

# *Words and Deeds*

**Bright Phoebus Revisited**  
**The Philharmonic**  
**14<sup>th</sup> October 2013**

The Philharmonic provides a fitting environment for tonight's performance of what has often been called folk's own Sgt. Pepper's, Bright Phoebus. Originally released in 1972, it is Lal and Mike Waterson's only album of original (rather than traditional) material, and Liverpool is privileged to be on the five-date tour revisiting the music, 'lost' for all this time. The band features members of their family – their sister Norma, Lal's children Marry and Oliver, Norma's husband Martin Carthy and their daughter Eliza Carthy – and a range of guests, including Richard Hawley, Kami Thompson (daughter of Richard, who played on the album), and John Smith.

On its 1972 release, Bright Phoebus had a poor reception from media and traditional folkies alike – disappointed that the Watersons, who had done so much to revive interest in folk music in this country, had seemingly abandoned the genre and produced an album consisting of, in parts, the Beatlesque (opening track Rubber Band), psychedelia (Magical Man), jazz, pop and country – not to mention the rather rockabilly Danny Rose, performed tonight by Richard Hawley. And yet, perhaps in 1972 people didn't listen to all the tracks – Lal's hauntingly beautiful Fine Horseman, for example.

Tonight, the songs – together with some previously unreleased material – sound vibrant and new; a melding of the traditional in Fine Horseman (sung by Marry) and The Scarecrow (the excellent John Smith), and new in the two tracks by Mike that bracket the evening: jaunty Rubber Band and catchy Shady Lady, where the band's stage set-up and sound feel reminiscent of The Band's The Last Waltz. These songs speak to us not just of their past but of our present – and the psychedelic feel of Magical Man wouldn't have been out of place at our own PsychFest.

Partway through the set, Eliza tells of how Mike used to compose words and tunes in his head whilst painting and decorating, and then 'decant' them during his tea breaks. Thus, from the prosaic and mundane comes great beauty: the spark of Bright Phoebus itself was lit in this way: "Today bright Pheobus she smiled down on me for the very first time".

According to my sources, the album's producer, Bill Leader, is in attendance – he must be thrilled that the songs he stipulated had to be recorded in Cecil Sharp House, the home of folk, are being 'debuted' to a new audience (not entirely 'new', mind, as the bloke next to me is singing along– and he's not the only one).

We exit into the night, whistling, humming and singing, and thanking Marry et al. for reviving the (hopefully no more) neglected cult classic that is Bright Phoebus. May the dispute that has kept it from being reissued soon be resolved!

*Let me turn your deeds into words*