

The Beth Guitar Journey: England and Scotland

December 2018 – October 2023 (14 plays)

From Beth Orton at the launch party in Soho, the Beth guitar went to **Brighton** for Ben Walker

Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire to Steve Tilston

Altrincham with Kirk McElhenny

Lowton Cheshire with Ryan Deakin

Liverpool to John Chandler and Tony McManus (on a visit from Canada)

Shipley, West Yorkshire to Gerry Cooper

Scotland:

Inverness for Ewan McPherson

St Andrews for Jonathan Kemp

Edinburgh to Simon Kempston and then with Sam Grassie on tour in Scotland; the back down to

London to Elliott Morris

Surrey to Jacqui McShee and Mike Piggott; and back to Beth Orton in

London again. All the artists signed the guitar and wrote in the travel diary.

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**The Beth Guitar is named for English singer /guitarist / songwriter Beth Orton.**



Beth Orton won the Brit award for best female artist in 2000. Both her 1997 debut album, and her second album, went gold and she hit the UK Top 10 with her next

album. Bert invited Beth to participate in his 23rd studio album *The Black Swan* which was released in 2006 through Drag City

Beth said: "I am honoured to have called Bert Jansch a friend and a teacher. It's not easy to summarise what I learned. It was such a personal experience as much as a musical one. I loved to sing with Bert, his timing is legendary as a guitarist, but also as a singer and his grit and wisdom up close like that was mind-altering."

Beth brought the brand-new beautiful Yamaha TransAcoustic guitar to the launch party for 'Around the world in 80 plays' hosted at Yamaha Showroom in Soho, from where it was eagerly taken home to Brighton to begin its journey with nominee Ben Walker.

## **Ben Walker – Brighton**

BBC Folk Award winner, Ben Walker, was recently hailed as "one of the ten best acoustic guitarists in the world" by Total Guitar magazine. His music has been described as "thoughtful" (Guardian), "deft" (Telegraph) and even "legendary" (Morning Star). He is brilliant at bringing together traditional and contemporary music – putting old jewels into new settings. As well as having a busy gigging schedule, Ben is an admired producer, arranger, mixer and teacher.



Ben says, "I had great fun with this guitar. There's some really funky stuff that happens if you hold one of the knobs in." he added: "It's difficult to be a folk musician without feeling the connection to Bert Jansch. I soon realised the true extent of Bert's influence on the folk guitar canon. The timing, the feel – it's all him. I love the fact that there's consistency in what he produced whether it was just him at a kitchen table with a tape machine in 1965, or with the full collaborative efforts on something like 'The Black Swan' in 2006.

I love the fact that he stayed with it and worked with the best of the next generation of musicians. It's a great thrill for me play my 'Bert's Blues' as a part of such a wonderful project."

## **Steve Tilston – Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire**

From Brighton it hopped up to Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire to Steve Tilston – a near contemporary and friend of Bert's. Steve formed his own record labels, Run River, and Hubris. In 1988 he was a member of John Renbourn's group Ship of Fools, which released an album on Tilston's label. He is also a published author whose first novel *All for Poor Jack* set in Bristol and the New World, has been enjoyed by the likes of Bob Dylan.

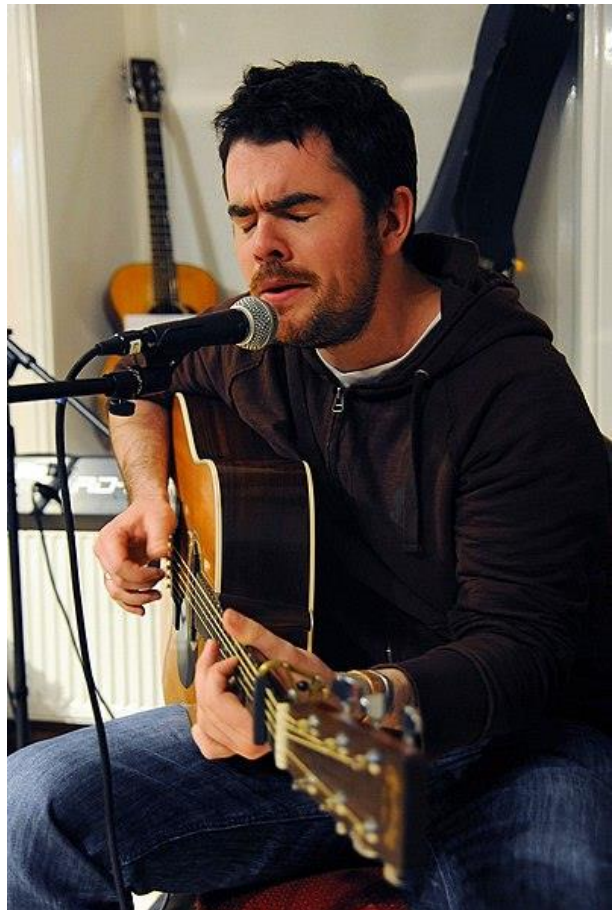


Steve says "Bert and I got to know each other in the early '70s, when we had the same manager; gigging together regularly and meeting socially around the Half Moon in Putney and in family walks in Richmond Park with children in tow. When he had his music shop, I would often go over and we'd end up playing tunes together. He was a good friend and always an inspiration. This Yamaha TransAcoustic is a nice guitar, and it plays well."

