



## Review: Chesterfield Folk Club – Chris While and Julie Matthews /Shaun Hutch



Concert: Friday October 11<sup>th</sup> 2019

Another month...another Friday... another super-talented musical duo. I'd never come across [Chris While and Julie Matthews](#) before (ah...the shame of ignorance), but I was obviously in the minority. Their reputation is huge (ex- Albion Band, St. Agnes Fountain and nominated no less than ten times in the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards) and was reflected in an almost full house at the Library Auditorium.

But before we get on to the main course, let's savour the appetiser that was local legend Shaun Hutch. Dolled up to the nines in his best 50s-a-like togs and slicked-back hair, it looked like we were in for a rock'n'roll revival.

**Shaun Hutch** – photo by Patrick Scott

Shaun started his set, rather unexpectedly, with a song by Chris Wood (soon to appear at a Folk Club near you, this coming March). The song in question was *"The Cottager's Reply"*. It deals with a yuppie from London who's driven out to the Cotswolds to try to purchase a country cottage from a long-time local resident, only to be told to f\*\*k off back to London. It's not my favourite of Chris Wood's songs – it's too full of logical flaws (if the local yokel didn't want to sell the cottage, why did he put it on the market? And if he didn't like the purchaser, wouldn't it have been better to give him a call, rather than let him drive all the way up the M4? Bloody locals!) – but it does raise some complex thoughts about immigration (and I'm a former immigrant worker myself) – would rural communities stagnate without an influx of new blood from the cities? Do immigrants show wisdom when they tread lightly in another culture? Stop burbling, Dave. The important thing is that Shaun pulled the song off with aplomb. He went on to deliver a set of lovely folky songs, with a confident guitar style, in open tuning, and a melody riff being picked out on the top E. Shaun let rip with Dick Gaughan's version of the Burns poem *"Song Composed in August / Now Westlin' Winds"* and then treated us to two of his own compositions (which, for me, were the highlight of the set) –

“Melancholy Day”, concerning the lure of the Sheffield moors “where the curlews call” and the instrumental “Katie’s Tune”, written for his niece. And finally, we reached the music that Shaun was dressed for – “Blue Bayou” by Roy Orbison. Brilliant delivery – you can really feel the extent to which Shaun identifies with old smoothie-chops – the song really suits his voice. Thanks, Shaun!



Julie Matthews and Chris While - photo by Patrick Scott

Last month’s duo (Brian Willoughby and Cathryn Craig) were, in terms of equipment complexity, almost the polar opposite of Chris and Julie. Brian and Cathryn brought a minimum of sound gear and were up and running in 10 minutes. Chris and Julie had a collection of gadgetry and were apparently (none of us were around to witness it) over 2 hours honing their sound system. It sounded great, of course – although maybe not better than Cathryn and Brian – still, one does have to wonder whether the few minor glitches caused by, for example, the use of in-ear monitors, were worth the trouble. But. None of our business and each to their own. What’s important was that Chris and Julie wowed the almost sell-out audience with a fabulous and lively set, representing their 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Tour, interspersed with a very comfortable and funny line of patter (gentle admonitions after minor faux-pas like “It’s a exactly this kind of thing that keeps us out of the big money”).

They started off with the rhythm-guitar drive and clear vocals of “Revolution Calls” (“Not enough of them to keep us all down”). This immediately starts me wondering whether I’m one of “us” or one of “them” – but I keep such thoughts to myself and cheer along with the rest of the audience at the rousing anthem. Subtler stuff follows: “Landfill” – with reflections on our throwaway culture and the sobering thought that, yes, we too will end up being landfill (or, more likely, incinerator ash) one day. My favourite song of the set was probably “Drop Hammer” – a song about industry being not just noise pollution, but the heartbeat of a community (and, in this respect, it was reminiscent of O’Hooley & Tidow’s “The Hum”). The song was beautifully delivered with unaccompanied vocals and hand-held percussion. In “Single Act of Kindness”,

concerning the celebrities who turned out to help the New Orleans victims of Hurricane Katrina, Julie played rhythm guitar, while Chris complemented with solo licks high on the fretboard. "Coming Out to Mother" was also a great, heartfelt personal saga playing out on the heights of Jawbone Hill and Grenoside, although it maybe finished a little too sweetly for my personal taste. More lovely guitar work from Chris on "Stardust", a song inspired by the passing of Julie's mum, followed by "Ashes Came Falling", about Chris's dad's employment as a carpenter and shopfitter on the liner Oriana in the Barrow shipyards. "Shake the Money Tree" was undoubtedly a catchy song - but it's back to "us" and "them" again and makes me wonder whether there's some mileage in rewriting the old Tom Springfield / Judith Durham hit as "Tell me white dove, where will I find the money tree". Hmm...watch this space.

Chris and Julie sailed their musical schooner into harbour with a couple of crackers: "Now that Love is Gone", set to a rumba or tango rhythm (despite several years of "Strictly" indoctrination, I still can't tell the difference) with Julie on accordion. And "[Rock of Gelt](#)", a great song, hammered out at a songwriters' workshop on the subject of Hadrian's Wall. The text reflects on a Roman centurion stuck in the northern hills and longing for home. It was inspired by a piece of Roman graffiti near the wall: "Dominus didn't want to do it". It also contains possibly my favourite lyric of the evening "walls are silent...walls have ears".

Thanks for coming to visit us Chris and Julie. And do come back soon!

*Review by Dave Banks for Chesterfield Folk Club*