

The Wildcard Guitar Journey – Crisscrossing Britain and Ireland

December 2018 – September 2022

The Wildcard set off on its way from the Launch Party at Yamaha Music in London going to Scotland and Ireland and back through England.

Sheffield

Edinburgh

Dublin

Belfast

Macroom Co Cork

Mayfield Co Cork

Limerick)

Somerset

Suffolk

Staffordshire

West Yorkshire

Surrey

Kent

Cornwall

Devon

– visiting several Folk Festivals across the country. It was returned to Bert Jansch Foundation Trustee, Adam Jansch, at the Bert Jansch Studio in Frome.

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'Around the world in 80 plays' When Bert's favourite guitars, the Yamaha LL Series started travelling the world, nominated by one artist to another, in an imaginative project to connect to Bert and his music, it was decided to also send a 'Wildcard' – a guitar that could be an unpredictable factor – where artists could nominate themselves to play.

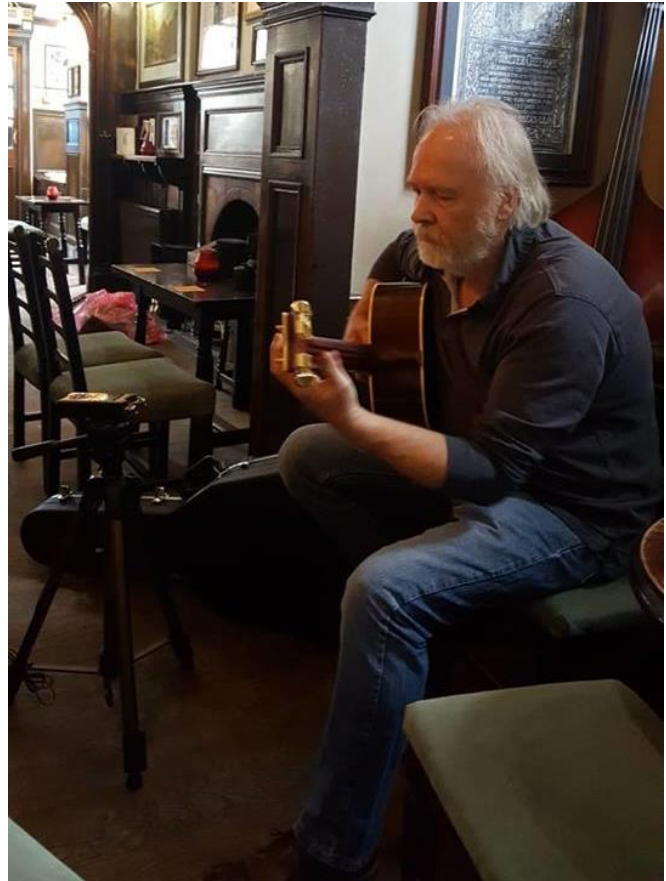


So, an extra TransAcoustic guitar, the newest model in the LL Series, took to the highway. **Chris Murphy** (left) whom we first met at the BJF guitar workshops, threw his hat into the ring, and was thrilled to be the first 'Wildcard' chosen. He took the beautiful guitar with its great built-in chorus and reverb, from the launch party at Yamaha Music Showrooms in Soho, back to Sheffield for the start of its journey. Chris (above), a singer songwriter and a guitar

teacher, loved having this special Bert kind of guitar with him at home and managed to play quite a few songs on it while he had it. He admits that for him, Bert was key. His whole a songwriting pproach changed 'post-Bert'. For the journey, Chris played his own composition 'March Flare' which he said was heavily influenced by Bert. He told us that he had the good fortune when quite young to see his hero play live at The Wardrobe, a small pub in Leeds. Chris got a handshake and an autograph which he treasures to this day.

