

Interview – Tracey Wisdom

Summary

MW introduces, thanks TW. MW asks how TW got into folk music. TW says she was singing in various choirs and having singing lessons, doing lots of classical singing, in her early 20s. She wandered into the Sole Bay Inn in Southwold on a May bank holiday. A group of people were singing and there was a melodeon player. She remembers joining in with rousing choruses and having fun. A friend called out that she was a singer, the melodeon player asked if she knew any folk songs. The only folk song she knew was The Butcher Boy, having learned it from a Pye factory demo record as a child. The story had always fascinated her, although she hadn't always understood that it was about suicide and teenage pregnancy. Liked the lilt of the song. She said she knew it, melodeon player offered to accompany her. Seemed to go down quite well. It turned out this was a yearly event they held every bank holiday, TW started going every year. Met Paul Wisdom, folk musician, who later became her husband and father of her daughter, Megan. Paul introduced TW to folk sessions, particularly one at the Butley Oyster in Suffolk, which was long-running and popular. Learned some songs to sing there and at the Golden Key, Ipswich. Built up a repertoire singing with Paul over many years. TW finds it interesting that The Butcher Boy was the song she picked out of a pile of demonstration records that her family were given by her uncle. TW explains that "Pye" is the record manufacturer, not as in steak and kidney. The Butcher Boy was the song she liked most at age 7/8 so her love of folk music started quite early on. She also used to sit at the piano and play through the family copy of the Community and Standard Songbook, being drawn to songs such as Cockled and Mussels and The Lass of Richmond Hill, The Oak and the Ash. Also Sea Shanties. It was not until many years later that TW discovered that the melodeon player from the Sole Bay was Tony Hall, a well-known melodeon player in folk circles, has played with Nic Jones amongst others. He became a dear friend. TW feels lucky that he is one of the people who introduced her to folk music in the first place. MW interjects that she has been to those bank holiday sessions for many years. TW agrees that she has been attending since she was a baby, remembers that MW sat in the Lord Nelson, Southwold, in a car seat, perched between the bar and the family room aged around 3 months (no children were allowed in the bar) in order to be part of the session. MW asks what keeps TW coming back to folk events etc. and what she likes about folk music. TW says that she loves the inclusivity and the community feel, the sharing of music, the way it makes you feel to stand in a room full of people singing a chorus or playing a tune. The sense of everybody in the moment as one with something. The fun and people who enjoy the same things. The simplicity of folk music. MW asks if TW has any final thoughts. TW says nowadays she has started playing her fiddle relatively recently after 25 years, having played at school. Folk music has opened many doors for her. She plays in a ceildh band. She has made a great many friends, locally and at folk festivals further afield. It has been a big presence in her life and will continue to be so. MW thanks, TW thanks.