## **Kirk McElhinney – Altrincham, South Manchester**

Kirk has supported many folk artists, played with Nitin Sawhney and been part of The Saffires. He says: "Nothing changed my life more than when I first heard the opening bars of 'Strolling Down the Highway', many years ago." Kirk followed Bert on his English tours and saw him live countless times. He was later not only to meet Bert, but to support him at a couple of gigs and even get a guitar lesson from him. Another big landmark in his career was when Bill Leader, who recorded Bert's 1965 debut album, helped Kirk to record his own debut solo album.

Kirk says: "I chose for the track, my composition 'Cold Embrace' as the guitar part is heavily influenced by Bert's style and approach. It's a song about the suppression of the human spirit – yet



there's still hope for the future. Bert changed my life! I could say Bert was my form of schooling. I would focus more on his playing and composition than I ever did at school, sitting for hours and years trying to work out what he was doing (and I still do). Now, I'm at a place where I feel his playing is in me".

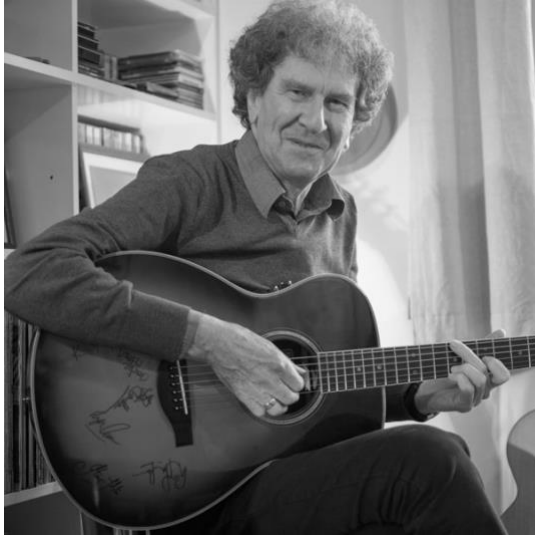
From South Manchester, Kirk arranged to pass the guitar on to Ryan Deakin in West Manchester.

### **Ryan Deakin, Lowton, Lancashire**

Only just 17 at the time, talented multi-instrumentalist and singer song writer, Ryan, was studying for a guitar diploma at the British Institute of Modern Music in Manchester. His first love has always been guitar. Since the age of 10 Ryan has explored the roots of English folk and blues artists being particularly intrigued by the depth and complexity of Bert Jansch, John Renbourn and Davy Graham. At the age of 12, Ryan was lucky enough to watch John Renbourn live and was inspired to take to playing the local live scene. He is a mesmerising performer, interpreting traditional folk and blues and captivating audiences with his own original and intricate compositions.

Intrepid Ryan chose what he recognises as one of Bert's most challenging instrumentals for Around the world in 80 plays - 'Chambertin'. He said: "Many see it as Bert's Magnum Opus. The way Bert played guitar was unique, sometimes sounding like multiple guitars at once, and his unorthodox way of aggressively plucking what is traditionally seen as a very pretty instrument is almost punk. As a songwriter he also stands out. His songs made me feel like something magic took place a long time ago in another part of the country." He added "It is incredible how, in this day and age of technology, Bert Jansch's minimal, earthy early recordings still manage to stand out in their unique tone. His music gave me permission to find myself".





## **John Chandler, Liverpool, Merseyside**

Next Stop for the Beth Guitar was with John Chandler in Liverpool. John took up playing the guitar at 16 and was particularly inspired by Bert Jansch and John Renbourn, whose instrumentals he played in UK folk clubs in Liverpool in the '60s and '70s. John was a member of the legendary Les Cousins Club in London's Soho, where Bert frequently played, and went there whenever his studies at Liverpool University allowed. He created and played at a folk club in Liverpool with Jude Kelly, now director of the WOW Foundation. Since then, he has become better

known as a performer of traditional Irish music, as a soloist, an accompanist, and in bands and seisiúns. In 2003, John founded, and chairs, the annual Liverpool Irish Festival. John says: "Bert was a huge influence on my guitar playing. I started my music career in the mid-1960s playing his version of 'Anji' and other instrumentals around folk clubs in Liverpool. My guitar stayed firmly in its case though, on the only occasion when we actually rubbed shoulders, in Les Cousins in 1967. I hope I am experienced enough by now, to do justice to 'Anji' in honour of Bert." John also arranged for Tony McManus (on a visit from Canada) to participate in the odyssey.

