

the singers ...

Mary Humphreys and Anahata

by Mary Humphreys and Derek Schofield

Mary Humphreys and Anahata have between them about sixty years worth of individual performing history, but only came together as a duo in 2001.

Mary was born and brought up in Wrexham, North Wales and educated in Wrexham, North Wales and cannot remember a time when she did not sing. Her first songs were in Welsh, and it was only when she went to Manchester University that she started singing in English. She helped to run the university folk song society and was fortunate to meet singers in Manchester, especially Harry Boardman and collectors such as Jim Carroll and Paul Graney, who were interested in collecting or researching traditional song. It was at this time that she was a member of group of singers who modelled themselves on Ewan MacColl's Critics Group.

Her interest in unusual variants of songs stems from those early days and she has worked on getting songs put back into circulation that have been gathering dust in printed collections.

In the early 1970s, she spent a few years in Hull, before returning to Manchester where she became a resident at Harry Boardman's folk club, and also took part in a series of BBC Radio Manchester radio programmes, *Ballads of Manchester*, inspired by the original *Radio Ballads*. By 1988, Mary was living in West Yorkshire, where she was an active member of the Ryburn Three Step organisation: a resident at the folk club, a musician for the longsword dance team and a regular musician at the English traditional music sessions in Ripponden. She also played keyboards in the Herb Boys ceilidh band, the founder members of which were Vic Gammon and Steve Harrison.

Mary used to sing mainly unaccompanied, although she has always played banjo in a rather harp-like style for some of her lyrical songs or ballads. She also plays English concertina, mainly for tunes although she uses it for accompanying one or two songs.

Anahata was given his Sanskrit name by the enlightened master Osho. Originally from Hertfordshire, he has an orchestral music background. A cellist,

he played in the National Youth Orchestra then in various musical groups whilst at Cambridge University, where he was first introduced to folk music. He joined Chelmsford Morris, and then played in Lumps of Plum Pudding ceilidh band. Later, he played for Hammersmith Morris and joined Angel Morris as both dancer and musician, and was a resident at Islington Folk Club. During a spell living in Yorkshire, Anahata was recruited by Johnny Adams into the innovative Our Northern Branch - an English ceilidh string band.

By profession a software engineer, he plays English traditional music on Anglo concertina, melodeon and cello.

Mary and Anahata first met at Sidmouth Festival, and then again in Yorkshire, before settling in East Anglia, where they are one half of the ceilidh band Fendragon. As a duo they started to perform in local folk clubs and appeared at the Sidmouth International Festival. In 2003, they recorded a CD for the WildGoose label - *Sharp Practice* - with several of the songs coming from the Cecil Sharp collection. This was followed by a second CD in 2005, *Floating Verses*. In the meantime, they were recruited by Martyn Wyndham-Read for *Song Links 2*, a celebration of English traditional songs and their American variants, which had its concert debut at Sidmouth Festival in 2004, with

the CD being released the following year.

Many of the songs Mary has in her repertoire are compilations of texts that have been married to tunes that have been collected with only one or two verses. If she finds a good tune and an associated text which is incomplete she will work up a text from traditional sources or broadsides until there is a complete song.

Her interest in English traditional music is informed not only by listening to traditional singers, by also by researching into the publications and manuscripts of collectors such as Cecil Sharp. Maud Karpeles, Percy Merrick, Percy Grainger, and Kenneth Peacock who collected in Newfoundland, are other collectors whose songs she particularly admires.

Although she loves singing unaccompanied, Mary's singing has been considerably enhanced by Anahata's accompaniments on concertina, melodeon and cello. The duo also search for interesting and unusual English (or Welsh) tunes and include many in their concert and club performances.

Since moving to East Anglia, Mary has become increasingly interested in songs collected in the region. The song 'Lucy Wan' in *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs* (now republished by the EFDSS as *Classic English Folk Songs*) drew her to the other songs collected by Ella Bull from Charlotte Dann of Cottenham in Cambridgeshire.