## Sandy Bells – the legendary folk venue in Edinburgh

From Sheffield, the guitar went up to Edinburgh, where Bert grew up. **Mike Walker**, a colleague from the early days had the idea of adding a dimension to the project by arranging a jam session at the legendary folk pub of the '60s and '70s scene, Sandy Bells. Mike said: "Bells epitomises the folk pubs in which Bert started off before his London days. I've really enjoyed the whole experience, and the session in Bells was a real blast from the past for me. Diehard fan **Dave Moir** came down from Aberdeen and brilliant young pretenders **Sam Grassie** and his **Avocet** band, and many others joined us for the jam session. So, thanks and kudos to you guys at the BJ Foundation for making this possible."



Born in Orkney in 1954, Mike Walker's life has intertwined with the music of Bert Jansch and John Renbourn which had enthralled him from an early age. He first met Bert when he was a support to Bert's 1973 Edinburgh University gig! He studied guitar in London with the same teacher as the young Renbourn. At RCA Records and later as senior mastering engineer at the legendary Trident Studios in Soho, Mike found himself working repeatedly on the catalogues of Bert, John and the Pentangle, collaborating with both Bert and John. His intimate knowledge has proved very useful as a member of the *Bert Transcribed* team. Mike is a key teacher in the Renbourn Guitar Workshops, which he has continued to run since John's untimely passing in 2015. Mike mused: "Bert used to like to compose by just communing with the guitar and then working and re-working/re-voicing the ideas that flowed out. So, I have tried to use that process for this exercise. The result is a bit old school and is a nod to the early Bert/John/Pentangle days. I have called it **One for Bert** and I hope it will resonate with Bert fans."

Mike continued "All who came were impressed with the guitar and there was much discussion and dissection of Bert's music and a renewal of interest from the guitarists who turned up, so a real endorsement of what the Foundation is doing with Yamaha's help. It will be really interesting to see and hear all the contributions on this guitar journey."

### **Sam Grassie**

created a band called Avocet in homage to Bert at just 23 in 2018. He first discovered Bert's music sifting through his father's music collection, which was the catalyst for his first attempts at song writing.



Sam said: "Bert's work will always be a lodestone; a source of inspiration as we continue to develop our music. It keeps us grounded in these uncertain times. Our song for Bert, Steal From the Road which Iona Zajac and I (pictured above) wrote and performed for 'Around the World in 80 Plays' took shape from our reflections on the kinds of expectations we all have when embarking on a new journey."

### **To Ireland**

Mike Walker nominated **Eoghan O'Shaughnessy**, a striking young player from Dublin who had impressed him at one of the Renbourn Guitar Workshops.





Eoghan and Consuela Nerea Breschi who make up the band **The Morning Tree** played 'My Bonnie Boy', learned from Anne Briggs in tribute to Bert. Eoghan wrote: "Bert's music summed up everything I had been looking for in a guitarist. The feeling, the technique, the repertoire, the intuition. It was like he was purposely \*not\* adding things to the music in a way that made you feel them even more in the delivery. And after that I was hooked." Eoghan added: "It's really a great model of a guitar. I can see why Bert played these. This one is particularly suited to finger-picking! Might have to get one for myself!"

Next, Eoghan O'Shaughnessy nominated **Lankum** in Dublin. Daragh Lynch and Radie Peat (pictured below) played a piece by Davey Graham 'Hares on the Mountain' on the Wildcard in Dublin in December 2018. Lankum is normally a four-piece traditional acoustic folk group, established in the early 2000s. They combine distinctive four-part vocal harmonies with arrangements of uilleann pipes, concertina, Russian accordion, fiddle and guitar. Their repertoire spans humorous Dublin music-hall ditties and street-songs, classic ballads from the 'Traveller' tradition, Irish and American dance tunes, and their own original material.



Daragh said, "*Hares on the Mountain* from the Davey Graham, Shirley Collins album *Folk Roots, New Routes*, but the style of playing is what both Bert and Davey are renowned for, probably most famously with the folk standard 'Anji'. Apparently, Bert was present at the actual recording sessions, and it directly affected both his style and repertoire. Myself and Radie have recently started playing this live at

Lankum gigs and it's always very enjoyable to play – and on this guitar was an absolute pleasure."

