

FOLK SESSION – Virtual Brampton

The Brampton folk session met by Zoom on 19th January, with a very large virtual turn-out. A warm welcome to three new arrivals: Bev, Jeremy and Richard Harradine.

The theme was 'music and dance', with an eye on making life easier for our instrumentalists (as *any* tune played on an instrument fits in with the 'music' theme!) Sally Hardaker on tin whistle and flute gave us *Song of the Seven Streams*; *Dashing White Sergeant* and *Caddam Wood*, while Adrian on accordion played *British Grenadier*; *White Ladies Aston* and *Huntsman Chorus*.

'Dance' proved a popular subject, ranging from the joyful nonsense of *The Wee Kirkcudbright Centipede* (Bev) and the comedy of Joyce Grenfell's *Old Time Dancing* (Jan); Aitch's entertainingly irreverent *Bored of the Dance* and Phil's surreal *The Reel in the flickering light*, through Anne's warning tale of the dancers changed into a stone circle (*Stanton Drew*), to Richard Harradine's protest at 'the mad dance of war' (*Normandy Orchards*) and Jeremy's elegiac *Dancing at Whitsun*. Ruth sang *Love, call me home* (which mentions 'dance' in the last verse) because times are hard and people are troubled. Richard Hardaker invited us to 'step up and join the dance' (*Spend a while with me*). Sylvia's heroine danced alone with her shadow in *Danyuan Ren Changjui*, whereas Charlie recalled dancing 'cheek to cheek' (*Sweet Thames, Flow Softly*) and Ged admired *Sally Wheatley* as she 'hopped about' in a threesome reel. Taking dance to another level (literally!) was Mike's own song *Dancers in the sky*, about the Red Arrows.

Several singers found references to musical instruments: Sam praised *Johnny's Old Guitar*; Patsy and Bob mentioned the clarinet in *Real Good for Free*; a viol featured in *The Sweet Streams of Nancy* (Katy); a fiddle in Gerda's haunting ballad *Every Man's a Fool*; and the drum, guitar and bass in *Come, all ye rolling minstrels* (Alan). The hero of *The Galway Shawl* (Steve) plays a series of tunes while the heroine sings. Mary showed the proper creative spirit when she sang *Aitken DRUM* (groan!)

A more general musical theme was expressed in Terry's *Arthur Street*, where the musicians used to gather; Bill's optimistic *This Year* in which 'we can sing a song just like a troubadour' and Christine's *The Leader of the Band*. Arthur invited us to *Sing with me now* and Mick asked *What can a song do to you?* Elaine raised the cultural tone with Sir Walter Scott's *The Minstrel's Request*, while Sally – well, not exactly lowered it, but sent up the folk scene hilariously in *The Perfect Folk Club in the Sky*.

We next meet on Tuesday 16th February at 8pm by ZOOM. The theme will be 'happy endings' – because we could all do with cheering up. ALL WELCOME!

Folk Session – Virtual Brampton

In defiance of popular ideas of folk music, we had a thoroughly cheerful session on 16th February, encouraged by the theme of ‘happy endings’. A warm welcome to Steve Andisaw, Tori and Lester, all joining us for the first time.

Our instrumentalists that evening were Sally Hardaker on flute, playing *Hamburg Sexstur* and *The Wounded Hussar* (‘It has a happy ending because he gets better. We hope’, said Sally); Adrian on melodeon playing *Mona’s Delight* and Steve Andisaw on pan pipes and concertina, who gave us an exuberant medley of fairground tunes.

Our singers dug deep and came up with love stories with *happy* endings. Charlie contributed a version of *High Germanie* in which the lovers stay together; Christine’s *Albion Heart* and Anne’s *Dark-Eyed Sailor* both feature young men who come home after seven years overseas and marry the faithful sweetheart who has been waiting for them. *My Lovely Rose of Clare* (David and Liz); *Bonnet and Shawl* (Richard Harradine); *The Spinning Wheel* (Tori) and *Mountain High and Green* (Sylvia) all describe tranquil and harmonious courtships. The happy endings became more hard-won with escapes from a castle in *Ned of the Hill* (Gerda); a heroine disguised as a soldier in *Sweet Polly Oliver* (Ruth); Pip’s eventual reconciliation with Estella in *Pip’s Waltz* (Jeremy – the reference is to *Great Expectations*). Most dramatic of all was Janet’s struggle in *Tam Lyn* (Alan) to rescue her love from the Queen of Elfland.

Let us not forget the cheeky parodies that provided new endings to familiar stories: Richard Hardaker told how *Mrs Spencer the Rover* was much better off without her wandering spouse, and Bev provided a satisfactory end to an old tale in *My Husband’s got no courage in him (Viagra version)*.

