance be for-got, A-nd ne-ver brocht tae mind? Should
auld acquaintance be for-got, And auld lang syne? For auld lang syne, my jo, F-or
au - ld la - ng syne, We'll tak a cup o' kind-ness yet, for auld lang syne.

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brocht tae mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And auld lang syne?

Chorus

For auld lang syne, my jo [dear],
For auld lang syne,
we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.

And surely ye'll be [buy] your pint-stowp [cup],
And surely I'll be [buy] mine!
And we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.

We twa [two] hae run about the braes [slopes],
And pu'd [picked] the gowans [daisies] fine;
But we've wander'd mony [many] a weary fit [foot],
Sin auld lang syne.

We twa hae paidl'd [paddled] i' the burn [stream],
Frae morning sun till dine [dinner time];
But seas between us braid [broad] hae roar'd,
Sin auld lang syne.

And there's a hand, my trusty fiere [friend],
And gie's [give us] a hand o' thine!
And we'll tak a right gude-willy waught [goodwill drink],
For auld lang syne.

Readifolk Newsletter

My thanks go to ev'ryone, Oorily eerily, Who helped with this edition, I-ti-diddly-i-ti-de, And without whome, Fi-de-rollerum-pum, There couldn't be a newsletter.
Hi-ho and a rum-tum-tum.



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 JANUARY - MARCH 2011

<u>2 Jan</u>	Theme 'Party Pieces'	<i>Let's welcome the New Year with a fun evening featuring your favourite musical pieces.</i>
<u>9 Jan</u>	Patty Vetta & Alan Franks www.vettaandfranks.co.uk	<i>A scintillating combination of Alan's witty, pointed political and poignant songs and Patty's beautiful voice. "Truly excellent, sublime, sustained brilliance" The Times</i>
<u>16 Jan</u>	Singers Night	<i>The usual format – a song, a tune, a poem, a joke or just sit and be entertained.</i>
<u>23 Jan</u>	Quality Street	<i>A welcome return of this 'quality' trio. Wonderful harmony singing and superb guitar accompaniment.</i>
<u>30 Jan</u>	Theme 'News of the World'	<i>Could it be a song of scandal or just the latest news headline? You decide.</i>

<u>6 Feb</u>	Acushla www.acushlafolk.co.uk	<i>A brilliant 4-piece band playing music from the Celtic world.</i>
<u>13 Feb</u>	Damien Barber & Mike Wilson www.thedemonbarbers.com	<i>Powerful singing with guitar and button accordion accompaniment – delivered with a lively rapport with the audience.</i>
<u>20 Feb</u>	Singers Night	<i>Come and sing or play what you like. We'll give you every encouragement.</i>
<u>27 Feb</u>	Andy Smythe Band www.andysmythe.com	<i>Wonderfully evocative songs from this exciting 4-piece, guitar, piano, bass and drums combo.</i>

<u>6 Mar</u>	Ewan McLennan www.ewanmclennan.co.uk	<i>A gorgeous lilting voice, a quietly assured and commanding presence and some smart guitar arrangements. 'He is superb' – Mike Harding</i>
<u>13 Mar</u>	Theme 'Rivers'	<i>Go with the flow or make a splash. Let's hear your song on this watery theme.</i>
<u>20 Mar</u>	Jez Lowe www.jezlowe.com	<i>A long-awaited opportunity to hear this renowned singer/songwriter with an engaging Geordie wit.</i>
<u>27 Mar</u>	Singers Night	<i>Come and sing, play or just listen. A warm welcome is guaranteed.</i>

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

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

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