## Gigs at the Black Box, Belfast

The Wildcard TransAcoustic next moved north to Belfast where long-time Bert fan **Stephen McCann** had put his hand up for it. He booked a whole gig at the famous Black Box folk venue and invited friends to join him.

Stephen said: "I don't recall when Bert became an all-consuming passion for me. It seems like he's always been there. He gave me something wonderful to aspire to. His playing got under my skin, and it satisfied my artistic desire to both imitate and create."



Bernard Butler (left) clutching the Wildcard guitar with Stephen McCann at the Black Box, Belfast January 2019

Stephen added: "I met Bert several times, the first where he introduced me to Davey Graham in Belfast. He was a wonderfully humble and quietly encouraging man and I am glad that we crossed paths. I am still in awe of his body of work and the themes he addressed, from the archetypal to the deeply personal. It's been a real trip. 'Bert's Beat,' the piece I wrote as soon as I knew I was a Wildcard

artist on this trip, was the final tune in my gig that went amazingly well. I played a set of Jansch covers and there was a performance from Bert's biographer, **Colin Harper** (below) who played his own composition 'Make Your Own World'. Colin said,



"It's great to hear Bert's music live again. In fact, to have it *live* again..." Stephen McCann also met up with **Bernard Butler** when he played at the Black Box a couple of weeks later in January 2019. Steve said: "Bernard was a sweetheart. He used the guitar on a couple of the songs during his gig and signed it too. Thanks so much to the Bert Jansch Foundation for introducing us, it's been a blast!"



## Rhapsody in Ireland

The 'Wildcard' went straight down to County Cork to **Ger Wolfe**, where it enjoyed warm hospitality from singer-songwriters and gigging musicians working all over Ireland. Ger passed it to Fintan Lucy in Mayfield also in Co Cork. Tony Henderson recorded with Fintan and then handed it to Alan Jordan in Limerick.



Ger Wolf



Fintan Lucy



Tony Henderson



Alan Jordan

**Ger Wolfe** who wrote and performed 'I See the New Moon' said: "By the way, the guitar is really beautiful, I see what you mean about the electric tone, the sustain is brilliant on it, very nice, and really suits the open tunings – I could 'waste' away hours on it quite happily! Fintan Lucy sang his own composition 'Peace Will Come Again Someday'. He said: "Bert was a force and a feeling who has directly and indirectly seeped into my own humble efforts as a songwriter and guitarist. I'm lucky to have finally got to see him play live in my native Cork in 2006." Tony Henderson played a song 'Yellowhead Pass' that he wrote about working on the Canadian railroad. Alan Jordan chose Jackson C Frank's 'Blues Run the Game' that Bert made his own. He said: "I learned to play it from listening to Bert. I have always loved fingerstyle guitar music, particularly with a folk-blues feel to it. Bert's music seemed to blend together the styles of music I loved, as simply an integrated expression of himself."



## To the Thompson Family in London

The TransAcoustic came back to London for a setup at the Yamaha Soho Superstore before Bernard Butler picked it up and took it along to his live [Boogaloo Radio show](#) to meet his nominee for the Wildcard, **James Walbourne**.

James is one-half of The Rails– the other half being his wife, Kami Thompson. Since 2008, he has been

guitarist for The Pretenders and previously was part of Ray Davies of the Kinks' solo band and toured with The Pogues. James composed and recorded 'The Camden Town Breakdown' in May 2019, before taking the guitar to his father-in-law Richard Thompson.

## **Richard Thompson**

The acclaimed English singer, songwriter, and guitarist **Richard Thompson** **OBE** was a close contemporary and friend of Bert's. Richard has been blending traditional Celtic and English music with American rock 'n' roll since the mid-1960s when he helped found the seminal British folk-rock band **Fairport Convention**. His songwriting has earned him an Ivor Novello Award and, in 2006, a BBC Radio lifetime achievement award. Richard was appointed OBE in 2011 for services to music. He continues to write and record new material and perform live at major venues throughout the world.

