



# THE *NEW* HIGH LEVEL RANTERS

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This is the first recording made by the New High Level Ranters. It sees the group changed by the departure of Alistair Anderson and Tom Gilfellow, who are going their own ways in making their own kind of music. The two lads who replace them are Jim Hall and Peter Wood, who contribute their particular skills in playing and singing, thus continuing the Ranters' commitment to British folk music and especially the music of the North East of England.

Jim is a skilled piper, having proved his ability on the instrument by winning most of the local piping competitions. He is also the caller for the group when it plays for ceilidhs.

Peter, originally from Lancashire, has taken to Geordie culture enthusiastically and includes a number of local songs and tunes in his repertoire. He plays concertina and guitar and at the ceilidhs plays the piano with relish.

The original members of the group are Colin Ross and Johnnie Handle, who are perhaps too well-known to merit description. Anyway, Colin plays the fiddle and pipes and Johnnie sings and plays the accordion.

There was never any doubt in their minds that the group would carry on after Ali and Tom left, so it was only natural that Jim and Pete, fellow members of Folk Song and Ballad Club, Newcastle, be asked to come into the Ranters.

After their first year together (1981) they have gathered some of their best material for this recording, keeping the spirit of British folk music alive - especially that little bit which is called Northumbrian music.

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### **Fisherman's Friend/Black and Grey**

Colin *fiddle*, Jim *pipes*, Pete *concertina*, John *accordion*

The march comes from the Newcastle Fishers' Garland 1843 in the collection by Crawhall but under a different title, and is a stirring tune from an even earlier time. **The Black and Grey** is an interesting version of the *Newmarket Horse Race Jig* and appears in the Northumbrian Minstrelsy, the bible of North-East folk musicians. The colours of the title could refer to local regiments, pubs or perhaps fighting cocks.

### **Ca' Hawkie**

John *vocal*, *accordion*, Colin *fiddle*, Jim *pipes*

A light rural air about the difficulties of getting the cows in for milking. Johnnie's version differs slightly from the Stokoe and Minstrelsy version.

### **The Old Drove Road/Kennedy North**

Colin *fiddle*, Jim *pipes*, John *accordion*, Pete *guitar*

Two great tunes from a couple of pipers who have been an inspiration to the band since it was first formed. The first is from Billy Pigg and the second from Tom Clough.

### **Jim Jones**

Pete *vocal*, Colin *fiddle*, Jim *pipes*, John *accordion*

A transportation song from Australia to a tune that Pete prefers, although imperfectly remembered, originally written by Mick Slocum of Melbourne. Historians would rightly quibble about the temporal juxtaposition of the transport fleets and 'The Bold Jack Donaghue'. However, the sentiments and feel of the song are right.

### **The Tynemouth Volunteer Life Brigade**

John *vocal* and *accordion* + *chorus*

A humorous song written in 1977 after the Ranters performed in the Brigade hut, an imposing and historic structure above the cliffs at Tynemouth, overlooking the harbour. The story relates the imaginary rescue of well-known seafaring people.

### John Peel

Peter *vocal*, Colin *fiddle*, Jim *pipes*, John *piano + chorus*

A well-known song, but in this version, collected in the North-East of England and found once again in Stokoe's collection, a refreshing renewal of acquaintance. Peter was here once again inspired by a local singer, this time Graham Pirt. The traditional hunt-supper piano accompaniment is used to back the singer and also the instrumentalists in the tune Bonnie Annie, which was used for the verse of the song and finishes off the song in fine style.

### Durham Regatta/Little Jenny

Colin *fiddle*, Jim *pipes*, Pete *concertina*, John *piano*

Peter found the first tune in Kerr's Merrie Melodies, written in Bb as a fiddle tune, but it is adapted here for the piper in the key of G. It sounds very like one of James Hill's tunes. The second tune, **Little Jenny**, existed for years as a half-remembered tune in Colin's manuscript books, until last year when he completed it and introduced it to the group. It's a cracker!

### The Snows They Melt the Soonest

Pete *vocal*, Colin *fiddle*, Jim *pipes*, John *accordion*

The song can be seen as either a poignant lovers' parting or an arrogant piece of male chauvinism. It can be found in Stokoe's Songs of Northern England (1895). In earlier collections the beautiful tune was originally associated with *My Love Is Newly Listed*, nowadays sung to a much brighter tune.

### Yellow Haired Laddie/The Glen Coe March

Colin *fiddle*, Jim *pipes*, Pete *concertina*, John *accordion*

The first tune comes from Allan Ramsay's folk opera *The Gentle Shepherd* and must be rated one of the great tunes of all time.

The march is of much more recent origin and comes from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, where there is a tradition of fiddle playing in the Scots style. Colin would like to thank Alan Jones of Montreal for this one.

### New Song of the Coal

John *vocal*, *accordion*, Colin *fiddle*, Jim *pipes*

A song about the permanence of the mining industry with its automatic machinery in the '70s. Written by Johnnie for the 1977 National Coal Board festival at Blackpool and sung to a tune by Archie Fisher.

### Skipper's Wedding

Pete *vocal*, Colin *fiddle*, Jim *pipes*, John *accordion*

Another song found in Stokoe's invaluable Songs of Northern England, first heard by Peter when sitting in the bar of the Baltic Hotel on Newcastle quayside during his first year on Tyneside, listening to the singing of Alan 'Fitzsie' Fitzsimmons of Denton Burn. The tune which finishes off the song is called The Boy in the Basket, from the Vickers manuscript of 1770. It could well have been played by Blind Willie at the wedding!

### The Duke of Fife/Maggie Lauder

Colin *fiddle*, Jim *pipes*, Pete *concertina*, John *accordion*

The Northumbrian small-pipes are well suited to playing a wide range of tunes, providing they are transposed into the right key for the instrument. The first tune, by Scott Skinner, is one of these brought down to G from A to suit the pipes, and the other instruments as well. The Ranters finish off the selection and the record with a flourish in **Maggie Lauder**, a tune arranged first as a fiddle solo, then by Tom Clough, the Northumbrian piper, as a brilliant pipe solo, and taken up here by the band as a tune that suits the New Ranters.

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