Happy endings take other forms than love and marriage, of course. Phil lauded the comforts (and financial advantages!) of *Granny’s Old Arm Chair*. Some find their happiness in the family affection of *Costanza’s Kitchen* (Mick) or in everyday activities such as work (*The Carter* – Katy) and retirement after a lifetime at sea (*Retirement Song* – Aitch) whereas others, frankly, get their kicks from smuggling (*The Prussian King* – Lester). Shipwrecked fishermen were brought safely *Home from the sea* (Ged) by lifeboat volunteers, while brave Sir John saved the countryside from the ferocious *Lambton Worm* (Mike). Elaine looked forward to the happy time when the world would ‘put and end to war’ (*Strangest Dream*) and Mary’s song looked forward to the soldier’s return *When Johnny comes marching home*.

Several songs simply expressed contentment with the singer’s life/lot/surroundings: Sam and Eleanor Simmons captured this spirit in their Cotswold song *The Happy Man*. Sam Millington was delighted to be *Back home again*; Sally Jones was glad to be *Where Ravens Feed*. Arthur described his song, *Circle*, about life and friendship, as ‘happy all the way through’.

We next meet (virtually) on Tuesday, 16th March at 8pm. The theme will be ‘Dreams and Sleep’. ALL WELCOME!

FOLK SESSION – Virtual Brampton

We met virtually on 16th March with the soothing theme of ‘sleep and dreams’. A warm welcome to Frances and John, joining us for the first time.

Frances started us off with the lullaby *Coorie Doon*, the first of several over the course of the evening. The Border reiver’s wife lulled her baby with *Sleep, my babe* (Anne) and the Irish mother urged her hungry child to sleep in *Dún do Shúil* (Elaine). Sam Millington and Terry showed us very different facets of American life in, respectively, *The Hobo’s lullaby* and *Broadway lullaby*. Ruth took us back to the Elizabethan era with *Golden slumbers kiss your eyes*. Slightly too sophisticated to be a true lullaby, but still gentle and sleep-inducing, was *John o’ Dreams* (Steve). Also in the not-quite-lullaby category were *Morningtown Ride* (Mary) and *Little Man, you’ve had a busy day* (Mick).

Sally Hardaker on flute played two night-themed tunes, *Starry Night in Shetland* and *Da Slockit Light*. Richard Hardaker sang a night-visiting song, *When a man’s in love*, arguing that the parents at least must have been asleep or there would have been trouble! The little boy in Phil’s *Why does it have to be me?* protested vigorously at having to wake up and go to school. On the other hand, Gerda’s *Sleepless sailor* longed for rest ‘on the deep sea’ and Jeremy sang about the final sleep of death in the hymn *Only remembered*.

The ‘dream’ part of the theme was treated in various ways: we had plenty of literal dreams. Energetic ones, as in *Keep your feet still, Geordie hinny* (Charlie); absurd ones (*The Drover’s Dream* – Sam Simmons); prophetic or prescient ones such as piper Duncan Campbell’s vision of his death at *Ticonderoga* (Ged) and the sailor’s dream of the girl he had deserted on the *Magdalen Green* (Katy); homesick ones (*Spancil Hill* – Patsy and Bob). John explained that he hadn’t realised we had a theme but suggested we treat his song *Painting Box* as ‘all a dream’ (the true creative spirit!)

Then there were the dreams that express longing because that is *The way dreams are* (Mike). As Sally Jones pointed out, *Waltzing’s for dreamers*, while Eleanor sang about *Waiting for the shooting stars* and Christine confessed *Last night, I dreamed of loving you*. On a cheerful note, Jan sang about a dream that came true (*Gilli Gilli Oxenpfeffer Katzenellenbogen* - and made some of us feel **very old** when we realised that we remembered the song in its heyday). Dreams, however, are fleeting, a point picked up in Sylvia’s Mandarin Chinese song *Woman Flower*. The sailor in *The Wreck of the Dandenong* (Tori) dreams hauntingly of the family, warmth and home he will never see again.

Finally, there are the dreams that are aspirations: for *A new world in the morning* (Alan); the ‘stolen dreams’ in *Caledonia* (Richard Harradine); the longing for escape (*Sonny’s dream* – Patsy and Bob) and simply for an end to this pandemic! (*This fall* – Bev).

We meet – still virtually – next month on 20th April at 8pm. The theme will be ‘Spring’. ALL WELCOME!