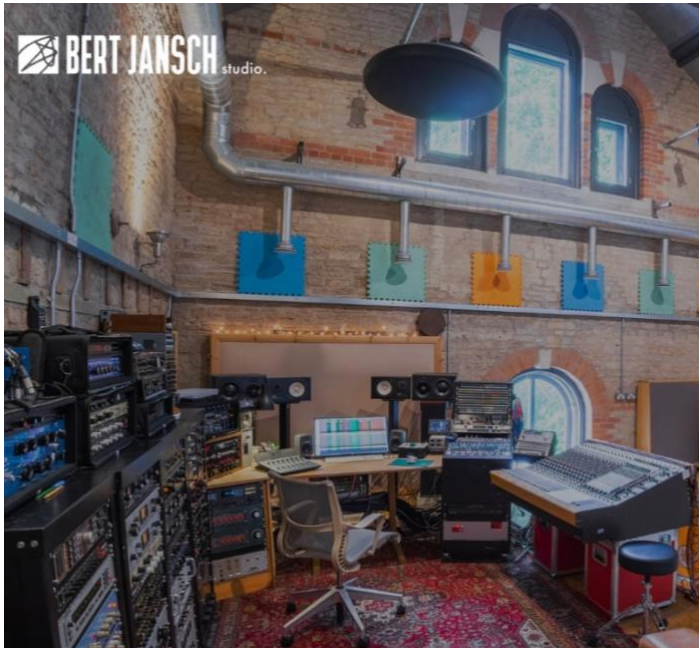
Richard recorded Bert's iconic 'Blackwaterside' in Notting Hill in August 2019. He said he first heard it played by Bert in a folk club and has since performed it throughout his career both solo and with colleagues such as Sandy Denny.

He adds: "Bert could take the blues and jazz and traditional British folk music and blend those together into a style. He was also a great songwriter. Thank you, Bert, for your influence on my music and everyone else's music. Everybody who was around in the folk scene after you – learned from you. So, God bless you wherever you are and thank you."



## Crisscrossing England – first stop: The Bert Jansch Studio, Frome, Somerset

The Wildcard next winged its way to the Bert Jansch Studio in Frome, Somerset.



The Bert Jansch Foundation had watched with pleasure and helped where possible to turn this old industrial building on the site of the Cheese & Grain Market (now a thriving arts centre) into a world-class music recording facility managed jointly with local music producer Dom Monks. The studio has hosted international recording artists including Sir Tom Jones, Michael Kiwanuka and has delivered postproduction services for Nick Cave and Laura Marling. It also hosts youth music projects and masterclasses by local musicians.

<https://bertjanschstudio.com/>

First to play it in Frome was **John Smith** (right). He has released five albums and played around the world. He's opened for folk greats including John Martyn, Davey Graham and John Renbourn, who called him "the future of folk music".



John chose to make his own arrangement of Anne Briggs' 'The Time has Come'. He said: "The guitar part is distinctly Bert and invites a fingerpicker to disappear down a rabbit-hole of hypnotic altered-tune syncopation. One of my favourite ways to spend time is to close my eyes and play Bert's riff for this song. I saw once Bert perform, but never had the chance to thank him for his part in changing my life."

Next up at the Bert Jansch Studio were **Cara Dillon and Sam Lakeman**. They are the golden couple: perfect musical and marital partners. Both were born in 1975 into musical families: Cara in County Derry, Northern Ireland and Sam on the



fringes of Dartmoor. Cara's beautiful voice won her the All-Ireland Trophy when she was only 14 and Mojo magazine has said she has "What may well be the world's most beautiful female voice."

