

KlezNorth Youlgrave Festival

A weekend of klezmer music, song and dance in a Peak District village

- conceived and organised on a shoestring
by Judith Plowman and Adrian Dobson
with Judy Sherwood and Phil Tomlinson

It really was about time that the North held its own Festival of Klezmer. The scattered musicians, singers and dancers across the more northerly part of Britain do meet up from time to time, but seldom as more than a generous roomful. This time, we hoped to attract enough Klezmerim to fill a hall and create a lively party atmosphere, maybe thirty or even forty enthusiasts, but we never once predicted the extent of the northern Klezmer Diaspora. A good month before KlezNorth, we found ourselves having to turn away would-be participants, as we already had reached the magical figure of one hundred.

KlezNorth was conceived as a Festival on a 'shoe-string', one which everyone could afford. The luxury version involved booking one's own accommodation in the lovely village of Youlgrave. The basic version meant sleeping on the floor in Youlgrave Village Hall, actually not at all as bad as it sounds, as I can vouch. Home-made evening meals and breakfasts were included in the price, whilst food brought to share made for delicious and varied lunches.

Programme

Perhaps the North has come of age, for we realised that we had by now among our numbers sufficient talents to organise a full festival programme of instrumental, dance and song workshops, as well as illustrated talks on the history of Klezmer. Mostly, there were three different strands running concurrently: instrumental; dance or song; lectures, jam sessions or other themed instrumental workshops. Ros Hawley and Ray Kohn organised classes for instrumentalists, Phil Tomlinson ran sessions for vocalists, whilst Judith Plowman led the dancers to accompaniment from our resilient house band, The Klatsh. Sue Cooper, Simon Carlyle and Ros Hawley gave fascinating talks on aspects of the background and history of Klezmer music, beautifully illustrated with early recordings, whilst Adrian Dobson, Andrew Gardiner, Keith Lander, Sue Cooper and Jo Veal all helped to focus rhythm workshops and jam sessions.

Judith's 'to do' lists

Of course, it isn't just talented musicians and dancers that make a festival, as we began to realise as the bookings rolled in. Judith's creative and organisational talents grew to match the multiplying and mutating demands of the ever-growing numbers: a car-park, an extra workshop venue, a '10 Things to Bring' list. Judy Sherwood and Judith quite literally spent days in the kitchen, chopping, mixing, stirring, baking, boiling and freezing. Simon patiently transcribed music onto pdf files as it was

requested by workshop leaders, then arranged for it to be sent out. Phone calls and e-mails needed answering as participants asked for reassurance, further information or just human contact. It became clear as Judith's 'to do' lists grew longer and longer, that practical support during the actual weekend would be needed. Just when we were despairing of finding an angel to act as housekeeper, Sylvia Goater volunteered for this demanding role. And she was wonderful at keeping the duty rotas running. Food appeared as if by magic. Washing up was done swiftly and without fuss. Tea, coffee and drinks never ran out. The kitchen stayed tidy, and there was so much good-humoured fun that some volunteers came back for more.

Why Youlgrave?

For those of you have never yet been there, this is the moment to go. It is a lovely Peak District village, small, irresistibly pretty and stone built. It has shops and pubs with plenty of accommodation, cottages, bed and breakfasts, a youth hostel, a campsite and beautiful landscapes all around. The local people seem very friendly, but most importantly, it has an airy and spacious Village Hall with showers, so we could play music to midnight and sleep there too. Some of you will have spotted by now that there are two ways of spelling Youlgrave / Youlgrave, one at either end of the village. We were anxious that transport might be awkward for those not arriving by car, but these fears were dispelled by the early arrival of two Klezmerim travelling separately from France who both reported that the buses from Derby to Bakewell work very well indeed, as do the buses from Bakewell to Youlgrave. Of course, motorists faced different challenges: single track roads, steep hills, eccentric signposting and the treacherous field we had been encouraged to hire for car-parking.

Much happened that was unforgettable

Two Welsh Klezmer bands, *The Klezmonauts* and *Finickity Chaos* arrived, apparently from opposite sides of the same mountain, but neither knowing of the other's existence. Keith Lander was transformed from his usual serious self into an amazingly lively, witty and over-ebullient Master of Ceremonies. Our filming and recording technicians, Tim and Andy, could be found shooting the event from every possible angle. Dancing Klezmer feet, intense Klezmer faces, gesturing Klezmer hands and spiralling Klezmer dance patterns should all be captured forever, once the hours of watching, listening, cutting and pasting have finally been done. For me, the Rhythm Workshop produced the most amazing music, and the evidence that a Klezmer band needs but one strong lead instrument, whilst generating excitement and energy from any number of percussionists, bass and rhythm players. For others, the Sunday morning car-pushing workshop will be equally memorable, as we strove to free vehicles trapped in tussocky wet grass. Friendships are forged in adversity, and we really were much better musicians once we had all struggled in the mud together.

'Hope to make it a tradition'

KlezNorth never really goes away. Of course, the clearing up has been done, and washing up put away. Boxes of bowls and cruets are back in our loft. Tunes go on reverberating in our heads, and encouraging messages continue to trickle in:

'an amazing weekend that will stay in my memory for a life time. Rarely do we get such good value for money in life. Am so grateful to all who organised it and the tutors and especially to yourself. Definitely want to come again.'

'I have been singing and dancing in the kitchen -- with my accordion, and generally feeling happy. :-). I've been learning one of Phil's songs... let's see if I can practice it now...'

'Loved Ros's workshops, very helpful; loved Simon's talk esp his digital rendering of heterophony! and loved the many opportunities for just playing along. Loved hearing and joining Phil singing'

'I am absolutely in awe of your energy and dedication in organising and leading the whole thing. It's a remarkable achievement to coordinate and (especially) feed so many people as smoothly as you and your team did - I came away feeling extremely impressed.'

'And the food! Yikes, I've got to go on a diet after all those yummy cakes. . .'

'The communal dancing - my greatest discovery'

'I feel inspired to learn to break into the upper register on clarinet, which I've not done much of before. The clarinettists at the workshop were wonderful!'

'I loved the feeling of safety and trust that one has at an event of this size. Didn't once worry about my stuff being safe.'

'The energy, music and atmosphere was great and the organisation spot on. Pam and Dave from Devon really enjoyed themselves, and would probably come again in the future. I think everyone's wondering when the next is!!!'

'You could tell the level of thought and care that went into organising. Ran smoothly so enjoyment experience could grow.'

'Will come again – yes ... silly question!' 'Hope to make it a tradition'.

Adrian Dobson April 2010