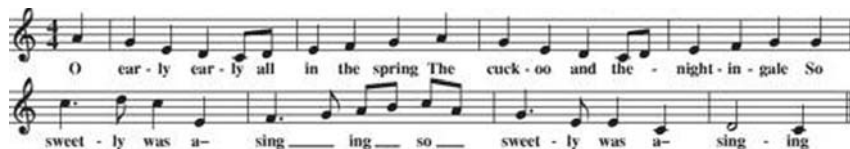
Mary Humphreys and Anahata have specially recorded 'The Cuckoo and the Nightingale' for EDS, and this can be heard on the EFDSS website:

<http://eds.efdss.org>



Photo: Derek Schofield

the song ... the cuckoo and the nightingale



The song is a version of 'Catch-me-if-you-can'.

Text from Charlotte Dann (nee Few) noted by Ella Bull, Cottenham 1904. In the Lucy Broadwood manuscripts (LEB /5/77) in the VWML. Text (in italics) enhanced from the version collected by Hammond from William Farnham, South Perrot, Dorset June 1906, as published in *The Wanton Seed* ed. Frank Purslow, EFDSS 1968. Tune noted by Ella Bull from Charlotte Dann in 1904 (LEB/5/56). Charlotte learnt the song from her mother.

O early early *all* in the spring
The cuckoo and the nightingale
So sweetly was a-singing.
So sweetly was a-singing

As round at eve I cast my eye
A pretty maid I chanced to spy
A-taking of the air o,
A-taking of the air o.

I said pretty maid will you come with me
I'll show you what you never did see
I'll show you a pleasant bower
I'll show you a pleasant bower

*So this fair maid she gave consent
And along with him she straightway went
And soon he gained her favour
And soon he gained her favour.*

Now you have had your will of me
And robbed me of my liberty
Pray tell to me your name sir
Pray tell to me your name.

My name is Catch me if you can
I'll marry you when I return
When I return from the wars o
When I return from the wars o

*When six long months were gone and past
The maid grew thick around the waist
And she thought of pleasant bowers
And she thought of pleasant bowers.*

*When nine long months were past and gone
This fair maid had a beautiful son
But then there was no father
But then there was no father.*

She said *My Babe*, your daddy's gone
these 2 next verses transposed
And left me here to sigh and mourn
Poor child he's got no father now
Poor child he's got no father.

Away they went with horse and man
To catch that young man if they can
So soon they overtake him
So soon they overtake him.

*They caught the rogue and bound him fast
They took this young man in at last
And robbed him of his pleasure
And robbed him of his pleasure.*

the source ... Charlotte Dann

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Charlotte Dann was born Charlotte Few in Willingham in Cambridgeshire, daughter of John and Hannah Few, and was baptised on 5 October 1856. Her mother Hannah – from whom she learnt her songs – came from Over: both Over and Willingham are neighbouring villages about five miles north-west of Cottenham, which in turn is about five miles north of Cambridge. The 1901 census reveals that there were 153 people with the surname Few, and every single one of them lived in Cambridgeshire, almost all of them in and around Willingham.

By the 1881 census, when she was about 24, Charlotte was married to James Graves. Dann, an agricultural labourer, and they lived at Little End in Cottenham with a daughter, Annie, aged one. By 1891, they were living at 15 Rooks Lane, Church End, Cottenham

with a further four children: Ada May, Henry, George and William. In the 1901 census, the couple's address was given as High Street and they had the three boys living with them, plus Reuben and Ernest. Henry was now 16 and an agricultural labourer, whilst George at 14 was a cycle fitter. Charlotte's husband died in 1912, and her son Ernest died in France during the First World War. The record of Charlotte's death has not yet been discovered.

Prior to her marriage, Charlotte had been a domestic servant at Bernard's, 27 High Street, Cottenham, the residence of Arthur Bull, a prosperous fruit-farmer, his wife Eliza (nee Cross) and their children. In the 1881 census, five daughters were living at home, from Mary aged 12 to Hilda aged 11 months. One daughter, Ida, who became a magistrate, is not listed as living at home in 1901, but of the other four daughters,

two are reported as being 'blind from birth' and another 'sight defective'. One of the blind daughters was Ella Bull, who was born in 1871.

It would appear that Charlotte worked for the family in 1876-7, during which time Ella heard her singing folk songs.

In 1904, Ella Bull first contacted the folk song collector Percy Merrick and sent him the manuscript notations of several songs, remembered directly from the singing of Charlotte Dann.