Sam, an immensely talented pianist and acoustic guitar player has produced, co-written and arranged all of Cara's albums and performs live alongside her. He also produces other artists including John Smith's *Headlong* album in 2017. Cara, who is a featured artists at the Cheese and Grain, was one of half a dozen artists who tackled Bert's famous take on 'Blackwaterside', singing, while Sam played the guitar.



## To Suffolk – to Jane Bromley, James Bromley and Peter Reeves, February 2021

For Jane Bromley (right) who grew up in Lincolnshire and now lives in rural Suffolk with two children, a rescue greyhound and three chickens, music is an abiding hobby. She plays guitar, flute, recorders, piano and sings. She has participated in a diverse range of orchestras, groups and choirs and regularly plays as part of local folk group. She discovered Bert's music in her teens, through her parents' CDs. Jane said: "I chose 'Go Your Way My Love' as I first heard Bert play this accompanying Anne Briggs on the *Acoustic Routes* CD 25 years ago. I went on to discover more of his earlier work and to hear him live in the late 1990s. The song has a haunting melody and melancholy lyrics, but Bert's accompaniment makes it rhapsodic and therefore lovely to sing."



Jane's son, **James Bromley**, (left) just 18 at the time, had no compunction in offering 'Anji' as his piece for Bert. He said: "I grew up hearing the music of Bert Jansch. 'Anji' was something I taught myself to play early on in learning the guitar. I enjoy playing *Anji* because it includes elements of blues and jazz styles, which is where my own songwriting and guitar playing naturally tends to focus."

Jane's partner **Peter Reeves** (below) chose to play 'Black Water Side', as this was his introduction to Bert Jansch and made a lasting impression on him. He said: "Bert uses a passing note to great effect and the tune showcases his signature riff. It's a challenging tune to play authentically, and its difficulty is not lost on the audience. It is Bert's ability to take a traditional tune and apply a unique interpretation and a distinct trademark style that has influenced me to write a number of my own tunes and to further explore the many musical connections the folk genre offers."

Jane, James and Peter, have attended several Bert Jansch guitar workshops organised by the Bert Jansch Foundation at Cecil Sharp House.





## Hassam Mahmood, from Lahore, Pakistan



We had been in touch for months with passionate fingerstylist and Bert fan, **Hassam Mahmood** in Lahore Pakistan. We were pondering how to get a guitar over to him there – maybe his brother who lives in Switzerland could take it – when he suddenly announced that he was coming to the UK to study at Keele University in Staffordshire. That made things much easier, So, from Suffolk, the Wildcard made its next stop with Hassam at Keele in the potteries near Stoke-on-Trent.

England, sightseeing, we had just 'Paper Houses' from the album *Toy Balloon* on repeat most of the time. It has been thrilling to play it for Bert on one of his preferred Yamaha instruments."

Hassam (left) said 'Paper Houses' is one of my absolute favourites. When my brother and I were travelling around

## From Keele, Staffs – to Bingley, West Yorkshire to Katie Spencer.





Next the Wildcard TransAcoustic shot up to Bingley in July 2021, to be played at last, by its first female guitarist and singer-songwriter, young **Katie Spencer**.

At just 23, Katie Spencer (above) had already built up a respected profile playing at the Cambridge Folk Festival and Celtic Connections with musicians such as Danny Thompson and Ted McKenna. She said: "At the age of 16, many of my weekends were spent squeezed into a busy pub somewhere in the north of England listening to music. I became particularly obsessed with acoustic guitar playing. The first Bert Jansch record that I heard was *The Black Swan*.

"Not only did his guitar playing blow me away, but also his raw delivery and beautiful song-writing style: he was a pure innovator. I really love it and I still feel so excited and welcomed by the music. I often re-visit his music – my favourite at the moment is *Avocet*. My song, 'Shannon Road' is an autobiographical memory song, just like many of Bert's songs were snapshots in time. Bert's songs carry a lot of honesty, and I find that really moving. Shannon Road in Hull is where my Grandma lived for most of her life. I have very fond memories of spending time with her there, and I wanted to capture that feeling within this song."