FOLK SESSION – Virtual Brampton

It's April, so what could be more natural than the theme of 'Spring' when we met for our Zoom session? A warm welcome to new faces (and voices) Paul from Southampton and Ian from Macclesfield.

The fauna and flora of spring were popular. We had what Phil described as a 'hat trick of nightingales': they featured in Tori's *The birds in the spring*; Mick informed us that *A nightingale sang in Berkeley Square*, and Phil's song was simply called *The Nightingale*. Elaine invited us to *Follow the Heron*. *Blanche the baby owl* (Mary) made an engaging and undignified effort at first flight. *Loch Lomond* (Alan) mentions 'the wild flowers of spring'; Ruth longed to be *Where Primroses Grew* and Sally on flute played us *Pant corlan yr wyn* (The Lamb's Fold Vale). The seasonal rebirth has an additional layer of meaning in the Easter hymn *Now the green blade riseth* (Ian).

Sam delighted in *Springtime in the country*; Katy longed to see *Ma Normandie* and Ged, by a cunning substitution of one word ('spring afternoons' for 'warm afternoons') included the pleasures of the season in *Song for the Mira*. Chris praised spring on the Great Divide in the *Night Rider's Lament*. In tender and elegiac mood, Richard Hardaker's *Whither must I wander?* grieved that spring will return, but the wanderer will never regain the home he left, while the ladies who go *Dancing at Whitsun* (Richard Harradine) honour their menfolk who died in the First World War.

Charlie gave us the *Hal an Tow*, and Gerda told us what happened *As I roved out one May morning* (Yay! You can't have a spring-themed folk session without those, can you?) Steve told us what he did 'in the merry month of May' with a *Ball of Yarn* (Tsk!) and Sylvia's Mandarin song recounted *The Story of Spring*. Various other events happened in spring: *The Old Triangle* (Mike) mentions 'a fine spring evening'; *The Lakes of Pontchartrain* (Patsy and Bob) starts on 'one fine March morning'; the sailors toil 'all spring' to raise *The Mary Ellen Carter* (Paul) from the seabed. Anne, in mischievous mood, sang *The Rehabilitation of the Drunken Sailor*, based on recent blockage of the Suez Canal.

We next meet virtually on Tuesday 18th May at 8pm with the theme 'Occupations'. ALL WELCOME!

FOLK SESSION – Virtual Brampton

We enjoyed a lively on 18th May with the theme ‘Occupations’. Who would have thought that quite such a wide range of ways of making a living had had songs written about them?

Just to defy expectations of what you find in a folk session, Sam Millington brought us into the space age with *Armstrong*. Phil described the delights of a sewerman’s life (*I’m glad I’m working down below*); Paul and Karen harmonised about ‘When I was a singer’ (*Under that old Clare moon*); Mick’s theatre cleaner reminisced about the *Velvet Curtain* and Patsy and Bob sang about the hardships of *The Boxer’s* life. The monologue, *Free Activity Period* (Jan) gave us a comic insight into the vicissitudes of a nursery teacher’s work, and Mary’s poem warned us against falling into the hands of *The Practise Nurse*.

Injustices and inequalities were a significant sub-theme. *Roll on* (Terry) protested about the hardships of working life – poorly paid, exploited by employers and consumers alike, while *Three Nights and a Sunday* (Mike) noted too much work for some and not enough for others. Maddy poignantly described the sufferings of the worker discarded and unable to find *Honest Work* due to changes in the workplace.

Traditional trades appeared in *The Little Carpenter* (Gerda); *The Waggoner* (Mike); *The Jolly Miller* (Ruth) and the navvies who worked on the *Carlisle-Settle Railway* (Alan). Mill hands featured in *Shift and spin* (Ged); keelmen in *Carrying coals* (Charlie); and poachers in *Moon Song* (Richard Harradine). Mining was well-represented: *A Miner’s Life* (Steve); *1915-1972* (Elaine); and *The Coal and Albert Berry* (Miriam). Sailors and fishermen (and fisherwomen) were also popular: *Sailor* – Ian; *Falling more slowly* – Terry; *Hong Shui Lang Da Lang* – Sylvia. We had various angles on agriculture: Anne’s *Harvest Gypsies*, about the itinerant crop-pickers who travel Europe; *Cainc yr Odryddes* (The Milkmaid’s Song) from Sam and Eleanor Simmons and the merits of a *Plooman Laddie* as a husband (Katy).

We next meet (still virtually) on Tuesday 15th June at 8pm with the theme ‘Colours’. ALL WELCOME!

