



THE FOLK VOICE

AN ONLINE CONFERENCE, VIA ZOOM

ORGANISED BY

THE TRADITIONAL SONG FORUM

IN THREE SESSIONS

18 APRIL, 25 APRIL AND 2 MAY



Programme

Session 1 – 18 April

4.00	Welcome
4.10	Frankie Armstrong – Keynote: Who Calls You To Sing?
4.30	David Atkinson – Voice and Persona: To whom are we listening?
5.00	Bruce Lindsay – Some Nights at the Rechabite: how they built Sam Lerner.
5.30	Katie Howson – A hundred years of singing in a fishing community: King's Lynn 1870-1970

Session 2 – 25 April

4.00	Nick Dow – The Secret Stream
4.30	Katy Ryder – The Sound of Protest? Women, Strikes and Folksong in Victorian and Edwardian England
5.00	Paul Mansfield - Can I Sing This Here? Voicing traditional song in broader acoustic music contexts
5.30	John Baxter – Some reflections on Music Hall songs and their influence on traditional singers

Session 3 – 2 May

4.00	Steve Gardham – From Dorset to Yorkshire, the songs of Shepherd Miles
4.30	Elaine Bradtke – ‘Now for the music and now for the fun’: Carpenter's recordings of songs from folk plays
5.00	Brian Peters – Finding the Folk Voice
5.30	Kara O'Brien – Relaunching the Inishowen Song Project: Community Curation of Traditional Song

Please stay muted during the presentations. The chair will ask for questions after each paper and you may indicate that you wish to ask something by raising your hand (using the feature in Zoom ‘Reactions’). The Chair will then invite you to unmute yourself and ask your question.

Abstracts

Session 1 – 18 April

Who Calls You To Sing?

Frankie Armstrong

Let me start by offering a quote from John Kirkpatrick talking of folk tradition. 'It's dark and dangerous, it's exotic and mysterious and addresses the uncivilised part of the nature. Whose voice stirs this in us, who brings forth the shivers and arrests our ears and touches us viscerally? Who brings our ancestors to life and gives us an imaginative insight into the breadth and depth of our humanity, its foibles, absurdities, hilarities, tragedies and creativity? Of course, as a singer of ballads and traditional songs, I'm aware I'm being totally subjective when I select which songs to 'get inside' - for me an aesthetic judgement. In terms of action/qualitative research, the question that I could ask my audience is: did the song touch you, did it move you viscerally and to feel or think? This can be scary, but it's what it means to be a singer.

Frankie Armstrong began singing professionally in 1964, initially with Louis Killen who truly opened her ears to traditional song and styles of singing. She also began singing contemporary songs at the time of the Vietnam War. As well as songs for causes she is known for traditional ballads and songs which illuminate women's lives. She has made eleven solo albums and appeared on numerous shared and themed recordings. She has co-written three books and contributed chapters to eleven others. From her belief that singing creates a sense of community she began running workshops 45 years ago to help people find their voices.

Voice and Persona: To whom are we listening?

David Atkinson

While there are many ways of approaching the idea of the 'folk voice', an underlying question with songs is *who is speaking? to whom are we listening?* or to complicate the question, *which persona is addressing us at any given moment?* The voices that can be heard in songs include those present in song texts as well as those of author/composer, singer/performer, listener/reader, and those implied by melody/accompaniment and by setting/context. Theories of persona borrowed from popular music studies facilitate identifying the different voices that can be heard in songs, several of them at the same time. We can ask whether folk songs are in any way different from other kinds of songs and acknowledge that songs are regularly mediated through multiple personae.

David Atkinson is an Honorary Research Fellow at the Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, and Executive Secretary of the Kommission für Volksdichtung (Ballad Commission). He is the author of *The Ballad and its Past: Literary Histories and the Play of Memory* (2018), *The Anglo-Scottish Ballad and its Imaginary Contexts* (2014), and *The English Traditional Ballad: Theory, Method, and Practice* (2002). He has co-edited and contributed to several volumes, including *Street Literature and the Circulation of Songs* (2019), *Cheap Print and the People: Popular Culture in the European Perspective* (2019), *Street Literature of the Long*

Nineteenth Century: Producers, Sellers, Consumers (2017), *Ethnic Mobility in Ballads* (2017), *Street Ballads in Nineteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, and North America: The Interface between Print and Oral Traditions* (2014), and *Folk Song: Tradition, Revival, and Re-Creation* (2004).

Some Nights at the Rechabite: how they built Sam Larner.

