



OLD MAN'S BEARD

THE NEWSLETTER OF
LUCY CASTLE, COMMUNITY MUSICIAN,
& TRAVELLERS JOY PUBLICATIONS

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Inside this Issue

A shorter edition than usual, because of a very busy period for me. I guess it must have been busy for a lot of you too, as there were no client contributions to this newsletter! I did, however, ask my dad to contribute an article, because what he does is very relevant to what it is all about. Over the page is an article he has written especially for "Old Man's Beard" about his work as a folk singer and storyteller, and how he came to it. You'll get most out of it if you're able to listen to the individual tracks on the CD indicated at various points in the article. (For online readers this will be the sound-files.)

On the subject of the CD / sound-files, there are a lot of really nice contributions from students, with a generally Christmassy theme. (Now why could that be?!) Remember when listening that everyone who has contributed has done so with a courage and openness that allows us to share in their work in progress, and have not held back their performances until such time as they felt they were perfect, but contributed them as they were.

It has always been my idea that the CD is a chance for the sort of sharing that might take place if we all got together for an end-of-term workshop, this being logistically impossible because of the huge variation in different geographical and life circumstances. So take this as a chance to "virtually" meet your fellow developing musicians. Not to compare and compete against—that would be futile as I work in a completely individual way with each of my students, so the milestones, as it were, are completely different, but to share the journey with, or at least wave to on the way!

THOUGHT FOR THE NEW YEAR!

TO BE ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN MUSIC-MAKING IN SOME WAY,
IS TO NURTURE VITAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN DIFFERENT ASPECTS
OF OUR THINKING, FEELING, BEING, AND COMMUNITY,
AND THEREFORE IS A VITALLY IMPORTANT PART OF BEING FULLY HUMAN.

Who is this newsletter for? *It's for anybody who is interested. It is distributed in paper format, free of charge, to my clients and their families, and appears on my website for all who wish to access it. It is meant to be of general interest, and particularly helpful to people involved in learning and developing their musicianship, as well as those in a supporting role. There should be a variety of articles coming from different perspectives, so that all can learn from the experience of others in different ways and at different levels, where appropriate with the sharing help of other supportive human beings.*

Contributions for next newsletter gratefully received.

PETE CASTLE

folk singer, storyteller



(and Lucy's dad!)

[Listen to Track 1: "Flash Company"](#)

It's amazing how often people go through school and on to college or university aiming for a career in a particular field and then suddenly give it all up and do something entirely different—something which they have no training in, perhaps. It seems particularly true of people in the arts and other 'creative' jobs.

It is true for me. As a boy was always 'good at drawing' so I was funnelled towards a career in 'art' although that was all very vague and no-one came up with an actual job I could aim for. When I was about 17 and thinking about where to go after school my art teacher asked whether I'd considered teaching. I hadn't but for some reason I did and went to Bretton Hall College of Education and became a teacher.

The trouble was I *wasn't* a teacher. I could do it, and I enjoyed the exciting, creative aspects of the job, but I couldn't really be bothered with spelling tests and collecting dinner money and all the other routine day to day tasks. When, after 8 or 9 years, I found myself in a school I hated (it was ruled through fear and corporal punishment) I decided enough was enough.

Ever since I was a teenager I had played the guitar and sung. At first it was the pop songs of the day and then rhythm and blues in local bands. When I went to college I discovered folk music. For most of my teaching career I had been singing in folk clubs as a hobby and had gradually built up a following and was known over quite a wide area.

Being a professional musician had always seemed an impossible dream—one I hadn't really dared dream, but perhaps this was my opportunity. So, in 1978, I stopped teaching and decided to give it a go. If it didn't work I could try something else. 30 years later I am still playing folk songs for a living!

At first it was just folk clubs and festivals but very soon I was enticed back into

schools—a folk club organiser who was a head teacher asked if I'd go and sing to the children the next morning and it went well. It soon became a nice little addition to my earning power. Then I realised that I was actually teaching the children more as a folk singer than I had as a teacher and I started to approach it in a more thoughtful way. Now I spend a lot of my time doing workshops in schools with pupils of all ages.

