

# Fairport Convention @ Cambridge Junction

Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> October 2024

Concert review by Carl Filby



There would be several candidates if I had to choose my favourite band dating from the late sixties and early seventies and one of them would undoubtedly be Fairport Convention. I discovered them in 1970 when, on a whim, without knowing anything about the band I bought *Liege n' Lief* from a friend. That was the start of a long love affair with folk music because that album ultimately drew me into the acoustic side of folk as well as developing my taste for folk rock. Of course, Fairport are much more than a 'Frock' band (their term for folk rock) these days and are essentially a great band of musicians with a fine back catalogue of songs to choose from written by themselves and some of the best songwriters around, Ralph McTell, Steve Tilston, James Taylor and others perhaps less known but just as good.

So, I was delighted to get the chance to see them again, this time in Cambridge on their Autumn Tour without drummer Dave Mattacks who will join them again in February for their Wintour 2025. I rather like the bass section to have a drummer so I wasn't sure what to expect, but of course these are musicians who have been playing together for more than fifty years in the case of Simon Nicol and Dave 'Peggy' Pegg and even 'newcomer' Chris Leslie has been in the band for 28 years, so I really shouldn't have had any concerns. In a more intimate setting with Ric Sanders completing the line-up they sat on stage and entertained us with their confident delivery of the music and their laid-back chat in-between. It's not just for us oldies either as my daughter, still in her twenties, accompanied me on this occasion and appreciated the often humorous introductions to the songs as well as the music itself.

As is traditional, the band opened with *Walk Awhile* from their 1970 *Full House* album and included two other songs, *Now Be Thankful* and *Doctor of Physick* from that album in their first half set, the last two being different from the other 'Full House' songs which they played on their Wintour 2023 when I last saw them. In many ways it was a very different concert from the one I saw last year though just as enjoyable.

The 4-piece format gave them a chance to air some of the quieter more reflective songs such as *Crazy Man Michael* and I particularly enjoyed the rendition of Chris Leslie's song *The Fossil*

*Hunter* which both featured early on in the first half which also contained *Banks of The Sweet Primroses*, *Banbury Fair* and *Bankruptured* and finished with *Cider Rain*.

Fairport are without a support on this tour and whilst it is always interesting to see the young, up-and-coming act that they often select to accompany them on their Wintours, it was also nice to be able to focus on their music alone. They also give very good value timewise and one senses that they really do enjoy being out on the road meeting their fans. There was no rush to leave the stage at the end and I was able to have a quick word with Chris Leslie to thank him for the generous time he gave me when I interviewed him for Unicorn Folk via Zoom recently.

However, I am jumping ahead and before the end we were treated to what seemed like a generously long second half opening with Steve Tilston's *Slips, Jigs and Reels* followed by Chris Leslie's *John Gaudie / Shetland Tunes* and the Banbury inspired UFO story of *The Year of Fifty Nine*, plus another fiddle tune *Steampunkery* also from the *Shuffle and Go* album. Overall, there was a good selection of songs from the many albums that Fairport have to choose from in their back catalogue, including James Taylor's *The Frozen Man* and another Chris Leslie song *I'm Already There*, like *The Fossil Hunter* taken from their 2004 album *Over The Next Hill*. That man Leslie really is a very talented songwriter!

Simon treated the audience to *Over The Lancashire Hills* from his *Before Your Time* solo album then all too soon we were enjoying the traditional *Matty Groves* and agreeing with the band that it was entirely appropriate to imagine *Meet On The Ledge* as the encore without all the usual palava of exiting the stage and being clapped back.

I know that it's a well-used cliché, but I really think that Fairport are like a fine vintage wine that has improved over the years BUT, on a note of caution, a lot of us folkies are getting older and neither the wine nor the drinker will be around forever so DO catch them whilst you can. You won't be disappointed!

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