Bruce Lindsay

Some Nights in the Rechabite analyses an experience that was crucial to the making of one of England's great traditional singers. Stereotypically, these performers learnt their singing, and their songs, around the family fireside, at school, or perhaps at work or in social settings. Sam Larner did all this and more. As a young fisherman Sam trod the boards in Lerwick's Rechabite Hall, performing to audiences of hundreds – there for free tobacco and cigarettes as much as from a love of musical entertainment – and sharing the stage with genteel pianists, light opera singers and purveyors of maudlin and sentimental ballads. In the company of this varied band of entertainers and in the face of such a large, boisterous and potentially hostile audience, Sam was a roaring success – bigger than Harry Lauder according to one enthusiastic, if biased, fan. This paper will use primary sources, including contemporary reviews, “fan mail” and Sam's own words and songs, to discuss the repertoire, on-stage style and performance techniques that brought Sam his fame, and will consider how these elements contributed to Sam's success five decades after the Rechabite concerts, when the folk revival “discovered” him and returned him, briefly, to the stage.

Bruce Lindsay is a social historian, music journalist and lapsed musician. Recent books include *Shellac and Swing! a social history of the gramophone in Britain* (Fonthill, 2020), and the *Two Bold Singermen and the English Folk Revival: the lives, song traditions and legacies of Sam Larner and Harry Cox* (Equinox Publications, 2021), which has been nominated for the Association of Recorded Sound Collections 2021 Awards for Excellence in Historical Recorded Sound Research.

A hundred years of singing in a fishing community: King's Lynn 1870-1970

Katie Howson

Vaughan Williams' song-collecting visit to the Norfolk town of King's Lynn in 1905 is well known, and I and others have studied it and written at length about it over the last few decades. In 2014 I did a presentation for a TSF meeting held in King's Lynn and was able to hint at other evidence of singing in the town in more recent times, including a radio broadcast in 1955 and field recordings in the 1960s. I had also just discovered a handwritten song book compiled by a fisherman between 1870 and 1890. All these came from within the same tight knit fishing community of the North End that formed the focus for much of Vaughan Williams' visit. Bringing these sources together, plus extra recently found primary material, gives us a wonderful opportunity to look at singing in one small community over a hundred years. In this presentation, generously illustrated with slides and audio clips, I will give an overview of the singers, their singing contexts, and repertoires in order to begin to reflect on the continuity and cohesiveness - or not - of a singing tradition in one small geographical area.

Katie Howson is a musician, educator, and social historian. She is well known, alongside husband John Howson, for championing the music, song, and dance from the eastern counties of England through both performance (e.g. Old Hat Concert Party) and recording (John founded the Veteran label). In 2000, the two founded the East Anglian Traditional Music Trust. From then until retiring in 2017,

Katie created and organised numerous events including a long-running community project in King's Lynn, introducing folk traditions to new generations. In 2010 she was awarded the EFDSS Gold Badge Award. She is the author of *Blyth Voices* (songs collected by Vaughan Williams in Suffolk, 2003); *Before the Night Was Out* (traditional music from Suffolk and Norfolk, 2007) *The Brightest of Entertainers*, (joint author with the late Pat Pickles: the history of percussive dancing dolls, shortlisted for the Katharine Briggs Award, 2019) and various educational publications and resources. Katie has a diverse range of research interests, including the history of the dulcimer in East Anglia and the many and varied stories relating to the music on a barrel-organ taken on Arctic expeditions in the 1820s. She has recently launched a new blog for her writings: www.unsunghistories.info



Session 2 – 25 April

The Secret Stream

Nick Dow

There is secret stream of Traditional songs flowing quietly and undisturbed within the Gypsy community, and those depths can be plumbed by the Folklorist, with permission and genuine respect. Nick Dow has been collecting and collating and singing songs from the Gypsy community for many years, from existing manuscripts, and in the field. There have been a few eye openers on the way. We will learn how Ella Leather was subject to a Gypsy Curse, how Vaughan Williams ended up sat on a bucket round a camp fire, the truth of Cecil Sharp's meeting with the Gypsy Folk, and how he was given a lesson in the Romany Language in Somerset. Nick will also talk about his own experience of collecting songs. Illustrated with photos.

One of the best Folk voices of his generation. **Nick Dow** has been singing and collecting Traditional Folk Songs for over forty years. His Guitar playing is sensitive and well thought out and his repertoire contains many songs you will hear nowhere else. Nick has gleaned songs from the West Country and been given songs by the Travelling people with whom he has lived and worked. Nick is trained in the dying art of Gypsy Wagon Painting and has worked as a painter for a long list of Celebrities including Ronnie Wood of the Rolling Stones. Nick Dow's gigs are informative, and entertaining. He has a great sense of humour, and nobody goes home disappointed.

