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Strange News

The new studio album from

TRADarr

December 2020



Introduction

PJ

Back in the 1950s, BBC Schools' "Singing Together" and shiny new Oxford School Music Books introduced me to the mainstream - "Cockles & Mussels," "The Ash Grove," etc. - but I liked the more interesting stuff that came via well-worn copies of English Folk-songs for Schools, the collection by Sabine Baring-Gould and Cecil Sharp (and taught to us by Mrs McDermott). Some of these songs had intriguing tunes, told engaging stories, had more verses and quirky lyrics from earlier times; some with a feel of mystery to them, a connection to another world.

Some of those tunes have been altered and arranged in recording them and the words may differ from what Cecil and the Rev. wrote down in 1907, but that's the folk process for you...

The recording of Strange News was finished just as Covid started sweeping the world; the seven of us had spent a year or so constructing these pieces and expected to be playing them live. At that point live music was pretty much cancelled for the foreseeable future.

So, until we can get onto a stage and play them, here's some greater detail on the songs that make up the Strange News collection.

The Rose of Allendale

Marion

Having taken on board the comment made by my mum that all folk songs seem to include at least one of the following - a murder, a shipwreck, an abandoned lover, people cross-dressing and a hanging, I set out to find a set of traditional lyrics which didn't. Something wholly lovely and positive! I wanted to find a sweet love song and do something poppy (as a bit of a counterbalance to Cuckoo's Nest, my offering on the last album, which let's face it, was septic!) So I stumbled upon these lyrics and a couple of different versions of it - Mary Black's which is beautiful and the Dubliners' which has a great joiny-in chorus. Charles Jeffreys is credited with writing the lyrics in the 1840's, so it's sort of traditional I s'pose.

It's assumed to be a Scottish or Irish tune, probably because of the number of artists from those countries who have performed it, but it is actually an English song, set in the Northumbrian village of Allendale.

So I set about writing a new tune for it using my favourite tuning - DADF#AD - and out it popped like a little frippery. Then in the studio, it morphed into a full on pop song, with brass! How very Kylie....

*The moon was bright
The night was clear
No breeze came o'er the sea
When Mary left her highland home
And wandered forth with me
The flowers be-decked the mountainside
And fragrance filled the vale
But by far the sweetest flower there
Was the rose of Allendale
Was the rose of Allendale
By far the sweetest flower there
Was the rose of Allendale*

*Where e'er I wandered east or west
Though fate began to sour
A solace still was she to me
In sorrow's lonely hour
When tempests lashed our lonely barque
And rent her quivering sail
One maiden's form withstood the storm*

*'Twas the rose of Allendale
Was the rose of Allendale
Sweet rose of Allendale
By far the sweetest flower there
Was the rose of Allendale
(Awesome solos from PJ and Guy)*

*And when my fever'd lips were parched
On Afric's burning sands
She whispered hopes of happiness
And tales of distant lands
My life has been a wilderness
Unblessed by fortune's scale
Had fate not linked my love to hers
The rose of Allendale
Was the rose of Allendale
Was the rose of Allendale
By far the sweetest flower there
Was the rose of Allendale*

PJ Wright	Electric guitar, Acoustic guitar, Tenor saxophone, Background vocals
Mark Stevens	Drums, Trumpet, Background vocals, Percussion
Marion Fleetwood	Lead vocals, Violin, Background vocals
Gemma Shirley	Background vocals, Keyboards
Guy Fletcher	Mandolin, Violin
Gregg Cave	Acoustic guitar
Brendan O'Neill	Bass guitar

The Barley Straw

PJ

I first heard The Barley Straw sung by The Young Tradition at a Coventry folk club (in those days every town had at least half a dozen) on a snowy night in 1968. Heather Wood's laconic introduction, "This is called the Barley Straw - which is a form of bedding - and deals with seduction - which is.....a form of bedding," made a great impression on young Pete Scrowther, sitting next to me.