### **From Katie in Yorkshire the guitar travelled to Michael Watts in Oxshott, Surrey**

Michael Watts is a guitarist, writer, journalist and film-maker. One of his career highlights was being invited to participate in the 2013 *Celebration of Bert Jansch* at the Royal Festival Hall, [playing electric guitar for Beverley Martyn](#).

Michael chose his own composition ***The Unfair Funfair*** to play on the TransAcoustic for Bert in August 2021.



He said: "I wrote this piece when I heard of Bert's passing. It is dedicated to him. It reminds me of him every time I play it and that makes me happy. I often play it near the start of my set to get the blood pumping! Bert's music was like mother's milk to me. I grew up with the sound of the 'Blue' [debut] album and my dad would play me some of Bert's songs on guitar before I could walk. Apparently, I really loved 'Smoky River'!

"I met Bert on a couple of occasions. Once at the Edinburgh festival and another time a decade or so later at the Sage in Gateshead for the Pentangle reunion tour, after I'd become friendly with John Renbourn."

## Next the Wildcard went to Hastings to UK based singer/songwriter and guitarist Jason McNiff

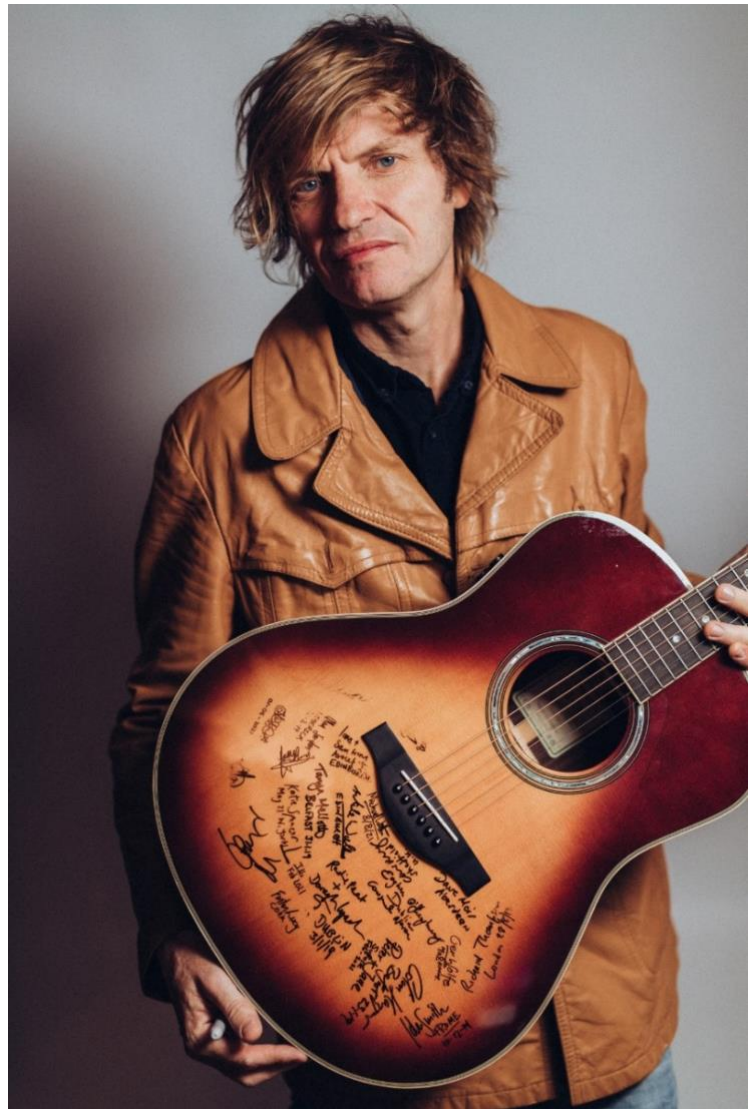
Jason has made eight albums of his own varied and particular take on British and American roots music. His playing is inspired by Bert and other great finger style players such as Wizz Jones, Ralph McTell, Mark Knopfler and John Fahey. He performs a livestream every Thursday and runs the popular 'Sundowner' event in Hastings.

