

Steeleye Span

40th Anniversary World Tour 2009

In a world where bands come and go in the blink of an eye, the enduring success of Steeleye Span is one of *the* great stories in rock music. 2009 will see them celebrate an incredible forty years together, an achievement made all the more remarkable by the fact that the band has seldom been more active in its career.

The current line-up of Maddy Prior, Peter Knight, Liam Genockey, Ken Nicol and Rick Kemp will come to the stage for this very exciting year in the history of Steeleye Span.

At a period in their career when most bands are happy to settle down to rehashing past glories, Steeleye Span have pushed on with a succession of acclaimed albums, each seeing them re-define their classic sound. Their fortieth anniversary year will be spent in much the same way as every other; they will play live (two UK tours, plus visits to Australia and USA) and make music, releasing a new album that will typically see them buck their own trend and go back to their roots, the interpretation of traditional song. This though, has always been the Steeleye way. Tied not to the past, the present or the future – simply timeless.

Members of Steeleye Span are available for Press, Radio & TV Interviews
(ISDN Line available if required)

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Steeleye Span: 1969 – 2009

Biography

Steeleye Span have been one of the most influential names in British roots music. Pioneers of folk-rock, Steeleye Span changed the face of folk music forever, taking it out of small clubs and into the world of gold discs and international tours. Members have come and gone over the years, but Steeleye has always remained at the forefront of the genre they helped to define, and, 35 years later the band has become an institution in British music.

Steeleye Span formed in 1969, with the vision of playing folk music in a contemporary, electric band format. Taking their name from the song Horkstow Grange, their debut album *Hark! The Village Wait* is a pioneering album that set out the blueprint for folk-rock.

However, this early line-up was to prove short-lived, with the Woods departing before the band's first gig, to be replaced by Martin Carthy, already a fixture on the folk scene, and classically trained fiddle player Peter Knight. Their 1970 album *Please To See the King* became a classic, while *Ten Man Mop* made inroads into the rock scene.

Further line-up changes ensued after this, with Hutchings leaving to form The Albion Band, followed shortly afterwards by Martin Carthy, Steeleye being joined by Rick Kemp on bass, Bob Johnson on guitar and Nigel Pegrum becoming the band's first drummer. With a more rock-oriented approach, it was this line-up that enjoyed the biggest commercial success, with the acapella Latin carol *Gaudete* giving a Christmas chart entry in 1973 and a No 5 hit in 1975 with *All Around My Hat* produced by Mike Batt.

After this run of mainstream success Bob Johnson and Peter Knight quit the band in 1977 after making a duo album *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. With another album and tour in the pipeline, Martin Carthy rejoined bringing with him squeezebox ace John Kirkpatrick, giving the band's trademark folk-rock sound a distinctly English folk flavor.

This tour was to be the last for a while, as the band went their separate ways. But it was only a matter of time before they reconvened, releasing *Sails of Silver* in 1980 and *Back in Line* in 1986. The '80s were an evolving time, with Tim Hart leaving the band, Tim Harries replacing Rick Kemp on bass, Liam Genockey occupying Pegrum's place behind the drum kit. But the strength of Steeleye Span has always been the band's ability to draw on the different musical personalities of the members and remain greater than the sum of its parts.

1995 was a major landmark for the band: the 25th anniversary was celebrated with a one-off reunion of all members past and present for a charity gig at the Forum in London. The live album *The Journey*, released in 1999, serves as a reminder of Steeleye's importance in the development of British roots music, with a personnel list reading like who's who of folk.

If *The Journey* was a celebration of what had gone before, Steeleye's 1996 album *Time* showed the band equally able to move towards the future, hailed as their best in years by critics and fans alike. A further development was the return of original member singer Gay Woods, adding another dimension to the band's sound.

