

THE SITTING ROOM SESSIONS

Brian Boothby sings the benefits of taking live music back home

Imagine the scene: 20 or 30 of your friends and acquaintances gathered in the intimate and congenial setting of a sitting room, a yurt, or even a bender. It's been a cosy evening, with hot chai and home-made flapjacks, wine and fragrant olives. The candles are bright in the lanterns, a palpable sense of community and celebration has developed as three expert musicians weave an acoustic tapestry of songs, tales and music, transporting you to far off places and also to the inner spaces of the mind and heart. Clearly the musicians themselves are also deeply moved, delighted to play every note knowing that your participatory listening has honoured their craft.

Such was the scene at our house in Derbyshire in last April. We were celebrating the launch of my first solo album for 15 years, with four such concerts over the span of a weekend.

REAL MUSIC

With few exceptions, mainstream media decrees that music is better if it's loud, image-driven, marketable and played on the most prestigious stages, and who's to deny the undoubted thrill of witnessing a brilliant band performing at that level? However, there are so many alternatives to this. For centuries, classical music has thrived and excelled in the pindrop silence of rapt listening; and jazz musicians the world over have refined music to explore those startling intervals and unusual rhythms which demand true listening. For many like myself, seeking an authentic expression of music and song, there is always the homely truth of folk, roots and world music, the non-exclusive shared oral tradition, linking us back to real human experience and the very roots of human sound... Permaculture in art.

MAGIC MELODY

It is not just a question of doing things more simply, nor is it a desire to create new art forms or dismantle preconceptions. It's simply that despite the undeniable power of playing electric through a massive PA, and despite the inescapable logistics of how a few musicians get to reach as many people as possible, and notwithstanding the infinitely longer time it takes to build a following when only playing to a few dozen people at a time, for me there is just no equal to what happens when people listen with complete attention to a musician in full flight, giving every ounce of their being. Magic happens.

This realisation happened for me years ago in a big bender on a windswept Beltane camp, when we gathered round the burner, told stories and sang, knee to knee or heads on laps, inner eyes catching pictures in the flames. The vast sense of history and the tribal memory flooded through and connected me as never before to my ancestors on this land, all having done exactly this since the dawn of humanity. This later became the driving motivation behind the Music Spaces which developed at the Big Green Gathering and which still continue on the Healing Field at Glastonbury Festival.

SITTING ROOM SESSIONS

Here it is again, surfacing stronger than ever in this latest stage of my own musical journey. Judging by the overwhelmingly positive response from the 74 people who came to our four 'Sitting Room Sessions', it is also something that's crying out to be reinstated in living spaces all over the world. For me it is not just a question of bringing back the sing-song round the old joanna, or giving everyone a chance, though it is that as well. It's also to do with the way we listen and the way we honour our poets and musicians.

By inviting them into our gatherings, sharing what they have to offer and thereby acknowledging their raison d'être and their trade, we reconnect to our own roots and bring more creativity to our communities. Performers aren't gods for pedestals as the media seems to suggest, just skilled human beings offering a journey and seeking fulfilment. Similarly, you don't have to wait for Mean Fiddler to arrange it, you too can be promoters 🙌

If you would like to experience this, live at a settee near you, email Brian on: brianb@w3z.co.uk

To sample video from the sessions, visit: www.myspace.com/brianboothby

For more music and information: www.brianboothby.co.uk

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