

## Ewan MacColl Memorial Concerts and Book Launches

Centre for Political Song, Glasgow Caledonian University, Saturday 22 October at 2pm

Peel Hall, Salford University, Tuesday 27 October, 7.30

Glasgow tickets from [J.Powles@gcal.ac.uk](mailto:J.Powles@gcal.ac.uk)

Salford tickets from [wegottickets.com](http://wegottickets.com)

**Ewan MacColl** was born in Salford in 1915 and died 20 years ago in London, on 22 October 1989. The concert at Peel Hall celebrates his life and work and launches a new edition of his autobiography, *Journeyman*.

Ewan was an actor, playwright, singer, songwriter and dedicated political activist. Born Jimmie Miller in Coburg Street, Salford, of Scottish working-class parents, he left school at 14 when unemployment was at its height. He largely educated himself at Manchester Public Library, joined the Communist Party, and began a street theatre group *The Red Megaphones* at the age of 16, and was acting for BBC Manchester three years later, and had married the actress Joan Littlewood by the time he was 20. With Joan, before and after the War, he pioneered radical theatre, writing and adapting plays that she directed. With the touring Theatre Workshop they received huge acclaim abroad but were ignored at home until they settled at Stratford East in the early 1950s. At that point Ewan changed direction, and concentrated on folk music, instigating an English folk revival, singing all over the country and beginning to write songs in the folk idiom. Between 1958 and 1964 he wrote over 70 songs for the influential Radio Ballad series (the first to allow real working people's voices to be heard), on which he worked with his partner Peggy Seeger. Until his death at 74 he tirelessly continued to write songs and campaign for radical causes, notably in support of the 1984 miners' strike.

His autobiography *Journeyman* was compiled by Peggy from his writings and published after his death. This autumn, Manchester University Press is issuing a new version, reassembled and edited by Ted Power. The first half of the book concentrates on his early years in Salford and Manchester, the second on his post-war life in theatre, folk music, and in supporting political causes.

### The Performers

**Peggy Seeger**, who has written a new foreword to the book, was Ewan MacColl's partner in life and work for his last 30 years. Peggy was born into an eclectic musical family in East Coast America, as the half-sister of the much older Pete Seeger, pioneer of the American folk revival, and arrived in England in 1956 at the age of 21. Originally invited as an expert banjo player, she plays a wide variety of instruments, and as an accompanist and singer invigorated with Ewan the English folk revival of the 1960s. Later she became a prolific writer of songs in the folk idiom. She turned to feminist issues after the success of her *I'm Gonna be an Engineer* in 1971, and continues to write songs prolifically on a wide range of subjects. A masterly live performer, she still tours regularly and runs a songwriting course at North Eastern University in Boston. Now living in America, she plans to return to England permanently in 2010. **Headlines both concerts.**

**Sandra Kerr** was a founder member of an informal group of young singers known as the *Critics Group* which met regularly in the MacColl/Seeger home in Beckenham in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was an education in folk song and radical causes, and subsequently in acting, with an annual *Festival of Fools*, a satirical show of pyrotechnic brilliance which for several years would run for a month after Christmas in London. They produced several influential records, including an East End *Romeo and Juliet* for schools in which Sandra played Juliet, and after the group broke up each took their skills in a different direction. After many years researching folk song, writing and performing solo and in groups such as *Sisters Unlimited* and *Voice Union*, Sandra is now a tutor on the hugely successful folksong and traditional music degree course at Newcastle University. She is a ubiquitous performer and teacher in constant demand, and directs two folk choirs in Newcastle. **Both concerts.**

**John Faulkner**, an English folk singer and songwriter now living in. With Sandra Kerr he co-wrote and performed the music and songs for the popular children's TV series *Bagpuss* created by Oliver Postgate and Peter Firmin, which has enjoyed a cult revival. In recent years he has been a prolific writer of film music. He is now artist in residence at the Galway City Museum. **Both concerts.**

**Frankie Armstrong** was another member of the *Critics Group*. From skiffle at 16 she moved on to folk music, working with Lou Killen before recording *The Bird in the Bush* with Bert Lloyd and Anne Briggs in 1965, her first album of many. Deeply involved in folk and political song, in the 1970s she pioneered traditional song workshops, and was a member of FIG, the Feminist Improving Group. A passionate advocate of the inspirational and recuperative power of song, she continues to sing and to run workshops for a wide range of groups. In January she will be publishing with Janet Rodgers a new book, *Acting and Singing with Archetypes*. **Glasgow concert.**

**Jez Lowe** is one of the country's foremost songwriters and performers in the folk idiom, touring constantly at home and abroad, both solo and with his group *The Bad Pennies*. Known for his songs rooted in the North East's coalmining history, he is a prolific songwriter who has produced 15 albums of his own songs in the last 30 years. He contributed 19 songs - written from the actuality in the MacColl Radio Ballad style - for the 2006 Radio Ballad series. He was nominated Folksinger of the Year for the Sony Awards in 2008, and this year his album *Northern Echoes* won Best Lyrics Award in the USA Indie Acoustic Project. **Manchester concert.**

**Bob Fox** is another folk singer from the fertile North East. In the last 30 years he has produced several albums, solo and with Stu Luckley and now Billy Mitchell. In 2003 and 2004 he was nominated for Sony Folksinger of the Year, and he sang several of Jez Lowe's songs for the 2006 Radio Ballad series. **Manchester concert.**

**Jimmie McGregor** was one of the most well-known early folk revival singers, appearing regularly as a young folksinger on BBC's early evening Tonight programme from 1960 with Robin Hall. They sang together for 20 years, making over 20 albums, fronting the White Heather Club for several years, and singing with The Galliards. Later McGregor moved on to further work on Scottish television and radio, such as *McGregor's Gathering*, a long-running show for Radio Scotland. Among them was a programme he wrote on Ewan MacColl. Recently he has been much involved in the conservation movement, notably in the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland. **Glasgow concert.**

**Bob Blair and Brian Pearson** were both members of the *Critics Group*, featuring on their several records. The folksinger Bob Blair returned to Scotland, where he became a member of *Stramash*, a Scottish group specialising in traditional Scots and Irish songs. Brian Pearson was a leading light in the *Festival of Fools* productions. A singer, songwriter and voice workshop leader, he now chairs the Chester-based professional group *Theatre in the Quarter*, which specialises in creating plays in the community. **Both concerts.**

**David Ferrard** is a young Scots/American folk singer and songwriter based in Edinburgh who has specialised in songs of pacifism. With Roy Bailey he has a show entitled Not in Our Name - Songs of Peace and Protest, and Not in Our Name is the title of a CD he assembled of songs protesting against the Iraq War. He won the Danny Kyle award at Celtic Connections in 2006 and was a winner at Burnsong 2007. **Both concerts.**