## **Tony McManus – Elora Ontario, Canada**

Tony McManus (born 1965 in Paisley) has been hailed by John Renbourn as "the best Celtic guitarist in the world". The session scene in Scotland and a BBC Radio studio set, provided the springboard for gigs around the UK and then the world. In 2002 he was nominated as Musician of the Year by both the BBC Folk Awards and Scottish Traditional Music Awards. Tony moved to the beautiful village of



Elora, in Ontario, Canada and makes world-wide appearances at guitar festivals, where just a few years ago jigs and reels would be unheard of. In addition to his solo output, Tony has worked with many singers and instrumentalists providing his distinctive sound on many successful projects. Tony found time before his Liverpool Philharmonic Hall gig, to salute Bert Jansch. Tony played an amalgam of two Gaelic pieces. In Tony's hands the complex ornamentation normally associated with fiddles and pipes is amazingly transferred to guitar.

## Gerry Cooper – Shipley, West Yorkshire

Next the Beth paid a visit to Shipley in West Yorkshire (near Bradford) to Veteran Gerry Cooper.

Gerry grew up in Newcastle-upon-Tyne where he was drawn into the 1960s folk club scene in the Northeast. He soon discovered acoustic blues: Big Bill Broonzy, and Brownie McGhee, mainly through artists like Bert Jansch, Wizz Jones and Ralph McTell.



Gerry moved to Yorkshire in 1972 as a teacher, playing folk clubs and joining a variety of bands. Once retired in 2002, he started writing songs and playing solo acoustic blues gig in pubs, clubs and festivals in the UK (mainly in the North) and in France, Spain and New Zealand (where his younger daughter lives).

Gerry played his own composition 'Righteous Train'. He said: Bert was the

first guitarist I ever heard or saw who used Drop D tuning to play melodic phrases up the neck whilst still maintaining a steady bass. It was a lightbulb moment for me, and many of my own songs have been written with a Drop D accompaniment, including 'Righteous Train'. Bert's first CD absolutely stunned me: my first reaction was 'This is amazing!' and the second was 'I'll never be able to play like that!' But that didn't stop me trying ..."

## Ewan McPherson – Edinburgh

The Beth then crossed the border and had a great tour of Scotland. Ewan McPherson lived in Edinburgh for 14 years and spent a lot of time playing music in one of Bert's old haunts Sandy Bells pub. He also worked for Stoneyport Associates which booked Bert's Scottish gigs and so he was regularly in touch with Loren, Bert's wife, organising publicity and promotional materials. Ewan plays in a band called *Salt House*, which is influenced by Bert's music including Pentangle. He took the Beth Guitar up to Inverness where he recorded his song 'The Low Call'



## Jonathan Kemp – St Andrews

Jonathan Kemp who lives in Anstruther, Fifeshire, is bassist with Teannaich rock ceilidh band, and guitarist and bandleader at St Andrews Fusion. He teaches music at the University of St Andrews and researches musical acoustics including the physics of guitar strings. He is also a music producer and recording engineer. His solo output includes British fingerstyle acoustic guitar works 'Spawn of Sporrán' and 'Treeman', and an electric album, *Electric Bothy* inspired by the Scottish folk song tradition.



He played his own composition 'Duffle Coat for Bert'. He said the title was influenced by hearing Bert introducing a song (almost certainly 'Strolling Down the Highway') at a gig, saying that he once went hitchhiking round France in the blazing hot sun wearing a Duffle Coat.

Jonathan said: "I saw Bert Jansch playing at Edinburgh Folk Club and was greatly inspired by his music. My interest in fingerpicking began with country blues but Bert, along with John Renbourn, Davey Graham and Isaac Guillory provided a spectacular link beyond. My recorded output at the time (late 90s to early noughties) was very much influenced by Bert's style. I met Bert briefly at the book signing for his biography and was able (somewhat cheesily) to let him know that I was playing some of his tunes in cafes around Edinburgh at the time and to say 'thank you for the music'."

## Simon Kempston – Edinburgh

The Beth got back to Edinburgh to the hands of Simon Kempston an award-winning Scottish singer-songwriter and guitarist. He has performed live throughout Europe, including the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Ronnie Scott's, Celtic Connections, Sligo Live and Fairport Convention's Cropredy Festival. Simon has also performed live on radio across the UK and for continental music radio stations.