Further changes were afoot when Maddy left in 1997 to concentrate on her mounting solo work. 1998's mainly acoustic album *Horkstow Grange* saw the band withstand the change with Gay Woods' voice coming to the fore, and a more Irish element displayed in the band's music. 2000's release *Bedlam Born* saw Steeleye move further on with an album that married true rock energy to their traditional material, while exploring some decidedly more experimental territory.

With Maddy returning to the band in 2002, Steeleye Span reformed with a "classic" lineup, with Maddy being joined by Peter Knight Rick Kemp, Liam Genockey and Bob Johnson. This year saw them release a 2-disc album, *Present – The Very Best of Steeleye Span*, an album revisiting their greatest moments, as decided by their fans in an online poll.

With Ken Nicol on board in 2004, the band released the album *They Called Her Babylon* early in the year, and extensively toured the UK, Europe and Australia. Their prolific output continued with the release of the Christmas album *Winter* later the same year, as the band ended a busy year of touring with a gala performance in London's Palladium theatre.

In 2005 Steeleye Span were awarded the Good Tradition Award at the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards, The band carried out a UK tour in April and May 2006, followed by dates in Europe and an appearance at the 2006 Cropredy Festival. A live album *Folk Rock Pioneers in Concert* and DVD of their 2004 tour were additionally released this year.

In November 2006, Steeleye released their latest studio album *Bloody Men* with an Autumn/Winter tour to support the release.

Steeleye Span 2009 finds Maddy Prior - the voice of Steeleye for 32 years- back at the helm of a line-up featuring band stalwart and fiddler extraordinaire Peter Knight, Ken Nicol (Albion Band) on guitar and vocals and Liam Genockey on the drum stool, with Pete Zorn taking over from Rick Kemp on bass, due to illness. This year will yet again prove busy, with a live album released in May 2009 (*Live at a Distance – PRKCD104*), a world tour and a studio album release later in the year.

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Maddy Prior

Biography

Some forty years from her emergence on the late sixties folk club circuit, Maddy Prior is one of the most enduring, influential and respected artists in British music.

Born in Blackpool and, raised in St Albans, Maddy first came to prominence as a duo with singer/ guitarist Tim Hart, building a reputation around the folk clubs and releasing two albums. As the 70s dawned, they joined forces with Ashley Hutchings (of Fairport Convention) and Gay & Terry Woods, with the idea of fusing folk song with rock instrumentation and technique. The new group took its name from a traditional Lincolnshire ballad 'Horkstow Grange' - the tale of a character called Steeleye Span.

So began an incredible story. Others may claim the invention of folk-rock, but Steeleye were the first to drag it into the electronic age. In the age of the giant rock band, Steeleye Span fitted the bill perfectly, taking folk music out of the backroom clubs and into the charts with a string of hit albums, gold discs and world tours. Hart and Prior remained constant in a group whose changing line-ups read like a Who's who of British folk, until Tim left in 1980 and the band undertook a couple of sabbaticals, before returning in 1986.

Throughout this period, Maddy continued with extra-curricular activities. Two albums were released with June Tabor (as the Silly Sisters) and solo projects saw her work with the cream of traditional musicians including Martin Carthy, Nic Jones, Danny Thompson and John Kirkpatrick. While Steeleye continued to explore traditional material, Maddy used her albums to develop her own songwriting, despite claiming to be in awe of the craft.

One of her most abiding projects was born in 1987 with the release of *A Tapestry of Carols* with The Carnival Band. The meeting came out of chance but this part-time collaboration has lasted for twenty two years and several albums, primarily a Yuletide affair but also exploring other ways to combine early music, hymns, classical and more with an "anything goes" attitude. Their Christmas tours have become something of legend, as documented on the 1998 *Carols At Christmas* live album.

1997 was a year of change. Steeleye Span (now with original member Gay Woods back in the fold) released *Time*, acclaimed as their best album in many years. Two massive UK tours followed, the second of which saw Maddy make her last appearance with the band after 28 years. The workload of a band, the Carnivals, a solo career and a family had started to prove too much and a decision had to be made.

