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Songs of sadness, joy and reflection

St James played host to folk musician, political activist, author and Guernsey Literary Festival guest Peggy Seeger on Thursday night.

Shaun Shackelton found it an evening of complete joy

IT WAS an evening of reflection, sadness, unbridled joy, remembrance and a scattering of political satire. After a reading from her memoir, *First Time Ever*, and an intro by her son, Callum MacColl, shawled in red, Peggy Seeger took the stage beaming. Careful and measured, befitting an 83-year-old, she sat down and picked up an acoustic guitar and the pair strummed into *Up in Wisconsin* by Don Lange. An eco song about the environment and killing endangered species, it nailed Peggy's activist colours to the mast from the off. All the way through the evening Peggy spoke to the audience in an easy, often self-deprecating, way. 'I never forget anything,' she said, 'I just remember it later.' Something she proved a couple of times. But when you've recorded 20 albums of your own and featured



Peggy Seeger at St James on Thursday night. (All pictures by Chris George Photography)

on more than 100 others, you can be forgiven for forgetting the order of verses and choruses. Reaching for a banjo – which she

clawhammered with virtuoso dexterity – she played the old classic murder ballad, *Omie Wise*. 'Well, we've had ecological disaster

and reflective and included a lovely Napoleonic ballad (*The Isle of St Helena*) in which Callum played slide guitar and included

'If this is a sign of things to come, Guernsey Literary Festival 2018 is going to be the best yet'

an 'impromptu' acapella, filled with hidden expletives, called *Donald's in the White House*. But for me (and my two daughters, who admitted to 'tearing up', if not actually crying), the highlight of the evening was a beautiful rendition, by Callum, of his father's song, *The Joy of Living* – 'My father's farewell song' as he called it, showed the closeness and playfulness between mother and son. Taking this further, Peggy's next song was *Song for Callum*, which she wrote when he was 12. Moving on to the piano, she sang *All in the Mind* and then a moving song for her mother, *Ruth Crawford Seeger, Everything Changes*. After *Ballad of Accounting*, a Ewan MacColl song, the first set ended with an audience singalong, the wonderful, autoharp-led, WC Handy/Spencer Williams classic *Careless Love*. The second half was more

written at the bottom of a Scottish mountain he couldn't climb because his legs had finally failed him. Peggy sat with her eyes closed all the way through, miming the words, until the last few lines – 'I'll be riding the gentle wind that blows through your hair / Reminding you how we shared / In the joy of living.'

The evening itself was a complete joy. We got to sing with Peggy Seeger. If this is a sign of things to come, Guernsey Literary Festival 2018 is going to be the best yet.



Seeger with her son Callum MacColl.

going out

big guide

Saturday

Elysium Pink Floyd set at The Doghouse.
Tantale at The Vault.
Mark Guppy at The Rockmount.
JD & Folk at The Rockmount.
Nic Coleman at The Golden Lion, from 9pm.
The Liberators at The Thomas de la Rue.

Monday

Open mic night at The Thomas de la Rue.

Tuesday

Open mic night at The Cock and Bull.

Wednesday

Open mic night at The Golden Lion.

Thursday

Open mic night at The Vault.
The Irish Session at The Cock and Bull, from 9pm.

Friday

Fade2Grey in Herm.
Matt Bonneville & The Cage Shakers at The Doghouse.
Jam Night at The Fermain Tavern.



Tantale 'are to the Vault' tonight.