The Sound of Protest? Women, Strikes and Folksong in Victorian and Edwardian England

Katy Ryder

The turn of the twentieth century was a point of great change in the political landscape of England; the working classes were becoming increasingly unionised, and women up and down the country were taking to the streets in the demand for universal suffrage. Whilst their more militant actions are now almost legendary, the use of music and song by these so-called 'suffragettes' has been much less discussed. Perhaps even more unexpected is the overlap between the campaign for the vote and the movement to collect traditional 'folk' songs, which rapid industrialisation was seen to be endangering at this time. Here these links will be explored, as well as the impact of folksong and earlier

political/protest songs on the music of the suffrage movement. In doing so, the question will also be raised as to what exactly may be counted amongst the traditional folksong 'canon', and the extent to which our understanding of this may be shaped by factors such as the gender or social class of a song's composer (if not by its anonymity), as well as its intended audience.

Katy Ryder is a music teacher and folk musician who recently completed an MA in Ethnomusicology at the University of Sheffield. She is particularly interested in exploring gender within the UK folk scene, both historically and in the present day.

Can I Sing This Here? Voicing traditional song in non-specialist settings

Paul Mansfield

This presentation will focus on the experiences of amateur singers of traditional song when performing in settings that do not specialise in traditional music.

The paper will refer to the reception of traditional song in different settings and how that influences singers' attitude to performance. The paper will also consider the range of both advertised and word-of-mouth local acoustic music events; this variety may complicate understandings of what music is deemed, formally or informally, to be welcome/permissible or unwelcome/impermissible in performance.

Using personal observation, existing sources and new interviews carried out for this purpose, I will examine the experiences of performers of traditional song and offer some thoughts about the survival of traditional song outside of what might be deemed, perhaps controversially, its protected environments.

Paul Mansfield is a singer of traditional repertoire in several folk clubs in the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, and contributes to the magazine, *The Living Tradition*.

He is the author of the chapter *Understanding the Repertoire Choices of Folk Club Singers* in Roud and Atkinson (eds.) 2019, *Old Songs, New Discoveries*, published by The Ballad Partners, and is currently working on a series of papers about folk clubs operating online during the pandemic.

Some reflections on Music Hall songs and their influence on traditional singers

John Baxter

Thousands of songs were written for performance in the Music Halls, and the height of the Halls' popularity coincided with a boom in English folk song collecting at the turn of the 19th century. Despite the intentions of some of the collectors, a small number of these songs found their way into the traditional repertoire. Later, more liberal collectors have added to this element of vernacular song in English-speaking world.

The repertoire of professional British Music Hall performers was extremely dynamic: songs were constantly being written, re-written, forgotten, and revived. The style and content of songs varied over time and to an extent regionally. Nonetheless a number of persistent song types and themes can be identified. My project is ongoing but having traced the stories of around 300 songs written and performed in the period 1830 to 1914, I will present some preliminary conclusions about the most

influential song types with respect to traditional singing. Using a small number of examples, I will also discuss how folk performers have sometimes voiced Music Hall songs in ways which substantially change the original accepted meaning of the song.

John Baxter is an amateur folksinger, an academic specialising in interdisciplinary studies at the Open University, currently Qualification Director of the BA/BSc Open degree. I facilitate regular singing sessions, mostly online these days. I am undertaking an ongoing project to explore the intersection of folksong and songs written for the Halls, you can explore it at <http://folksongandmusichall.com/>



Session 3 – 2 May

From Dorset to Yorkshire, the songs of Shepherd Miles.

Steve Gardham

In the first decade of the 20th century Vaughan Williams recorded some of the songs of Willy Miles and his wife at Woodlands, near Cranborne in Dorset. Unfortunately he only partly noted down the words to some of the songs. However, a young girl living locally, daughter of the vicar, was very friendly with the Miles family and learnt by oral tradition Willy's songs. She grew up to be a teacher and joined the EFDSS, eventually following her husband's job to Hull where I recorded her singing in October 1969. Her songs are now on the BLSA and available to all of her great grandchildren spread around the world. I would simply be telling the story of how this remarkable event came about and playing some of Dorothy Bavey's Miles songs.