FOLK SESSION – Virtual Brampton

We had a session on 15th June that was not only entertaining but educational: the theme was ‘colour’ and we now know that black is an absence of colour, that silver and gold are not colours but ‘specular reflections from a white or yellow surface’ and that sage is an ‘iteration of green’. In spite of this scientific information, we still included all these (non-)colours in our songs!

A warm welcome to Angela with her hurdy-gurdy and welcome back to Charlie Carr and his fiddle, joining us for the first time on Zoom. Together with Adrian on melodeon, they made up our instrumentalists for the evening and worked heroically to find theme-related tunes: *Dark girl dressed in blue* and *Man in brown hat* (Angela); *Bonnets of blue* (Adrian); the hornpipe *Boys of blue hill* (Charlie).

Blues songs are a handy way of including a colour, so we heard the *Cocaine blues* from Mike and the *Self-assembly blues (and yellows)* from Sam Millington – also known as *Lost in IKEA!* Jan sang of colour in general in *True Colours* and Sally gave us the children’s song *Sing a Rainbow*. Some colours featured prominently in the titles: *Green eyes* (Mick); *Red River Valley* (Bev); *Bright blue rose* (Elaine); *Blue moon* (Ian) and *Nut brown maid* (Katy). Maddy sang *Grey Funnel Line* and Steve sang *Grey October Clouds* – we are assured that grey is a colour! From Mary we heard Roald Dahl’s wickedly funny version of *Red Riding Hood*, and from Ruth the charming *She wears red feathers and a hula-hula skirt*.

In other songs, the colours were tucked into the lyrics: there was a ‘red rocking chair’ in Gerda’s *I ain’t got no sugar baby now* and ‘purple shadows’ in Alan’s *Isalei* (a Fijian song about the sadness of leaving). Sylvia’s Mandarin song *Grassland at night is beautiful* mentioned green grassland and a silver star. Phil found blue, bright orange and sage in *The Hard Cheese of old England* and, in similar edible vein, Aitch recommended *Chocolate* ‘when your chequebook is red and you feel blue’. Eleanor and Sam Simmons summoned goats of red, pink, blue, green and white in the Welsh *Oes gafr eto* (what exciting goats you must have in Wales!)

We next meet on 20th July at 8pm, still by Zoom. Our theme will be ‘Transport’ – cars, planes, buses, horses, boats...are there any songs about motorbikes? ALL WELCOME!

FOLK SESSION – Virtual Brampton

Some of our regulars were away on holiday (and good for them!) on 20th July, but we had a lively session, circling around the theme of 'transport', including some rousing chorus songs which, alas, are not half so much fun when sung virtually.

Mike's song *Rolling English Road* had the widest chronological scope, ranging through the centuries from the Roman road to the modern bypass, and including feet, horseback, wagons, coaches and traffic jams. Gerda's journey to *Oregon* spanned the width of the United States, again with feet, horses and wagons, and adding boats for good measure. Sam stuck to water transport in his parody *Betty's Wet Weekend*, but still managed to list barges, trawlers, rafts, schooners and canoes.

Trains were popular: we heard about building them (*Poor Paddy on the Railway* – Chris); and riding them (*The Lakes of Pontchartrain* -Jeremy). Sylvia's *Sky Road* is magically summarised by herself: 'the railway built to the Tibet Snowy Plateau. Like one after another, dragons climbed over the mountain'. On a very serious note, Bev sang her own song, *Farewell*, about the Kindertransport, and Ged's *Ballad of Anne Frank* mentioned the railways that carried Hitler's cattle trucks eastwards to the camps.

Horses enjoyed an honourable mention in *The Maid of Reigate* (Katy) and *High Germanie* (Anne). Ships and boats were well-represented: Elaine told us about *Noah and the Flood*; Sally sang about *Whitby Harbour*; Alan about the *Ferry across the Mersey*; Phil about *The Transports*.

Just to prove that folk song can be very contemporary, Mary's form of transport was a spaceship, as she told us how *The Martians have landed in Wigan*. And, for variety, Mick mentioned a kiddie-car in *Little Man, you've had a Busy Day*; Ruth recommended *A Bicycle Built for Two*, and Adrian, ever inventive, not only picked up the challenge to find a song featuring a motorbike (*Cosher Bailey*) but found us a paddle boat and a bus in *The Day we went to Bangor*.

We next meet – still virtually – on 17th August at 8pm. The theme, by popular acclaim, will be 'animals', including, of course, birds, fish and insects.

FOLK SESSION – Virtual Brampton

Virtual Brampton met on 17th August to sing, play and recite on the subject of ‘animals’. A warm welcome to newcomers Ann Finch and Ray.