Jason played Bert's 'Open Road' for the journey. He said: "This is a track from *When the Circus Comes to Town*, the first record I bought by Bert. It begins with the line, 'It must be the gypsy inside me...' and you can tell Bert feels a deep connection with the myth and magic of travelling people. Perhaps he was a gypsy in a past life. It's also such fun to play with the little finger slap and bass line echoing the vocal melody. Bert was beginning his comeback with *When the Circus Comes to Town* just as I was starting out and moving to London. I was deeply inspired by Bert's playing then and still am today."

"I first heard the name Bert Jansch at the flat of local Nottingham legend Dave Turner. I was 21 years old and getting ready to move to London. He said 'Here's something you've never heard before that's going to blow your mind'.

A couple of weeks later, I was in Denmark Street putting up an advert for 'bass player into blues, country and Bob Dylan' when I saw on a little billboard, at the entrance to the alley, a poster saying "Bert Jansch here tonight".

"It was the start, of my journey into the world of Bert, and for the next few months, I went back every Wednesday (it was a weekly residency) and witnessed the club slowly fill until, by the end, it was rammed to its 14th-century rafters. Since that time, Bert Jansch has remained one of my most important influences. I have phased in and out but never grown tired. His style is layered and deep and so influential. Just ask Neil Young or Johnny Marr. In fact, influential is its essence. Just writing about him now makes me want to pick up the guitar."





## From the East of the country to the West Country



From the coast of Kent, the Wildcard travelled right across to the tip of Cornwall, where it was rapturously received by Sarah McQuaid in Penzance. Born in Spain, raised in the USA and now living in England, Sarah has recorded six acclaimed solo albums, most recently *The St Buryan Sessions*, recorded and filmed live in the beautiful medieval church of St Buryan, not far from Sarah's home in rural West Cornwall. She is the author of *The Irish DADGAD Guitar Book*, published by Hal Leonard/Novello and still the standard reference on the subject. Sarah was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Ards International Guitar Festival in 2017.

Sarah recorded a traditional Irish song 'When a Man's in Love' for Bert, in this beautiful church, in March 2022. She said: "I recorded this song on my debut album, *When Two Lovers Meet*, way back in 1997. It's one I always use as an example when I'm giving workshops on the DADGAD tuning, because I feel it's a beautiful illustration. While Bert never recorded this song, my guitar arrangement of it was heavily influenced by his playing. All the guitar tracks on the *Jack Orion* album seem to be played in either DADGAD or dropped-D tuning, and I remember listening to them over and over again, trying to work out exactly what he was doing with his fingers and eventually giving up! By the time I was in my early 20s I'd started using the DADGAD tuning exclusively and was a massive fan of Bert Jansch's style.

"I particularly loved the way Bert often played a guitar part that contrasted rhythmically and melodically with the vocal line, so that rather than simply a song with guitar accompaniment, the piece became a duet for guitar and voice. That's something I've always striven for in my own music."



## To Veterans Gareth Hedges and Graham Harvey

Sarah McQuaid brought the guitar to the border of Devon to hand it over to Totnes-based veteran guitarist and singer songwriter Gareth Hedges, a contemporary and friend of Bert's, who had been nominated by Rik Palieri – over in Vermont USA.



Back in the 1960s, Gareth had played and listened at venues all over London where blues, jazz and folk were performed. He met Bert Jansch many times at his early performances. He was intrigued at how Bert could fold American Blues into traditional British ballads and vice versa. In the late 1970s Gareth spent many pleasant hours swapping songs and guitar tunings with him at Bert's guitar shop at 220, New King's Road, near Putney Bridge in London. The shop which Bert had opened with partner Charlotte Crofton-Sleigh, specialised in hand-built acoustic guitars but was not a commercial success and closed after two years.