*'Tis of a jolly old farmer
Lived in the west country.
He had the finest daughter
That ever my eyes did see.
'Tis of a rich young squire,
'Was living there close by,
And he found he wouldn't be easy
Until he'd had a try.*

*So he dressed himself as a tinker
And he travelled on his way.
Until he came to the farmer's house
'Was standing there close by.
"Oh, have you got any kettles or
Pots or pans to mend.
Have you got any lodgings
Cos I'm a single man".*

*"Oh, yes" replied this pretty maid,
Not thinking any harm.
"Oh, you can stay with us tonight
If you sleep in our old barn".
So after tea was over
And she went to make his bed,
The tinker following after
He stole her maidenhead.*

*The tinker, he being nimble
Jumped up and he barred the door,
She spent all night all in his arms
Amongst the Barley Straw.
"Oh, since you've slept with me all night
Don't think of me the worse".
He's put his hand in his pocket and
Pulled out a heavy purse.*

*"Oh, since you cannot marry me,
Pray tell to me your name.
Likewise your occupation
And where and whence you came".
He's whispered softly in her ear
"They call me Davey Shaw,
And if ever I came this way again,
You'll remember the Barley Straw".*

*Now six month being over,
And the nine month coming on,
This pretty little fair maid
Is the mother of a son.
Her father cried "Oh, daughter dear,
Who has done you this harm".
"I'm afraid it was the tinker
That slept in our old barn".*

PJ Wright	Electric guitar, Acoustic guitar,
Mark Stevens	Drums, Background vocals, Percussion
Marion Fleetwood	Harmony vocals, Violin, Background vocals, Whistling
Gemma Shirley	Keyboards
Guy Fletcher	Mandolin, Violin
Gregg Cave	Lead vocals
Brendan O'Neill	Bass guitar

A Country Farmer's Son

Mark

Well...PJ gave me a book of old folk songs that he had when he was a schoolboy, and amongst the pages I found 'A Country Farmer's Son.' Lyrically I thought it could have been a Dylan song so I dug out a riff I'd had knocking about for a few years and the whole song came together very quickly. There's definitely a touch of the 'All Right Nows' about it, but that can only be a good thing. Great energy from PJ's slide guitar and Gregg's vocal.

*I would not be a monarch with a crown upon my head
And earls to wait upon my state in 'broidered robes of red
For he must bare for many a care his toil is never done
Tis better I trow behind a plough, a country farmer's son*

*No I would not be a merchant rich and eat off a silver plate
And ever dread whilst laid a bed some freakish turn of fate
One day on high then ruin nigh I now wealthy now undone
Tis better for me at ease to be a country farmer's son*

*I walk about the farm all day to know that all things thrive
A maid I see that pleaseth me why then I'm fain to swive
Not over rich I do not itch for wealth, for what is won
By honest toil from out the soil, a country farmer's son.*

PJ Wright	Slide guitar, Electric guitar, Acoustic guitar, Tenor saxophone
Mark Stevens	Drums, Trumpet, Background vocals, Hammond Organ, Percussion
Marion Fleetwood	Percussion, Background vocals, Handclaps
Gemma Shirley	Background vocals, Keyboards
Guy Fletcher`	Violin
Gregg Cave	Lead vocals, Handclaps
Brendan O'Neill	Bass guitar
Mike Stevens	Baritone Saxophone

Lovers' Lament

Mark

Two old and well-established pieces with a new melody for Lovers' Lament sung and harmonised to perfection by Marion and Gemma, who along with me also take care of all instrumentation.

*I'll weave my love a garland. It shall be dressed so fine
I'll set it round with roses, with lilies pinks and thyme
And I'll present it to my love when he comes back from sea
For I love my love and I love my love, because my love loves me*

*I wish I were an arrow that sped into the air
I'd seek him as a sparrow and if he were not there
then quickly I'd become a fish to search the raging sea
For I love my love and I love my love, because my love loves me*

*I would I were a reaper I'd seek him in the corn
I would I were a keeper. I'd hunt him with my horn
I'd blow a blast when found at last, beneath the greenwood tree
For I love my love and I love my love, because my love loves me*

