

STIRRINGS

I've been a great admirer of Pete Coe, the "one-man folk festival", for an astonishing fifty years, since the sixteen year old me sat in the Beach Store in Sidmouth admiring the total coolness of the languidly tall guy with floppy blond hair and prominent cheekbones who so confidently, along with his equally cool blonde girlfriend Christine Richards, sang unaccompanied trad English songs, often with an edge of darkness, going: "Oh, me name it is Jack Hall, chimney sweep, chimney sweep", and "Come and I will sing you" with an instantly recognisable voice and style, and total commitment and presence. His longevity on the English folk scene, and his development as a singer, musician, dancer, songwriter, and enabler of others' development are the stuff of legend in my eyes.

My dad recorded some of Pete and Chris way back then, at our annual family pilgrimage to Sidmouth, and later at other festivals and events my parents went to, on his mono Philips cassette recorder. When I get time to digitise those tapes that have survived, I expect to find some good Coe stuff, not a lot, but good. When I was twenty, my younger brother Theo and I pinched the Cornish "Come and I will sing you..." Dilly Song when we were invited to do a song together for a Cyril Tawney West Country folk club style television series. (I blanked out on a whole verse, but Theo kept singing, and I think we got away with it...)

I don't know if Pete ever still sings that one, but Jack Hall, with the tune much varied from when in his twenties, is one of the songs on this newest CD. And that development from young unaccompanied singer? As he has done for many years now, he accompanies himself expertly with effortless banjo, bouzouki, the late and great Tony Rose's guitar, Hohner melodeons, and foot percussion. Accompaniments it's a joy to listen to. A master performer.

David Crickmore produced, and adds lead guitar, bass, and synthesiser when required; Andy Peacock ditto with drums; chorus voices are lent by Johnny Adams, Chris Coe, Emma Crickmore, Annie Dearman, Alan Rose, Lynda Hardcastle, Helen Hockenhull, Mike Hockenhull and John Clough.

I could go through the song list, and say that I bet you never heard The Spanish Lady quite like that before, and that, blimey, what a great job he and his collaborators make of Terry Conway's brilliant, sweeping contemplation on the history of warring peoples, The Walls Of Troy, and gosh, I haven't heard his Joseph Baker yarn for years, and so on... But no need: it's the latest CD from a really superb English folk singer and musician. If you recognise Pete's stature, you'll want it.

Jerry Simon