

# Reg Meuross & The Strike @ The Stables

Sunday 23rd March 2025

Concert review by Carl Filby

This was both my first visit to The Stables at Milton Keynes and also my first Reg Meuross concert and both proved to be very enjoyable experiences.

I have long included gigs at The Stables in the Unicorn Diary Listing on this website as they offer a good choice of music which appeals to fans of 'folk' in all its forms. The auditorium seats around 300 people in a setting which feels both spacious and intimate at the same time and in one sense that was true of the music as well on this particular evening.



Here is a man from Teesside, my own humble origins, telling the story of a folk singer from the other side of the Atlantic who performed mainly between the 1930s and 1950s and had a huge impact on folk music both in his own time and country and around the world and across time, in folk circles at least, and what a story!

Let me be honest and say that despite our shared origins I knew even less about Reg Meuross than I did about Woody Guthrie before I was sent the album 'Fire & Dust' to review earlier this year and you will be able to tell from the review (under [Music/CD Reviews](#)) what a deep impression the album made on me.

Of course, one reason why Woody Guthrie's music is so well known still is that it was picked up by Bob Dylan at an early stage of his career and one can equally turn that fact around to say that in doing so Dylan was helping his own career as well, though I somehow doubt that was in either of their minds at the time when they knew each other.

If you wish to know the relevance of Woody Guthrie to the present day then you only need to know that through his music he spoke for the oppressed, the downtrodden and the economic victims of his time, in particular migrants who served their purpose but were then regarded as mere statistics who were no longer wanted. If that sounds familiar it is not only the present U.S. Administration that is guilty of such attitudes.

Woody isn't around any more to voice his concerns but Reg Meuross has done an excellent job in researching his life and music and putting it together in such an easily digestible form for people like me! In a sense Meuross has become the modern day standard bearer for Guthrie, in the UK at least, and I think that both the album and the accompanying concert tour will have contributed significantly to any revival of interest in the latter's music.

There are still a few opportunities to see Reg Meuross and The Strike perform songs from **Fire & Dust** and although all the songs are taken from the album they are performed with a freshness that emphasises their different qualities when played live. In some cases that means that a song that works very well on the album, and I would cite **Red Shoes** as my favourite, doesn't necessarily stand out in the same way live, but that is also true in reverse and I would say to a greater extent.

The song that stood out for me in the live show was ***Stackabones & Runaway Boy*** which was beautifully sung by Meuross and emphasised the tragedy of the death of Woody's daughter Cathy in an echo of the death of his sister Clara, also by fire, hence that part of the title of the album.

For those who are about to buy the album or attend a concert there may be a dilemma as to which to do first. I enjoyed the album so much that I had played it several times by the time I got to the concert and had read all the biography of Woody Guthrie that came with it. It begs a similar question as to whether one should "read the book before seeing the film" or vice-versa, in this case see the live show or listen to the album first. It's a tricky question! Clearly I was more aware of the nuances between the songs on disk and sung live than if I had not listened to the album first though a lot of the narrative was familiar. Perhaps it is best to listen to the songs but not read the biography before seeing the live show as you can always follow up on that later.

In concert, the narrative of Woody Guthrie's story was shared by Meuross and Marion Fleetwood who also played the fiddle and provided backing vocals as part of The Strike, the other members being Phil Beer on mandolin, guitar and Fiddle, and Geraint Watkins on keyboards and accordion, both also providing backing vocals. The narrative was so compelling that at one point Watkins exclaimed "Oh S\*\*t!" as he missed his cue for the next song, so engrossed was he in the story. I doubt if that was a scripted response but it was remarkably convincing if it was and raised some gentle laughter from a good humoured and receptive audience which was the hallmark of the evening despite some desperately sad moments in the narrative of Guthrie's life.

The narrative between the songs instead of anecdotes made it a bit different from the average folk concert and ultimately enhanced a very enjoyable evening and a very worthwhile experience. You won't be dancing in your seats but you are bound to emerge with a greater empathy for the subject matter of Guthrie's song and the man himself as well as a keener appreciation of the songwriting and performance skills of Reg Meuross ably supported by The Strike.

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