Simon recorded his own composition 'Time Now To Go' in Edinburgh in April 2019. He

said: "I wrote the music after an evening listening to Bert's eponymous 1965 album on repeat. Soaked as I was in his spellbinding playing, I sat down at the guitar mesmerised and inspired by what I'd heard (despite having heard it so many times in the past). The musical structure of this song was what resulted." Simon says: "I grew up studying the classical guitar but a chance encounter with Bert's music changed my perspective upon the instrument, and I became immersed in his approach. My own guitar style now draws heavily from Bert and his contemporaries as well as from my classical training. The importance of that early listening to Bert's oeuvre and absorbing his playing, and then trying to imitate his unique style cannot be over-emphasised in the development of my own."

### **Sam Grassie in Edinburgh and on tour**



Sam had already played the Wildcard travelling Guitar in Sandy Bells pub in Edinburgh in January 2018 when the chance came up to meet another of the orbiting guitars in Edinburgh. He eagerly relished the opportunity to take the Beth travelling Yamaha TransAcoustic on tour with him in Scotland introducing it to new audiences around the country.

Sam was chosen as one of two BJJ young artists in 2020 for his superb playing and his dedication to Bert's music. The other BJJ Featured Artist was Dariush Kanani – who

played 'the Wheel on the Johnny Guitar, before it set sail for Europe. Here we see Sam on the left with Dariush right, with another of the Bert Jansch 80 players – Tommy Emmanuel from Australia – who caught up with the Graham Guitar in Santa Cruz, California in July 2019. Tommy Emmanuel was performing at the Royal Festival Hall in February 2020 when Geraldine Auerbach project manager of 80 plays for BJJ took them to meet Tommy.





## Elliott Morris – London

Back in London the Beth guitar went to Elliott Morris, who said: "Bert Jansch is a huge HERO of mine! I was brought up listening to him. Jansch was the real deal – he was ahead of the game decades ago, and still is. He is a constant source of inspiration so being a part of this project means a huge deal to me." Elliott recorded a Riff from 'The Black Swan'/together with his own untitled instrumental in January 2020.

He said: "To get to know one of Bert's favourite guitars, I have combined the riff from his song 'The Black Swan' with an as-yet-untitled piece of my own, inspired by the music of the man himself! If ever I am at a loss for what to work on, I need only listen to some Jansch and I am away!"



Half English, half Scottish and raised in Wales and Lincolnshire, Elliott, 30-years-old at the time, is a singer songwriter who has honed his craft on the road across the British Isles, from Orkney to Jersey, Boston to Llangrannog, Belfast to Clonakilty. Further afield, he's headlined shows in Germany, Holland, Ireland and Canada. Festivals have included Cambridge Folk Festival, The Great British Folk Festival, The London Acoustic Guitar Show, Ullapool Guitar Festival and Perthshire Amber, where BBC Alba broadcast a duo performance with Dougie MacLean. Elliott won a coveted Danny Kyle Award from Celtic Connections.

Elliott Morris signing the Beth Guitar

## Jacqui McShee and Mike Piggott – Surrey



The Beth's penultimate stop was with Jacqui McShee.

Vocalist Jacqui was part of Pentangle, Bert's five-piece group from its very inception in 1967, through all its variations, to Bert's final live concert on 1 August 2011 with the original line up. Mike Piggott has featured on many recordings for greats of the folk and jazz world and is known as a "Master of the jazz violin". He worked with Bert for several years playing both violin and guitar, as a duo and as part of Bert's 'Conundrum' band and, for a while in the 1980s, as part of the reformed Pentangle, appearing on two albums and on several tours with Bert. He also played on Bert's 1995 album *When the Circus Comes to Town*.

Although not a guitarist herself, Jacqui was close to Bert for so long and wanted to participate in this incredible project for Bert. She invited Mike to play the travelling TransAcoustic for her to sing Bert's: 'Baby Now it's Over'. Jacqui and Mike were two of Bert's closest friends and associates.

## Beth Orton – London

The next journey for the Beth Guitar was back to Beth. It stayed with her a long time, while she was writing songs, going on tour and contending with ill-health and uncertainty. But Beth really wanted to be part of Bert's special project.



The Bert Jansch Foundation is delighted that Beth with her husband Sam Amidon (pictured with Beth Orton performing at the Jaipur Literature festival) played the song that Anne Briggs taught Bert – 'Go Your Way My Love'.

The Beth Guitar's journey had at last come full circle.

All the artists on the journey of the Beth Guitar can be seen and heard on the dedicated website <https://80plays.bertjanschfoundation.org/>