[Listen to Track 2: "Cock-a-Doodle Doo"](#)

At some time in the mid 1980s I became aware of 'storytelling'. It was another folk art which was happening alongside, but entirely separate to, the folk clubs and when I heard it I realised that the stories they were telling were just like my songs but without a tune. I learnt a few to use in schools and then tried it with adults and the mixture of songs and stories worked very well. Now I think of myself as 50:50 a folk singer and a storyteller. Sometimes I will do one or the other but most often I will do a bit of each. People listen to stories and songs in different ways so the mixture makes for a nice, varied programme.

The songs and stories I use are mainly traditional English ones because that is what I am. I do tell some foreign stories—particularly with younger children, and I've played Bengali music with Aroti Biswas and Romanian music with Lucy and the group Popeluc.

[Listen to Track 3: "The Two Magicians"](#)

Recently I put together a programme with a Punjabi storyteller. I love music and customs from other countries but I feel that my job is to 'fight the corner' for English folk arts. That's not because I am narrow minded or right wing—just the opposite. I want Britain to be in Europe and England to be part of the world and too often it isn't! How many times do you see the programme for a multi-cultural event where everyone is included except the English?! That is dangerous because English youngsters then grow up unaware of their own culture and thinking that everyone else has all these exotic and exciting customs except them!

In the summer I had the pleasure of going to America to participate in the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington DC where I played alongside 'cultural exemplars' from Virginia, Senegal, N.Ireland and SE Asia. It was a fantastic experience. The only language we all had in common was our love of music and traditions. It breaks down all the barriers. When Americans, Vietnamese and Chinese can jam together you know there is hope. Someone said "If the United Nations worked through music, beer and coffee the world would be a better place." I think they were right.

[Listen to Track 4: "Virginia"](#)

I'm amazingly lucky to do what I do and I'm really glad I had that career change and went into something I was completely untrained for. I've not had a music lesson in my life but have picked up what I needed as I went along. The fact that so many people don't know what is the right career for them must prove there is something wrong with the way our education system works. Perhaps we should just accept that we *can't* know what we want to do until we are adult and not try to shape and steer children towards narrow goals too early.

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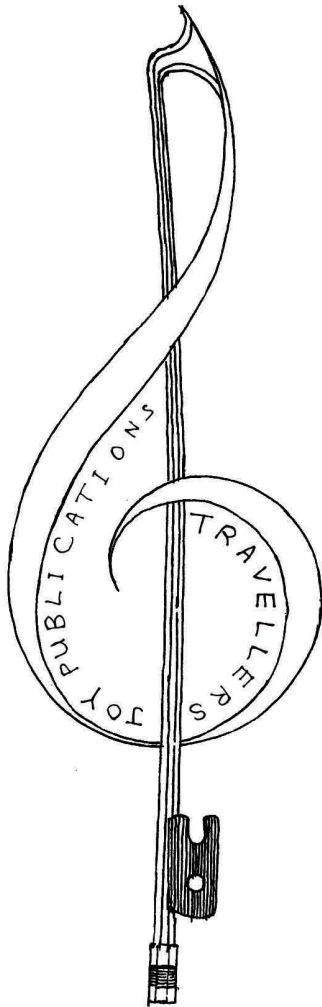
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Don't miss this issue's ACCOMPANYING CD! (or sound files, if you are reading this online)

CD Contents

CONGRATULATIONS and thank you to all who had the courage and generosity to contribute these performances, which represent just a snapshot of their "work in progress". Please listen to them in this spirit.

Duet and accompaniment parts played by me unless otherwise stated.

Tracks 1-4: **Pete Castle** (see article, pages 2-3)

Track 5: Eddie (piano) - "Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring", an arrangement of a famous piece by Bach

Track 6: Dulcie and her mum Alison (electric piano) - "Greensleeves", by Henry VIII (some say!)

Track 7: Nancy (piano) - "There Was A Tailor Had A Mouse", Traditional

Track 8: Max (piano) - "Copy Cat", from Joanna MacGregor's "PianoWorld"

Track 9: Esme (piano) - "Jingle Bells", an individual arrangement

Track 10: Ben (piano) - "Jingle Bells", an individual arrangement

Track 11: Madeleine (piano) - "Jingle Bells", an individual arrangement

Track 12: Katy (violin) - A Christmas Carol Medley put together by herself

Track 13: Ioana (piano) - "Jingle Bells", an individual arrangement