

Janet Russell

Singer, performer, vocal workshop leader, song arranger

Janet first made a name for herself on the folk circuit in the '80's as a young singer songwriter writing with hard-edged humour about issues affecting women. Her "Secretary's Song" was the most requested song on "Folk on 2" in 1987/8, and "Breastfeeding Baby in the Park" has been taken up by the pro-breastfeeding lobby nationally and internationally. Her work on Scottish traditional material with Scottish singer Christine Kydd has received huge critical acclaim, particularly in her native Scotland, and in the US.

Janet has now worked on the folk scene professionally for more than 30 years, starting in Edinburgh pubs, in 1980/81, and has experience of folk clubs, arts centres, concert halls, church halls and village halls of all sorts and sizes in the UK, Europe, and the USA. Throughout this time Janet has worked with other musicians, such as Sisters Unlimited colleagues Sandra Kerr, Rosie Davis and Peta Webb, and Scottish singing partner Christine Kydd, and also toured the show "Take These Chains from My Heart", written by partner Jim Woodland with storyteller Taffy Thomas, about the experience of recovering from a stroke. Janet worked as musical director for Mikron Theatre for ten years, and is recognised as an accomplished vocal harmony workshop leader. She is a member of the Natural Voice Practitioners' Network. At the end of 2001 Janet produced the first English performances of "The Christmas Truce" with international vocal trio Coope Boyes and Simpson. *"Well done. Professional, moving, beautifully sung.... Best wishes - Roy"* (from Roy Bailey MBE) a show which received a standing ovation at the Sheffield Raise Your Banners Festival in November 2001. The show ran successfully again in November 2002. In March 2005 the same team put on two performances of "Hearts of Coal" celebrating the lives of miners and mining communities with the Roses and Thorns choir, a magnificent group of 80 voices from across northern England. In November 2007 the third show in this same format was "The Toilers' Gift", a reference to the innate musicality of the rural workers of Yorkshire. In 2009 Janet helped Leon Rosselson celebrate 50 years of performing and writing songs. Alongside Sandra Kerr, Frankie Armstrong, Roy Bailey, Rob Johnson and Martin Carthy, Janet sang Leon's songs in London, Brighton, Gateshead, Bradford, Manchester, and Edinburgh in a concert entitled "Turning Silence Into Song".

In 2008 JigJaw Janet set up a new performance project with Rosie Davis, Kerry Fletcher, and Frances Watt singing for dancing and dancing for singing. This worked as a performance ensemble, a ceilidh band and also led workshops in singing for dancing and dancing for singing until 2014. See www.jigjaw.co.uk. JigJaw appeared at Towersey Festival in 2009 and there are videos of some of their performances on Youtube, which you can reach through the website.

More recently Janet has worked with a collective of singer songwriters and one Marxist magician... on the Anti-Capitalist Roadshow, hoping to cheer and ease the load of those suffering under the current millionaire government, and pose some alternatives to the mindset that seems to hold sway in the UK at the moment. There is a double CD "Celebrating Subversion" featuring all the artists, Frankie Armstrong, Roy Bailey, Sandra Kerr, Robb Johnson, Reem Kelani, Grace Petrie, Leon Rosselson, Janet Russell; Ian Saville, Peggy Seeger, and Jim Woodland.

Janet continues to perform solo in clubs and at festivals, and leads three community choirs, in Silsden, Burnley, and Settle, and does guest work with community choirs all over the north of England.

Discography

Solo recordings :

“Gathering the Fragments” – Harbourtown Records, HARC 003

“Bright Shining Morning?” – Harbourtown Records, HARCD 026

“Love Songs and Fighting Talk” – Harbourtown Records, HARCD 052

With other artists :

“Janet Russell and Christine Kydd” – Greentrax CDTRAX 011

“Dancin’Chantin’” – Greentrax CDTRAX 077

“Take These Chains from my Heart” a narrative CD with songs about a performer’s fightback from a stroke. With Taffy Thomas, storyteller. TT 006

“The Stones of Callanish” (various artists) DOG 005/6

“No Limits” with Sisters Unlimited, – Harbourtown Records, HARCD 013

“No Bed of Roses” with Sisters Unlimited – Fellside FE104

“No Change of Heart” with Sisters Unlimited, SISU Records 003

“Doodle i Doe” with JigJaw, Doodle i Records 001

“The most striking feature of Janet Russell’s arresting voice is a lower register whose distinctive power and edge make dramatic listening” Tony Rose, The Guardian

“Janet, I just wanted to let you know how moved everyone was by your version of “The Song of the Olive Tree”. The ultimate compliment is that the Palestinian singer, Reem Kelani, who is usually very critical was mightily impressed.” Leon Rosselson

“The meat in this sandwich, singer-guitarist Janet Russell confirmed that she’s one of the Scottish folk scene’s forgotten treasures... This return to her formative stamping ground was great fun and I’d go so far as to say life enriching, a tonic that bears repeating often.” Rob Adams, the Glasgow Herald. November 2011

Information on recordings available on the following website: www.harbourtownrecords.co.uk

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