William Percy Merrick (1868-1955) was an original member of the Folk Song Society, living in Shepperton in Middlesex. He collected songs from a farmer, Henry Hills, who was born in Sussex but lived in Shepperton. These songs were published in the 1901 and 1904 Folk Song Society Journals, and subsequently in *Folk Songs from Sussex* (1912). It is not clear why Ella should have contacted Percy Merrick, rather than one of the better-known folk song collectors, but they shared a common disability. By this time, Merrick was losing his sight and the contact may have come through Ella's father who, like Merrick, was involved in the



Photo: courtesy VWML

Ella Bull and her family. Ella is bottom left.

development of Braille. In 1905, he visited Cottenham and noted songs from Gypsies, including 'Down Came Weeping Mary'.

Merrick then wrote to Lucy Broadwood, and on 9 December 1904, sent her a manuscript book and the words of several songs that Ella Bull had noted. These included 'Hey Down Derry', the words of which – according to Merwick - Ella Bull considered 'unedifying'. Lucy Broadwood then wrote to Ella Bull and in the reply, dated 20 December 1904, Ella sent some extra verses of several songs including 'The Cuckoo and the Nightingale' which 'have lately come to my knowledge', suggesting that she had perhaps visited Charlotte to hear her sing again.

It was clear that Lucy Broadwood was intending to publish some of the songs in the Folk Song Society's Journal, but in April the following year, Ella asked her not to publish any of Charlotte Dann's songs because of inaccuracies in the time signatures. 'When I began writing out tunes, I did not know that 5/4 time was still extant, so I tried to render it by 4/4, with a pause over the third beat, and afterwards by 3/4 with an accent on the second beat, then Mr Merrick suggested 5/4, which seems to fit the need.'

By October 1905, it seems likely that Ella had been to visit Charlotte Dann again, to check the words and tunes and notate some more songs. She was then happy to let Lucy

Broadwood publish them, although none of the songs were published by Lucy Broadwood or the Folk Song Society.

In the Vaughan Williams manuscripts, there is a second copy of the tune of 'The Cuckoo and the Nightingale' in a different hand and in the key of A, with a note that it was sung by Mrs Dann in Cottenham on 3 August 1907. In Vaughan Williams's biography, *RVW*, Ursula Vaughan Williams notes that he rented a house in Meldreth near Cambridge in July and August and collected songs in the district. Apart from a discrepancy in the barring of the fourth bar and the second note in the penultimate bar, the tune is identical to the earlier one, noted in C, from Charlotte Dann by Eliza Bull, in 1904. Vaughan Williams included the song (with words from a different source) in *Novello's School Songs: Folk-Songs for Schools, Set VI* (1912).

Ella Bull remained unmarried and died on 6 June 1922. In the 1932 Journal of the EFDSS, Percy Merrick contributed one of Charlotte Dann's songs, 'Lucy Wan', which was then re-published in *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*. This version has subsequently been recorded by singers such as Martin Carthy on *Byker Hill* (1967) – Martin learned it from A.L.Lloyd. The book was reprinted as *Classic English Folk Songs* by the EFDSS in 2003, and the new editor Malcolm Douglas researched the singers and collectors and we have added to Malcolm's information in this feature. Charlotte Dann's song 'The Hungry

Army' was published by Roy Palmer in *The Rambling Soldier* (1977); and 'Hey Down Derry' was published, again by Roy, in *Everyman's Book of English Country Songs* (1979).

The songs collected from Charlotte Dann are:

'The Cuckoo and the Nightingale'
 'Hey Down Derry' (a version of 'An Old Man Came Courting Me')
 'There was a Brisk Young Ploughman' ('The Nutting Girl')
 'The Hungry Army'
 'Lucy' ('Lucy Wan')
 'Betsy' ('Betsy the Servantmaid')
 'There is an Alehouse'
 Lazarus tune, which was apparently sung to songs such as 'The Farmer's Boy', 'Florence Dombay' and 'The Red Barn'.

Other songs that may have come from Charlotte include 'My Old Man' (a version of 'Our Goodman'), 'Barbara Allen' and 'Spencer the Rover'.

Ella collected a few other songs from another servant, Hannah Collins, a song tune played on concertina from George Leader ('When First I was a Shepherd Boy') and songs from Gypsies.

All the songs and correspondence with Lucy Broadwood are contained in the Broadwood manuscripts in the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library (LEB/5/56-95).

With thanks to Malcolm Taylor and Peta Webb in the VWML, and to Malcolm Douglas whose initial help stimulated Mary's interest.