WATERSON:CARTHY
A DARK LIGHT

DIGITAL BOOKLET

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The Copper Family, Packie Manus Byrne, Seamus Ennis, Sam Larner, Almeda Riddle, Cecil Sharp and A L Lloyd who, in this case, co-produced *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*, were some of the people who had a profound effect on one or other of us at some stage in our musical lives and, in part, this CD reflects that involvement. In the end all our choices wouldn't fit on to one balanced CD and there were glum faces at the end of the sessions. But, since everybody lost something, we ended up sort of happy.

For myself, there were two people in the late 1950s whose unforgettable, wildly different performances – one at the Troubadour Folk Club in Earl's Court and the other at Ewan MacColl's Ballads and Blues Club in the upstairs room of a pub in the Edgware Road (the name of which I can't remember) – decided for me the musical direction which my life was going to take. That pub, close to the old Metropolitan Theatre, may lie buried along with that famous theatre under the flyover which leads on to the M40 Westway, but the memory will never, ever fade. The people I'm talking about are Seamus Ennis, whose version of **The Devil and the Farmer** starts this CD off, and Sam Larner, whose mighty telling of the Henry Martin story in **Lofty Tall Ship** was probably the single moment that ensured – bewildered though I was by what I thought of at the time as its baffling tune – that this music would embed its hooks into me for life. Packie Manus Byrne appeared on the English music scene in the early 1960s and quickly made his mark. He is a canny man. Because he never paraded his knowledge many people took him far too lightly far too easily, but a treasure house is what he was. And, indeed, is. The musical sweep of his knowledge is colossal, and he is also generous. It is from him that Norma learned **The Holland Handkerchief**, one of the truly spooky songs and one not found that often these days.

When, in 1976, The Watersons were invited to the Bicentennial celebrations on the Mall in Washington DC, we met various of our idols including a truly remarkable old-fashioned singer from Arkansas called Almeda Riddle, who insisted that people called her "Granny" and who always knew an extra verse to just about any song you could sing her – unless the singer was Walter Pardon who, of course and as was his wont, knew yet another. She sang **The Old Churchyard** and showed endless delight when we announced that we wanted to sing it.

Liza learned **May Morning** from the Cecil Sharp collection, also **Crystal Spring**, where she played with the rhythm of the tune, changing it from a straight three-four time to a kind of twelve-eight, filled with shifting accents. People

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left **The Copper Family** *right* **Cecil Sharp** courtesy EFDSS

sometimes get nervous about Country Idylls. They exist a-plenty in England, and, superficially I suppose, such reluctance can be seen as understandable. But, going even the teeniest bit deeper, isn't it surely true that people have always dreamed about having it better? And why not? When one lives a life as hard and unrelenting as the people who made these songs then dreamworlds such as *The Big Rock Candy Mountain* or, indeed, *Oleanna* and *The Land of Cockaigny* (as the European variants are known) can be seen in a clearer light and with a proper perspective. Norma learned **Death and the Lady** from the same source. It's a dark song here and she did what was second nature to the Watersons in their heyday, transforming the tune by altering just a couple of notes. Similarly, but this time rhythmically, she also tweaked (ever so slightly) the tune of **The Outlandish Knight** as found in the *Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*. This most mysterious of songs has haunted her for years ever since she heard it (with a different melody) from the great Shropshire singer, Fred Jordan. Mysterious in a different way is how it can be that so old and so widespread a song should, wherever it is found, display so very little variation as far as the words are concerned.

Balancy Straw is a Morris tune from quite a few places including Ascot under Wychwood and Bledington which Liza found in the Journals of the EFDSS, and chose to play more as a reel or a quick hornpipe, and it was Tim who introduced us to **Whitefriars Hornpipe**, one of those crooked tunes gracing the repertoire of John Kirkpatrick, whence he learned it. **Seventeen Come Sunday** is pretty much the standard way with the song but set by Tim to a Cornish tune and with the alternative ending chosen because of Tim's predilection for Rum. Lots of it.

It is to Vic Gammon that I personally owe thanks for pointing me at **Diego's Bold Shore**, a truly remarkable poem/song printed in *Songs the Whalemen Sang* by the indefatigable Gale Huntingdon and which I passed on to Liza. This book is a work of extraordinary patience, collecting together from 19th century whalemens' personal logs examples of the sorts of things which these sailors would jot down, whether it be songs, poems, drawings or anything else which took their fancy. Gale Huntingdon says that, on the evidence of these logs, the song was by far the whalermen's favourite song. These men of the 1850s, or thereabouts, who had signed on for such voyages, were always gone from home for months and, very often, years and, if the picture painted in the song may seem on occasion slightly romantic, there is, running through it, a vein of pure gold along with that tiny hint of the hardships

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involved and clues as to their state of mind during rare moments of relaxation. Whaling was a massively different enterprise a hundred and fifty years ago, but that should not tempt anyone into any roseate reflections about people "only taking what they needed" or "ensuring sustainability". The fact is that risking their lives as a matter of course, they exploited and were dreadfully exploited in their turn. Returning from such voyages, their pay had necessarily taken into account various "expenses" calculated by The Company and was shrunk accordingly. Rather like being signed to a Major Label really. The "Bold Shore" itself is, I think, the Diego Ramirez group, which lies south of Tierra Del Fuego. Must have been quite a sight.

A lot of nonsense is talked in some quarters, when referring to us, about "The First Family of Folk" or even (God help us) "The Royal Family of Folk". People who do that, in my view, want their backsides kicking – hard. If there is one family in this country who deserve such a title – and I must confess to the severest of collywobbles at the idea of anyone being saddled with such a miserable title – then that family is surely The Copper Family of Sussex. **Shepherds Arise** is a salute to them and gives us a chance to pay tribute to real nobility. Thanks very much.

Martin Carthy:Norma Waterson
Robin Hoods Bay, January 2002

engineered by **Ollie Knight** at Panda Sound, Robin Hood's Bay
produced by **Ollie Knight** and **Waterson:Carthy**
executive producer **Tony Engle**
design and photography by **John Haxby** (www.haxby.net)
thanks to **Ben Ivitsky** – viola on ***Diego's Bold Shore***
and to **Martin Simpson** – guitar on ***Death and the Lady*** and ***The Holland Hankerchief***
and to **Barnaby Stradling** – Fylde acoustic bass guitar on ***May Morning***
thanks also to Hobgoblin Music for the loan of Tim van Eyken's melodeon

tracks **1,2,5,6** : trad arr E Carthy, M Carthy, T van Eyken
tracks **3,8,9,11** : trad arr E Carthy, M Carthy, T van Eyken, N Waterson
track **4** : trad arr E Carthy, M Carthy, T van Eyken; track **7** : trad arr M Carthy, N Waterson
track **10** : trad arr E Carthy

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1	The Devil And The Farmer	3:34
2	May Morning	5:40
3	Death And The Lady	5:07
4	The Outlandish Knight	5:03
5	Balancy Straw / Seventeen Come Sunday / Whitefriars Hornpipe	6:32
6	The Lofty Tall Ship	4:01
7	The Holland Hankerchief	5:37
8	The Old Churchyard	3:23
9	Crystal Spring	3:56
10	Diego's Bold Shore	7:06
11	Shepherds Arise	7:04

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