*I'll weave my love a garland. It shall be dressed so fine
I'll set it round with roses, with lilies pinks and thyme
And I'll present it to my love when he comes back from sea
For I love my love and I love my love, because my love loves me*

Mark Stevens	Drums, Flugelhorn, Electric guitar
Marion Fleetwood	Lead vocals, violin
Gemma Shirley	Harmony vocals, Keyboards

Mary of the Silvery Tide

Guy

Everyone was asked to put forward a few items of material for Trads three. I had a few songs I liked and thought would work and started some home demos. Additionally I looked at songs I hadn't heard/wasn't familiar with. I liked the title Mary Of the Silvery Tide, it made me curious to find out the way in which Mary was 'of the tide'. My guess was that Mary had either emerged from or was heading towards the tide. I was correct! I chose to ignore the music which was originally in 6/8 and see what I could do with it. I had a groove in mind and went to see if I could make the song fit in 5/4. I like irregular time signatures and thought heavy guitars and lots of echo in the Space Rock direction of the band My Morning Jacket could work for this track. In the end our producer gave it more of a Scott Walker vibe. Look out for the odd bar of 6/4 - especially if you're in the band playing it.

*'Twas of a lovely creature who dwelled by the seaside,
Her lovely form and features she was the village pride;
There was a young sea captain who Mary's heart would
gain,
But she was true to Henry, who was sailing on the main.*

*'Twas in young Henry's absence this noble man he
came
A-courting pretty Mary, but she refused the same.
She said, "I pray you begone, young man, your vows
are all in vain,
Therefore begone, I love but one and he's on the raging
main."*

*With mad desperation this noble man he said,
"To prove the separation I'll take her life away;
I'll watch her late and early, then alone," he cried,
"I'll send her body a-floating in the rippling tide."*

*This noble man was walking out to take the air,
Down by the rolling ocean he met the lady fair.
He said, "My pretty fair maid, you consent to be my
bride,
Or you shall swim far from here in the silvery tide."*

*With trembling limbs cried Mary, "My vows I never can
break,
For Henry I dearly love and I'll die for his sweet sake."
With his handkerchief he bound her hands and plunged
her in the main*

*Her shrinking body went floating in the rolling silvery
tide.*

*It happened Mary's true love soon after came from sea,
Expecting to be happy and fix the wedding day.
"We fear your true love's murdered," her aged parents
cried,
"Or she caused her own destruction in the silvery tide."*

*As Henry on his pillow lay a fever'd dream woke he
His true love calling out to him from far away at sea
At daybreak the next morning he searched the coast a
cried
And found the corpse a-floating in the rolling silvery tide*

*He knew it was his Mary by the ring upon her hand.
He untied the silk handkerchief which put him to a
stand,
For the name of her cruel murderer was full thereon he
spied,
Which proved who ended Mary's days in the silvery
tide.*

*This noble man was taken, the gallows were his doom
For ending pretty Mary's days, she had scarce attained
her bloom.*

*Young Henry brokenhearted he wandered till he died.
His last words were for Mary in the rolling silvery tide.*

PJ Wright	Electric guitar, Tenor saxophone, Baritone guitar
Mark Stevens	Drums, Synthesizer, Trumpet, Percussion
Marion Fleetwood	Harmony vocals, Violin, Viola, Cello
Gemma Shirley	Harmony vocals, Fender Rhodes
Guy Fletcher	Lead vocals, Acoustic guitar
Gregg Cave	Background vocals, Harmony vocals
Brendan O'Neill	Bass guitar

Shore to Shore

Gregg

I was involved in a 'lock-in' years ago in a shady corner of Northampton town and as the night got so late it became the next day the acoustic guitars were out and a young lady sung a song she called '10,000 miles of the Turtle dove'. I remember the words being lovely. Roll on years later I was reading through an old collection of folk songs I had and the words that I recognized from that night jumped out at me.

I have completely re-written it here and added the chorus. Parky and I worked on the music for a while and these words were a fine fit. A song of coming together...

