

'Gallants' by Jim Moray

Reviewed by Carl Filby (April 2026)

Jim Moray is a well-known name on the folk scene, not surprising perhaps as this year he celebrates 25 years of performing which has been punctuated by a succession of folk awards and critically acclaimed album releases and includes a long list of guest appearances with other musicians either live or on albums which in some cases he has also produced.

Somehow during that 25 years he has eluded my attention with one notable exception, that being his involvement in **The Elizabethan Session** a project commissioned by Folk by the Oak and the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS). The project culminated in 2 concerts and an album in 2014 (though I discovered it much more recently) and one of the stand out tracks for me was **The Straight Line and the Curve**. The reason why I liked it was the highly distinctive voice of Jim Moray which stood out amongst a number of his celebrated peers such as Nancy Kerr and Martin Simpson and clearly he deserved his place amongst the company of such esteemed performers.



What I hadn't realised until now is that Jim Moray is also a very talented musician which is illustrated almost to an extreme on this album and the list of instruments he plays would be far too long to include here. It is easier to highlight the contributions from several celebrated collaborators, including diatonic accordionist Archie Churchill-Moss, drummer Matt Stockham Brown, violinist and violist David Le Page (Orchestra Of The Swan), cellist Clare O'Connell (London Contemporary Orchestra, Radiohead), Northumbrian piper Andy May, singer Maddie Morris and a number of others who mostly contribute to one track each. All the other instruments on the album are played by Jim.

This album contains Jim's reworking of 8 traditional songs plus a newly written ballad, **Three Gallants**, written by himself which fits perfectly into the genre. By far the longest track on the album is **Omie Wise**, based on the real murder of Naomi Wise by Jonathan Lewis in 1808 in Randolph County, North Carolina. The other versions of this song that immediately spring to my mind are one by Pentangle, sung by Bert Jansch (rather than Jacqui McShee) and taken from their 1971 album **Reflection**, the other is by Shirley Collins taken from her 1959 album **Sweet England**. The latter is sung by Shirley accompanying herself on banjo and ironically (given the title of the album) is sung in a style which I imagine would more closely resemble the original American ballad. By contrast, Jim slows down the tempo and gives it a much more contemporary feel with electric guitar & drums and melancholic strings in the form of violin, viola and cello, plus he adds a new verse to illustrate how the story has a relevance today in our supposedly more enlightened age.

All three versions have different lyrics and if I have one complaint about the album, or at least my copy (which may just be a promotional CD) is the absence of any lyrics, even (I think) on Jim's website which is where artists sometimes put them. Whilst I'm on the subject I would also say that the image of (presumably?) Jim on the front cover, dressed in what appears to be a straw or possibly wicker man guise, complete with mask and posed with guitar, might be better replaced by a recognisable image. If you are a very talented artist as Jim clearly is then why hide your light under a bushel, so to speak, unless of course the intention is to preserve his privacy.

Another standout track from the first few plays is the track, **Three Gallants**, written by Jim, which has something of a supernatural twist and a moral tale the gist of which is that it is better not to know one's fate than to be able to look into the future. Jim's characteristically clear singing is enhanced by the fine accompaniment of Niamh Flynn on the harp and Andy May on the Northumbrian smallpipes.

When I Was A Little Boy was originally collected from John Stickle of Unst, Shetland and Ralph Vaughan Williams and A.L. Lloyd included it in 1959 in The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs. It was sung by Martin Carthy accompanied by Dave Swarbrick and I think I may have witnessed one performance at Hitchin Folk Club in 2006. Jim has added a brass or perhaps more accurately a wind section to his version with a trombone, saxophone and flugelhorn augmenting the drumming which now drives the song along. It's a very different much more upbeat version and it's not surprising that it has already been released as a single.

I have also quickly taken a liking to ***Fortune Turns The Wheel*** which has been described as a “Scottish drinking song” learnt from the singing of Louis Killen, who collected it from Alan Rogerson, in 1959, though I think it says more about friendship than drinking. Alan was a shepherd who lived in the Wooler area of Northumberland but possibly the earliest version of the song appeared in print in Gavin Greig’s Scottish collection, Folk-Song of the North-East (1907-11). A brilliant version of the song appears on the Gigspanner Big Band’s 2025 album, ***Turnstone***, but this version is an arrangement for a capella singing and has a charm about it that works in a completely different way, whilst importantly retaining the original melody which is, I think, a large part of that charm.

So, an excellent album, notwithstanding my comments about the lyrics which are in any case offset to a large extent by the clear diction inherent in Jim’s singing.

You will be able to listen to a track or two from the album in the next edition of ‘[Filby’s Folk](#)’ (Show 116) which is due out any day now and the album is officially released on 24th April.

You can purchase or pre-order a copy of the album and check out gig details and more information about Jim and his music on his website <https://jimmoray.co.uk/home>.