A founder member of the TSF, **Steve Gardham** co-edited the new editions of the Marrow Bones series of anthologies based on the Hammond-Gardiner Manuscripts, and is in the process of helping to edit a further volume in addition to those originally edited by Frank Purslow. He recorded traditional songs in his native East Riding in the 60s and 70s which are now part of the National Sound Archive and has participated in the EFDSS Archive online. His speciality is researching the histories of English traditional songs and Child Ballads.

‘Now for the music and now for the fun’: Carpenter's recordings of songs from folk plays

Elaine Bradtke

In the course of his travels in England in Scotland between 1933 and 1935, James Madison Carpenter collected a great deal of folk drama material from former performers. In his theretofore unprecedented methodology, he collected plays and song texts from multiple members of the same group. It is difficult to say with precision how many plays he collected, but he collected plays in more than 150 different localities. He also recorded some of the songs onto dictaphone cylinders and photographed some of the participants. This paper will look at the songs associated with folk drama in the Carpenter collection and their recordings, and what may be learned from them about transmission and performance practice.

Elaine Bradtke is an ethnomusicologist and librarian. She has spent many years working on the James Madison Carpenter project, based at the Elphinstone Institute of the University of Aberdeen, and for the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. Before that she worked on the American Memory Project at the Library of Congress. During normal times she may be found singing, dancing, and playing the fiddle and mandolin with a variety of groups.

Finding the Folk Voice

Brian Peters

The second English folk song revival of the 1950s and beyond faced the thorny problem of developing vocal styles in which young, educated singers from urban and suburban backgrounds might perform convincingly old songs from rural working-class sources, whilst avoiding the polished and precious arrangements of art music. As principal founders of the revival, it fell to A. L. Lloyd and Ewan MacColl to establish some ground rules by example and by mentoring. This presentation will examine their early recordings, the instructional efforts of MacColl's Critics Group, and the varied approaches of the next generation of singers, from Anne Briggs to Martin Carthy, with respect to such features as accent, tone, decoration, and instrumental accompaniment. The extent to which revival singers sought to draw on the styles of traditional singers, or alternatively developed mannerisms of their own, is discussed.

Brian Peters has been a professional performer, researcher, and educator in the field of English traditional song for over thirty years, playing concerts and tutoring classes in the UK, North America and Australia. He has published research on song origins and development, Cecil Sharp's Appalachian collection, and the authenticity of folk revival repertoire, and is a regular reviewer for the Folk Music Journal. As a singer he has considerable experience of the challenges inherent in finding an appropriate voice for folk song.

Relaunching the Inishowen Song Project: Community Curation of Traditional Song

Kara O'Brien

The Inishowen Song Project (ISP) aims to preserve, promote and document the rich singing tradition of Ireland's Inishowen Peninsula. Begun in the 1980s, this unique collection now contains more than 2,000 items of audio, video, text and photographs, and offers a model for song collections created and curated by the singers themselves. In 2020 a major relaunch of the ISP was begun by members of the Inishowen Traditional Singers' Circle, with the object of updating the current collection and adding large amounts of new material and contextual information. This paper provides an introduction to the current ISP, its history and the materials in the collection, and a preview of the new version to be launched in December 2021. It will also explore the relaunch as an excellent model for singing communities collecting, curating, and contextualising their own song heritage.

Kara O'Brien is a traditional singer, song scholar and artist manager. Born in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, she graduated from the University of Colorado at Denver in 2016 with degrees in Vocal

Performance and Music Business, and moved to Limerick, Ireland to pursue an M.A. in Traditional Irish Music Performance at the Irish World Academy.

Kara has performed widely as a traditional singer, and with bluegrass and traditional jazz bands. She currently resides in Limerick, where she is pursuing a Ph.D. in Traditional Song Studies, focusing on traditional Irish hunting songs. She also teaches and performs regularly, and co-hosts the Limerick Traditional Singer's Session.

The conference will be simultaneously streamed live on YouTube for those who do not have a place in the Zoom section of the event. You will be able to find it by looking for the **Traditional Song Forum Channel** on YouTube. Videos of each of the sessions will be added to the TSF channel after the event,

The **Traditional Song Forum** has been in existence since 1998 and aims to provide support and to share information with all those interested in traditional song. Membership of TSF is free of charge and we rely for our finances on the donations we receive, particularly those members who choose to become **Friends of TSF**.

In the past we held meetings three or four times a year at various locations in the UK and Ireland. Since Covid we have been running fortnightly meetings on Zoom, usually with three or four short papers about matters related to traditional song. Videos of several of the past meetings are available on the TSF YouTube channel.

To find out more about the **Traditional Song Forum** and how to become a member go to our website:

www.tradsong.org.