*10,000 miles fare you well my own true love
The stars won't start falling the dove will perch on our silver tree
We're taking on mountains, chasing suns and watching them burn
This love is for dreamers, seeds of love pushing the sky*

*Hold it, Hold it up
Hold it, Hold it up
Hold it, Hold it up
With these hands, with these hearts we'll stand shore to shore*

*On the wings of a black crow the brightest day shall turn to night
I'll return as the white dove melting rocks in the golden sun
Cause 10,000 miles my love is true as the sea to the moon
The stars won't start falling reaching down touching shores*

*Hold it, Hold it up
Hold it, Hold it up
Hold it, Hold it up
With these hands, with these hearts we'll stand shore to shore*

PJ Wright	Electric guitar, Baritone guitar
Mark Stevens	Drums, Celeste, Background vocals, Percussion
Marion Fleetwood	Background vocals, Violin, Viola, Cello
Gemma Shirley	Background vocals, Handclaps
Guy Fletcher	Mandolin, Background vocals
Gregg Cave	Lead vocals, Acoustic guitar
Brendan O'Neill	Bass guitar
Mike Stevens	Guitar

The Blacksmith

Gemma

So being pretty new to folk music I had no idea what a popular and well loved song this is. I first came across it one hungover Sunday morning at my parents-in-law's house. Father-in-law was in the habit of getting the vinyl out while we waited for Guy to awake and educating me in folk music by playing me the most obscure things he could dig out-When Steam Came To The Fair and a charity shop find about cycling called Rump Up spring to mind. This came along with the more usual Waterasons and Copper family until one Sunday he put on Anthems In Eden by Shirley and Dolly Collins and I was immediately entranced.

Back in the 60's the in-laws ran a folk club in Northampton. As it turned out The Blacksmith was Mother-in-law's song of choice to perform. It also turned up that year as an arrangement in the Associated Board Of the Royal Schools of music grade 2 singing syllabus-the universe had spoken...

I came up with the melody in the back of the car on the way to Blandford Forum where Guy and PJ were playing at Wessex Acoustic folk club. It seemed to lend itself to something with different sections as the emotions change through the song and I wanted to give the protagonist scope for a more visceral reaction to her unfaithful lover. The singalong "Ohs" came first and what starts as a plaintive lament grows into something more vengeful, maybe even murderous....with congas!

*A Blacksmith courted me nine months and better
He fairly won my heart, wrote me a letter
With his hammer in his hand he looked so clever
And if I were with my love I would live forever*

*O where has my love gone with his cheeks like roses?
He has gone across the sea gathering primroses
I'm afraid the shining sun might burn and scorch his beauty
And if I were with my love I would do my duty*

*Strange news is come to town strange news is a-carried
Strange news flies up and down that my love is a-married
O I wish them both much joy though they don't hear me
And if I were with my love I would do my duty*

*O what did you promise me when you lay beside me?
You said you'd marry me and not deny me
If I said I'd marry you 'twas only to try you
So bring your witness love and I'll not deny you*

*O witness have I none save God almighty
And may he reward you well for the slighting of me
Her lips grew pale and wan it made her poor heart tremble
To think she had loved one and he proved deceitful*

*A Blacksmith courted me nine months and better
He fairly won my heart, wrote me a letter
With his hammer in his hand he looked so clever
And if I were with my love I would live forever*

PJ Wright	Acoustic guitar, Electric guitar, Tenor saxophone
Mark Stevens	Drums, Trumpet, Synthesizer, Percussion
Marion Fleetwood	Background vocals, Cello
Gemma Shirley	Lead vocals, Harmony vocals, Violin
Guy Fletcher	Acoustic guitar, Background vocals
Gregg Cave	Congas
Brendan O'Neill	Bass guitar

Mary Neal

Gregg

I found these words in John Clare's folk song collection. He stated in his collection that he would hear his parents sing the words and there are one or two different versions that he recorded, this one being my favourite. All old words except the chorus refrain of 'breaking earth...' I wrote. A little verse I'd written, inspired by our very own Marion Fleetwood after she gave me a book with the line 'A time to fly' Thanks Maz !