But as one door closes, so another opens, and a new solo album, *Flesh & Blood* was released to widespread acclaim. Combining traditional and original material, Maddy's voice had never sounded better, while her musical partners on the project- keyboardist Nick Holland and multi-instrumentalist Troy Donockley (uilleann pipes, whistles and guitars) were perhaps the most suited of her career. Following the release, the trio toured in the UK, Europe and USA. After debuting new material on stage, Maddy entered the studio to start work on her next album, *Ravenchild*. Once more immersing herself in her favourite topics of tradition, mythology and history, the record was released in spring 1999 to critical acclaim and supported by another British tour.

Ravenchild proved to be something of a landmark, being Maddy's 35th album in as many years. It seemed only too appropriate to mark this, so in December 1999 Maddy set out on the road again for a special set of dates celebrating her career thus far. As well as Nick and Troy, the shows brought together some of the musicians Maddy has worked with over the years including Rick Kemp and Peter Knight (of Steeleye Span), Steve Banks (from The Carnival Band) June Tabor, and Maddy & Rick's daughter, Rose Kemp. These shows were documented in the live album (and DVD) *Ballads and Candles*, released the following year. The most recent new album - *Gold Frankincense and Myrrh* - is another

seasonal endeavour, but this time with some exciting new directions in the form of another song-cycle, offering a new slant on the well-known story of the Three Kings, and Middle Eastern influences in the music.

2000 saw the announcement that Maddy's longstanding contribution to folk music was to be recognized with the award of an MBE in the New Year's honors list.

At this stage, many might be tempted to rest on their laurels, but if anything, Maddy has thrown herself into her work with even more vigor. Her most ambitious work so far, *Arthur The King* centered around an extended song-cycle exploring the facts and fictions surrounding England's legendary King.

Affirming Maddy's reputation as a songwriter, and as an unsurpassed interpreter of traditional song, the album explored an even broader musical palette, from traditional folk through to hard rock and ambient electronic textures.

Following *Arthur*, Maddy and the boys made a CD of *Lionhearts*, based on the story of Eleanor of Aquitaine, mother to Richard the Lionheart and King John, and wife to Henry II.

Maddy Prior's Girls brought together Maddy, her daughter Rose Kemp, and Abbie Lathe in a stripped-down, acoustic form, with an emphasis on vocal harmony, and a range of material from traditional folk, gospel and blues to contemporary writers and original material from all three. A well-received album *Bib & Tuck* and two successful tours followed.

When Rose decided to devote more time to her own fast growing career, she was replaced by Claudia Gibson and the CD *Under the Covers* was made. A daring and unusual album from Maddy, covering the songs of recent songwriters, based around the acapella arrangements the Girls had created.

In 2002 Maddy surprised everyone with the announcement that she was to head a reunited Steeleye Span for another album and tour. *Present: the Very Best of Steeleye Span* was exactly that, with the band revisiting, and bringing into the present their all-time favourite moments as chosen by their fans via an online poll.

The band's sold-out tour in the run-up to Christmas 2002 showed they were still very much a force to be reckoned with.

In 2004 Steeleye celebrated their 35th anniversary with tours in the Australia and the UK, a headline appearance at Sidmouth International Festival and a new album: *They Called Her Babylon*, the first release of new material from the band since 2000, and one that does the band's legacy proud.

In 2005 they made a seasonal CD of Christmas and associated material called *Winter*, and at the end of 2006 toured the UK with another new studio album called *Bloody Men*. In October, 2006, Maddy went on the road touring a retrospective of her work with Nick and Troy, based mainly around Arthur, involving a webcast and interactive Net activity. A groundbreaking and adventurous undertaking for the Park office Maddy's management and record company.

<http://www.maddyprior.co.uk>

Maddy Prior Is Available For
Tv, Radio & Press Interviews

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