Years of international touring had led to Gareth meeting American banjo virtuoso Rik Palieri and they teamed up to perform concerts, festivals and on radio, and recorded a CD together. It was Rik who nominated Gareth for the Around the World In 80 Plays project and who recently hosted Gareth, with other performers on this on his Folk Radio show from Vermont.



For Bert, Gareth (left) played 'The Cuckoo', a traditional English/American piece in April 2022.

Gareth said: "I chose this song because I wanted to show how important American music was to Bert. When Bert sang a blues, it might have a British feel while an English or Scottish folk song might have a transatlantic twang. 'The Cuckoo' is a song that began life in England in Elizabethan times, then

crossed the Atlantic and became Americanised – then travelled back and forth again and again. I picked up this version from Tennessee banjo player Clarence Ashley when I was his road manager in 1966. Bert recorded an English version of the song on the Pentangle LP *Sweet Child*.'

Gareth nominated near-neighbour and fellow Pentangle fan from way back, **Graham Harvey** (right) to be next on the journey.

Looking out onto the stark beauty of Dartmoor, Graham played 'Rosemary Lane' with vocals from his singer friend Gail Jones. He said: "Having bought *Basket of Light* as a 15-year-old, I saw Pentangle play on four occasions and continued my life-long love of folk music. I was always amazed at Bert's playing and writing...though it was only when I started playing seriously that I began to really appreciate how truly remarkable he was."





## A summer of festivals for the Wildcard with Reg Meuross.



**Reg Meuross** has toured the UK and the world since the 1980s with internationally known artists like Pete Townshend and Mike Harding, (who said: "Reg has that rare gift of being able to touch people, through his songs and performance, on a really human level". With Reg, the Wildcard had a wild summer fling in 2022, visiting folk festivals across the country and airing on the radio show 'Off the Beaten Track' on Somer Valley FM.

Reg Said: "One of the first albums I ever owned and certainly some of the first songs I ever learned to play were Bert's, especially 'Needle of Death' [which Reg played for the journey] which brought home the possibility of writing about very dark and important subjects. I

later played with Bert and Davy at The Troubadour in the 90s. When it came to deciding on how to play 'She Moved Through The Fair' for my release *Songs of Love & Death* of course I turned to Bert's interpretation."

At the Chester Folk Festival, Reg met up with Midlands-born fingerpicking guitarist and songwriter **Sam Carter**, who is well-known for his vivid, narrative-driven songwriting and live performances. Over the past fifteen years, he has appeared on national TV, won a BBC Folk Award, and has toured the world, sharing stages with some of folk's leading lights, including Richard Thompson, Eliza Carthy, Martin Simpson and Nancy Kerr. Sam picked a theme from *Avocet* which he said he had only recently discovered though he has been a Bert fan for ages, for his contribution to the journey. (Sam's is the only video with an active zipwire in the background.)





The Wildcard Guitar also met some great Folk Legends on the festival circuit, who, though not having the time to record a song on it, were nevertheless delighted to meet the Wildcard 80 plays guitar and sign it.



This included such luminaries as **Maddy Prior** (left) English Folk Rock Singer best known as the lead vocalist of Steeleye Span. Maggie has been gigging and recording with many artists over the years. She was happy to add her signature to the Wildcard Guitar.

Another old-time troubadour who signed the Wildcard at the festivals, was **Pete Morton** (below) who has been charming audiences all over the world in the contemporary roots music scene.





After signing the Wildcard himself Reg Meuross then introduced the guitar to one of Bert's heroes **Pete Townshend** (below).



After a rich, and exciting summer, Reg who is based in Somerset, brought the Wildcard Guitar to the end of its journey, handing it to Bert's son, Adam Jansch, a Trustee of the Bert Jansch Foundation, at the Bert Jansch Studio in Frome.