*There's beauty in the summer flower and in the hawthorn blossom
Tis sweet to lie at evens hour upon a sweethearts bosom
Sweet to lean upon her arm and loves emotions feel
While walking round the wood and field
With handsome Mary Neal...*

*Young Mary Neal was handsome and Mary Neal was fair
She was worth a lady's ransom with her dark and flowing hair
How fair the flower how soft the wind Through bushes used to steal
Like woodbine round the thorn entwined
I walked with Mary Neal...*

*How sweet the thorn its tender green shot o'er the wood side way
Sweet dimples In the brook was seen as though sweet showers of May
When down the green we used to hide and through the wood ride steal
When I kissed her cheek and praised her eye
Of my own Mary Neal...*

Breaking earth and crossing shores make true your aim, with open arms we adore, this time, our time, a time to fly.

*How beautiful the morn arose and o'er the barley shone
When I clasped her where the hedge briar grows young Mary all my own At broken
vows my heart would die the thought on't makes me reel
For her I live and love and sigh
My Lovely Mary Neal...*

Breaking earth and crossing shores make true your aim, with open arms we adore, this time, our time, a time to fly.

*How beautiful the morn arose and o'er the barley shone
When I clasped her where the hedge briar grows young Mary all my own*

PJ Wright	Electric guitar
Mark Stevens	Drums, Synthesizer, Horn section, Percussion
Marion Fleetwood	Harmony vocals
Gemma Shirley	Background vocals
Guy Fletcher	Violin
Gregg Cave	Lead vocals, Acoustic guitar
Brendan O'Neill	Bass guitar

Cold Blows the Wind

Mark

A fabulous duet with Marion on a truly epic scale with full string section, tymps, tubular bells, haunting trumpet and dark tremolo guitar. This is another one I found in PJ's schoolbook of folk songs, the original melody was a lot more upbeat and I felt it would work better for us if it was more sombre and orchestral so I came up with a new tune. My vocal was just for the demo so that the rest of the band could get a feel for the song but somehow it managed to stay there until the end and makes Marion sound even more fantastic than she already is (Ed....the rest of the band thought your vocals were fabulously perfect on here Parky!)

*Cold blows the wind tonight true love, cold are the drops of rain
I never had but one sweetheart. In Grayswood she lies slain
I'll do as much for my sweetheart as any young man may
I'll sit and mourn all on her grave a twelvemonth and a day*

*The twelvemonth and a day were passed
The ghost began to speak
Why weep you there upon my grave and will not let me sleep
what is it that you want of me and will not let me rest
Your salty tears they trickle down and soak my linen dress*

*What dost thou want of me true heart of me what dost thou crave
Well only a kiss from your lily white lips then I'll go from your grave
My lips are cold as clay sweetheart, my breath is earthy strong
And if you kiss my lily white lips your time will not be long*

*Our time be short our time be long, tomorrow or today
May Christ in heaven have my soul, but I'll kiss your lips of clay
When shall we meet again sweetheart, tell me, tell me when
As the oaken leaves fall from the trees and green will spring again*

*Cold blows the wind tonight true love, cold are the drops of rain
I never had but one sweetheart, in Grayswood she lies slain
I'll do as much for my sweetheart as any young man may
I'll sit and mourn all on her grave a twelvemonth and a day*

PJ Wright	Electric guitar, Baritone guitar
Mark Stevens	Lead vocals, Drums, Trumpet, Percussion
Marion Fleetwood	Harmony vocals, Violin, Viola, Cello
Gemma Shirley	Background vocals, Keyboards
Guy Fletcher	Violin, Mandola
Gregg Cave	Acoustic guitar
Brendan O'Neill	Bass guitar

The Mare and the Foal

Gregg

These words jumped out at me and I knew I wanted to do something with them. A nonsense song really, just like the nonsense we've all had to put up with in recent years from our so-called leaders of the Free World. Again I added the chorus and last verse. This last verse I feel sums up the mood nicely.. Thank you Alan Hull for the inspiration with this one!

