

Fairport Convention @ The Apex, Bury St Edmunds

Wednesday 18th March 2026

Concert review by Carl Filby

Well, here I am blessed with another chance to see the wonderful Fairport in action at this great venue in Suffolk. I say blessed because we are all getting on a bit from the first time that I saw them in concert around 55 years ago. I can't really move around in my seat with quite the same degree of wild abandon that I might have done in my twenties, though the lady in the seat next to me makes a valiant effort with a series of clearly well-rehearsed and complimentary moves to the music. The fact that she is



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at least 30 – 40 years younger just goes to show what a timeless appeal Fairport have across the generations. I already knew that actually having taken my daughter to a previous concert which she thoroughly enjoyed, but it is nice to see a good scattering amongst the audience of people who do not have grey or 'missing' hair.

Of course, all the members of Fairport now sport distinguished grey locks, as in the case of Simon Nicol, or an absence of hair similar to my own in the case of Peggy, though my beard is less fashionable than his! However, the passing of time has not affected their collective ability to entertain the audience, both despite and in part because of Ric Sanders variable one-liners, aptly underlined on 'comedy' keyboard by Dave Mattacks. As with many musicians their musical ability has improved with age and their voices retain power and control which means that the audience can still enjoy a wide range of music from joyful jigs to the more emotionally charged pieces.

So it was with the performance at this concert, but first I must say a few words in praise of their talented support act, Jenn Butterworth, who provided a short but impressive set to start the evening. She played 5 songs all but one from her 2025 debut solo album, *Her By Design*, tracks from which can be found in [Filby's Folk Shows 87 & 97](#). She also imparted the news (to me anyway) that she was not in fact actually Scottish, but originally from Yorkshire, but hoped she might be an honorary Scot by now.

Fairport seem to go out of their way both to select an excellent support act and then make them feel fully a part of the concert evening. One way that they do that is by joining the support artist on stage for their final song and so they did with what may be the best known song from Jenn's solo album, *Little Sparrow*, which sounded great with Fairport providing support.

From there Fairport moved seamlessly into their own first half set with *Hair Of The Dogma* from *Tipplers Tales* to accompany *Bankruptured* from the same album which came later in the half. In between we had *Crazy Man Michael* with Simon taking the Sandy Denny vocal, *Rising For The Moon* from the album of the same name and a Chris Leslie song *I'm Already There* taken from

their 2004 album *Over The Next Hill*. The last which features some lovely fiddle from Ric is one of my favourite Fairport tracks from what I term the new era, i.e. since Chris Leslie joined and I'm still making discoveries about their music since I rather lost track of them post-Swarbrick.

The first half ended with a couple of tracks from Full House, an impressive *Flowers Of The Forest*, which I haven't heard live before and *Sloth* which is a regular amongst the Fairport set list, unsurprisingly perhaps, as it gives virtually all the band members a chance to shine with a special mention here for the bass section Dave Mattacks and David 'Peggy' Pegg.

As Simon explained at some point in the show, Fairport like to "stir the pot" and see what rises to the surface when they are choosing their set lists. The second half commenced with a string of such songs including *Polly On The Shore* and *Spring Song* both taken from their 2011 album *Sense of Occasion*, *The Rose Hip* and *Claudy Banks* though I always find it difficult to listen to the latter without hearing the superb Shirley Collins and The Albion Country Band in my head.

The inclusion of such numbers keeps Fairport's shows fresh and no doubt the band itself as well, but after that we were on more familiar territory with first of all the old favourite *Farewell, Farewell*. Like *Crazy Man Michael* this song is taken from the *Liege & Lief* album and also written by Richard Thompson. Originally Sandy Denny sang this so Simon again took the vocal with a nice added accompaniment on flute from Chris, who then took the lead for his own song *Banbury Fair*.

Simon returned as the lead vocal with the affecting story of *John Condon*, at 14 the youngest known soldier to have been killed on active service in World War One, before Chris took over again with his self-penned and now seemingly regular part of the set *John Goudie*.

All too soon it was time for the band to belt out *Matty Groves* and then Jenn Butterworth joined Fairport on stage for the traditional but also loudly called for encore *Meet On The Ledge*. The lady next to me, as I imagined, had been to quite a lot of Fairport gigs. I didn't ask why, but I didn't really need to!
