

Dave Pegg, ‘Peggy’ of Fairport Convention



2023 tour line-up (L-R) Dave Mattacks, Chris Leslie, Simon Nicol, Ric Sanders & Peggy

by Carl Filby

As stated elsewhere on this website I really did fall in love with folk music after listening to Fairport’s ‘Liege & Lief’ album, bought unheard on a whim from a friend, but for various reasons it’s about 50 years since I went to a Fairport concert. I owe Fairport Convention an awful lot in terms of musical enjoyment and I’m therefore delighted to be going to see them in Harpenden on their [2023 tour](#) and very grateful to Peggy for taking time out to answer a range of questions for Unicorn Folk.

After such a long time performing what keeps you going as it must have been difficult at times?

Loads of times but too difficult to put into words and very personal in my case. We all love playing and obviously the camaraderie is there and we are all great chums and Fairport always has been a band of friends.

How would you describe Fairport’s music? To what extent is it still ‘Folk-Rock’ or was that just a transient label and how did/do you feel about that?

Folk -rock or Frock as we now refer to it was a label attached to Fairport in the late 60’s and did to some extent describe the amalgamation of traditional songs and tunes in the form of the band’s album Liege and Lief. Nowadays we don’t have too many traditional songs in our concerts. We have “The Banks of the Sweet Primroses” and “Matty Groves” in our current set.

Are there some songs from the early years that you still love performing and are there some that you try and avoid? For what reasons and do these ‘favourite’ and ‘least favourite’ songs change over the years?

For me I love playing some things that bring back happy memories. Currently we have a song that has traditional lyrics “Polly on the shore” that I wrote the music to for the album Fairport 9. Having Dave Mattacks back behind the kit on this tour means we can perform more vintage Fairport material.

“Matty Groves” and “Meet on the Ledge” are always in the set and “Matty” is always fun to play as it has improvised instrumental sections that keep you on your toes musically!

“Meet on the Ledge” means so much to our fans and has become an anthem to departed friends.

To what extent is your between-the-songs patter rehearsed or updated or do you keep the sets fresh by changing the songs with their different introductions?

We tend to keep the same songs in the set once the tour starts but the patter in between is not set and is often spontaneous. Ric has some very amusing intros and he could do "stand up" in my opinion.

I guess that I have to ask the Covid question – how did you/Fairport cope?

Myself and my partner Ellen reside in Brittany and covid and lockdown meant that we were able to enjoy our garden and the nearby beaches and watch the seasons change there for the first time. This has led to Fairport changing our work schedule so the spring tour that we used to do is now replaced by an October tour.

Financially it hit us and anyone who works in the theatre/ entertainment industry very hard and it's only now recovering and our audiences are coming back. We have had a couple of full houses this week which is great.

Our Cropredy festival luckily benefitted from a government grant which enabled us to pay for the warehouse and offices that we rent and pay bills that relate to the event. We had sold 7000 tickets and our fans trusted us with the funds which we put aside for the rescheduled date and this happened twice so 2020 and 2021 festivals were abandoned. Last August's event was such a joy and it was fantastic to all be back together on that wonderful site. We have a fantastic line up planned for this August 10th, 11th and 12th.

You have a quote from The Guardian on your website which said about a recent gig - "Stuffing their set with a surprising amount of new material for a vintage act, Fairport are still clearly having fun and brought the house down." Two questions arise from that:

a) Where do you now draw inspiration from for your new songs these days?

We are very lucky to have Chris Leslie in the band who is our main source for songs. He gets better and better and has written some beautiful songs. "My love is in America" and "Moondust and Solitude" are in the current set along with "Steampunkery" Ric Sanders' amazing instrumental. Ric and myself come up with tunes for recording and we have friends like Ralph McTell and Rob Beattie and Anna Ryder who come up with songs for us.

b) What mixture of new and old material can be expected on the upcoming tour?

We are playing stuff from the Full House album which were recorded at Cropredy with Richard Thompson and Dave Mattacks guesting and is our current CD release. We still do lots of songs from "Shuffle and go" our most recent studio album.

What are the best and worst aspects of a concert tour in your view?

We still really do enjoy gigging and the best aspect is having such a fantastic crew who make everything so easy. We turn up for soundcheck and everything is set up and Paul Smith does a great job making it sound good every night. Occasionally though we have long drives and tiredness can set in. Tristan Bryant our agent and tour manager does a tremendous job getting us around.

I saw you with Anthony John Clarke at Royston Folk Club a few years ago and note that you and Chris have recorded 'Bold Reynold' recently as part of 'David Carroll and Friends? To what extent do you keep in touch with the folk club scene and why?

I was in the Ian Campbell Folk Group in the late 60's and love going back to the clubs when I get the chance to play with my good friend Anthony John Clarke. It gives me the chance to get my mandolin and guitar out and I hope to be doing some club gigs in November with A.J.

Leaving aside all the other competing factors, if it came down to a straight choice between playing a gig in an intimate venue or on a big stage, which would you choose and why?

They both have their appeal and for me the venue size isn't that much of an issue. As long as you can get comfy soundwise and have an audience who are enjoying what you do I'm happy.

Has anyone else noticed a similarity between Chris Leslie's singing and that of Dave Swarbrick, or is that a deliberate ploy for the Full House set? I always liked Swarb's singing style by the way even though I think I heard Swarb himself describe it as being a bit like a submerged duck.

Chris has the same vocal range as Swarb. which helps when we do older songs. I always rated Swarb as a vocalist. He always sang in tune and had perfect pitch.

The success of the Cropredy festival has clearly played a big part in Fairport's history over the years. I'm sure there is a big team behind that now but how do various members of the band get involved in its organisation these days?

The festival was created and run for over 20 years by myself and my ex-wife Christine. The band were never involved in the organisation. When Christine and I split we appointed Gareth Williams as our C.E.O. and he does a fantastic job putting Cropredy together. It's an all year round occupation I can assure you. Simon and I are also involved and help by suggesting bands and performers and I sometimes have to negotiate with agents and managers which can sometimes be difficult!

What do you most enjoy about Cropredy?

I just think It's the best festival in the world and urge you to come and see it for yourselves!

If you could have any band or artist play a concert especially for you, who would it be?

James Taylor, Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell please.

Who are your favourite young musicians, from any genre, folk or otherwise, and why do you like them?

I am really enjoying listening to Hannah Sanders and Ben Savage who are opening for us on this tour.

What do you do to relax outside of music, in between tours and the Cropredy festival, that you care to admit to?

Living in Brittany I enjoy long beach walks and exploring new places and I am learning to play the cello.

Many thanks Peggy and good luck with the tour: [details here](#)