*A mare and a foal ran with great speed,
The mare from the Bible began for to read.
Stay said the foal but before you begin,
Whatever you pray for I'll answer amen.*

*We'll pray for the millers, who grind us our corn
For they are the biggest rogues that were born.
Instead of one sack they'll take two for toll
May the Devil take millers...amen said the foal.*

Chorus

*Cause when you add it all up, there's not a lot
Just a lot of empty lies in the councillors plot.
Makes about as much sense as the mare and the foal.*

*We'll pray for the tailors for they are no men
They'll buy an old coat and they'll sell it again.
They'll rub it and scrub it and darn up a hole
May the Devil take tailors...amen said the foal.*

*Yes we'll pray for the butchers for they are great cheats,
They'll buy an old cow and sell it as young meat.
May their fingers be burnt into cinders of coal
may the Devil take butchers.. amen said the foal*

(Chorus)

*We'll pray for the politicians that cheat
Oh they'll buy an old bus and they'll lie and they'll bleat.
May their lies be etched on their graves of stone
May the Devil take liars...amen said the foal.*

(Chorus)

PJ Wright	Electric guitar, Pedal steel guitar, Slide guitar
Mark Stevens	Drums, Percussion
Marion Fleetwood	Backing Vocals, Violin
Gemma Shirley	Background vocals
Guy Fletcher	Background vocals, Mandolin
Gregg Cave	Lead vocals, Acoustic guitar
Brendan O'Neill	Bass guitar

Staunton Whale

PJ

Collected by A L Lloyd as 'Whaling in Greenland', published in *Something to Sing* - ed. Geoffrey Brace, Cambridge University Press, 1963.

*They signed us weary whaling men
For the icy Greenland ground
They said we'd take a score of whale
while we were outward bound
while we were outward bound*

*The lookout up in the barrel stood
A spyglass in his hand
There's a whale, there's a whale, there's a whalefish he cried
And she blows at every span
She blows at every span*

*Captain stands stands on the quarter deck
The ice is in his eye
Overhaul, overhaul let your davit tackle fall
And put your boats to sea
And put your boats to sea*

*The harpoon struck, the line ran out
The fish gave a flurry with its tail
The boat went down with a dozen men
They never did catch that whale
They never did catch that whale*

*'Bad news, bad news,' our captain said
And grieved his heart full sore
But losing a hundred-barrel whale
Oh, it grieved him ten times more
It grieved him ten times more*

*Oh the winter star did then appear
It was time to anchor weigh
And stow below our running gear
And homeward bear away
And homeward bear away*

PJ Wright	Lead vocals, Electric guitar, Acoustic guitar
Mark Stevens	Drums, Harmony vocals, Percussion
Marion Fleetwood	Violin, Cello
Gemma Shirley	Violin, Background vocals
Guy Fletcher	Violin, Background vocals
Gregg Cave	Background vocals
Brendan O'Neill	Bass guitar
Simon Care	Melodeon

And the final words go to Brendan.....

Bass, 4 simple letters and 4 strings (no more!). That's what I have been bringing to the Tradarr party since I took over Bass duties from Tim Harries (some very big shoes to fill) in what seems like an age ago.

We have done many gigs and most have been great! I say most, as the first few may have been a bit nerve-wracking and it can take time to bed in with these things, but I have found my groove, evidence for which can be found in the latest album 'Strange News'.

I love the gigging aspect of Tradarr, festivals, theatres (both home and away!), bars and back stage and I also love recording. The fruits of which you can now purchase!! Please do!! The process was different to what I have been used to in previous bands. I am used to recording altogether in a sweaty studio somewhere, this was a little more refined and done in a much more professional way!! With much more tea!

Thanks must go to Parky for making me sound better than I am, apparently you can polish a turd, and it's all come out sounding rather lovely!!

It's been great playing with these lot who are all fantastic in their own way, and they all have many more strings to deal with than I do.

Long may this continue, but if and when(!) we make it to the next album (let's enjoy this one first) I will have to add to my musical arsenal!

Do enjoy the album. I recommend a healthy bit of volume and a strong cup of tea! See you soon

Brendan

Produced, developed and engineered by Mark Stevens at The Moulton Pie Company Studio, Northamptonshire

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