We had an unusually eclectic mix of approaches to the theme. Several people thoroughly enjoyed regressing to childhood, with *Nelly the Elephant* (Mary and Ann Finch); *Champion the Wonder Horse* (Maddy); a mouse in *A Windmill in Old Amsterdam* (Sally) and *Froggy went a-courting* (Bev). Others took the creepy-crawly route: Anne Gibson sang *Big Jim* (a worm), a tall tale about an angling competition; Phil, by request, introduced us to an amorous daddy-long-legs in *The Reel in the Flickering Light* and Mick used *Dragonflies* as a symbol of the brevity of human life. Birds featured, from *The Charcoal Black and the Bonny Grey* (Mike), about cock-fighting; to the blackbird in Ray’s *Winter Song*; via Chris’s folk tale from Lake Superior about Nanabush’s efforts to catch and cook wild duck.

At the other end of the size spectrum, we had whales (*Leviathan* – Steve; *The Miraculous Fish* – Katy); the elephant (*Me and the Elephant* – Sam Millington); and satirical hippos (*When hippos battle in the mud* – Paul).

To demonstrate how cultured we are, we heard songs in German, Old Welsh and Mandarin Chinese. Adrian sang *Ein Jaeger aus Kurpfalz*, which featured (so he assured us!) a hare, a cuckoo, a deer and a horse. Sam Simmons took us right back to the 7th Century with *Pais Dinogad* (Dinogad’s Coat), mentioning martens, dogs, fish, roebuck, boar, stag, grouse, lynx and fox. Sylvia took us *Back to our Mother’s House*, carrying a duck and a chicken.

At a folk session it is normal to hear ballads about shape-shifting seals (*The Great Selkie of Sule Skerrie* – Gerda) and foxes (*Black Fox* – Eleanor), possibly mules (*Would you like to swing on a star?* – Ruth) and dogs (*Chico* – Jeremy) but Aitch came up with the most unexpected animal in her song *Aardvark*.

We meet – still virtually – on 21st September at 8pm with the theme ‘Crimes and Misdemeanours’. Time to dust off all those songs about highwaymen, poachers and transportation!

FOLK SESSION – Virtual Brampton

The Brampton folk session met by Zoom on 21st September, with the theme of ‘Crimes and Misdemeanours’. A warm welcome to new contributors Andrew and Melanie.

Given the theme, it isn't really surprising that in the first five items we had three murders, three hangings, a miscarriage of justice, a knife fight and double death from despair and remorse! To begin with the murders - Andrew started us off with *Carew II (the rhyme that solves the crime)* – a parodic sequel to the old drawing-room recitation *The Green Eye of the Little Yellow God*. The next two murders-followed-by-executions were *Weila Waile* (Anne) and *Long Black Veil* (Sam Millington). The highest body count was achieved by Chris in the folk tale of that English bluebeard *Mr Fox* (it's not, however, a competition...) A different and sadder mood was created by Mick's singing of *Andy Goodman to his Mother*, about the Civil Rights worker murdered in Mississippi in 1964.

The knife fight referred to above took place in *A boy named Sue*, sung by Alan (at least the protagonists ended up alive!) and the deaths from despair/remorse in *Barbara Allen* (Ruth).

But, be reassured! We didn't spend the entire evening in quite such a sombre fashion. We had plenty of songs about good old-fashioned folk song sorts of crimes: highway robbery in *Whisky in the Jar* (Mike); bush-ranging in *Wild Colonial Boy* (Elaine); smuggling in Kipling's *Smuggler's Song* (Mary); poaching in *Jim Jones* (Sam Simmons) and armed rebellion in *The Song of the Western Men* (Adrian). The *Fair Maid of Islington* (Eleanor) took her innuendo-laden case to court against a tenant who failed to pay rent for use of her cellar (cough cough). Phil even found a light-hearted approach to arson in *Little Tim McGuire*.

Then there were the misdemeanours: the human tragedy of adultery (*Famous Blue Raincoat* – Bob; *Jolene* – Jan). But also the tongue-in-cheek tragedy of *Matilda, who told lies and was burned to death* (Melanie) and the social solecism of the risqué *Story that I started at the Kirk Soiree* (Katy). And one could debate for hours about which character committed what crime in Jake Thackray's *The Statues* (Paul), a song about two drunks who defend a bronze nymph from the advances of a statue of Robert Walpole.

We next meet on 19th October at 8pm with the theme ‘any song/poem etc that mentions a date’. One wit has already pointed out that dates are also fruit, so who knows what forms of creativity you will all come up with? We are still trying to see if we can arrange to meet ‘live’, so please look out for further information about whether we'll be meeting by Zoom or in the flesh.