



**Folk Education Network
Folk Education Development Day**

**University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ
Wednesday 15 November 2023**

Theme: A Multitude of Voices; Folk Arts and Communities

Review by Alex Bartholomew & Lindsay Want

East Anglian Traditional Music Trust



Dr Hazel Marsh presenting. Photo © EFDSS, photographer Honor Wicks.

We were delighted to be invited to talk at EFDSS's Folk Education Development Day which took place 'on our turf' in East Anglia and what a pleasure it was to join such a line-up of powerful speakers. This was a first for some of our team – attending a Development Day as well as presenting – and so the friendly, warm welcome we received from everyone upon arrival immediately put us at ease. The fact that the 50 places available for this event had all been snapped up is an indication of how interesting the topics to be covered during the day were going to be.

We were welcomed by UEA's Dr Hazel Marsh, who had co-ordinated the venue and also went on to present, and by Kerry Fletcher, EFDSS' Folk Education Network Co-ordinator. The title of this Development Day really did encapsulate its purpose. There were natural links to each presentation – some that already exist as collaborating groups, and some that are likely to lead to collaborative work because of the subject links, and so the flow from speaker to speaker felt natural.

At East Anglian Traditional Music Trust (EATMT), our work across numerous communities including Gypsy and Traveller communities has always seamlessly occurred and is accepted as a given. Yet, the first presentation given by Dr Hazel Marsh from the University of East Anglia and members of the [Gypsy and Traveller Voices in UK Music Archives](#) team (Dr Esbjörn Wettermark, University of Sheffield, Tiffany Hore, EFDSS' Vaughan Williams Memorial Library (VWML), and Candy Sheridan, Irish Traveller, Gypsy Council representative, Focus Group member and organiser of Strumpshaw Tree Fair), about their fascinating project, at times made for uncomfortable listening.

The team for this project include Gypsy and Traveller people and whilst all in the room will have been aware of the negative stereotypes that have been created over many years, it was still a shock to hear that even the positive, romantic spin on Romani life - one created by people outside of these communities - led to negative discrimination for those that don't present in the way the stereotype suggests.

The mention of books and LPs, many of which line the Trust's bookcase suddenly brought home how much there is still to learn. These books and LPs that come across as positive pictures for the life of Gypsy and Traveller people are often an inaccurate account of their lives. They are produced by people outside of the communities with little additional input from those within and certainly not with as much collaboration as there really should be (e.g. George Borrow, the 'Gypsy Scholar' from Norfolk, and even Ewan MacColl, Peggy Seeger, and Charles Parker's Radio Ballad 'The Travelling People'. Truly eye-opening presentations from Hazel, Esbjörn and Candy, with a humbling explanation of how the archives and library works at EFDSS from VWML Director Tiffany Hore, explaining why it is so difficult to find the songs sung, notated, or recorded specifically by Gypsy and Traveller singers. One of the aims of this project has been to right the exoticisation of Gypsy music and as you would therefore expect, there was no 'flimflam' romantic spin. It was a raw and heartfelt presentation from all.

Becky Marshall-Potter, Co-Founder and Director of [FolkEast](#) festival based in Suffolk followed next. Becky had hoped to be joined by Finn Collinson, musician, folk educator and leader, but a punctured tyre enroute meant Finn wasn't able to join the group until later in the day. Having just celebrated its 10th anniversary and feeling like they have firmly got their "feet under the folk table", Becky shared her FolkEast experience and inspirations of building up the Youth Provision within the festival. Her idea of folk isn't just about folk music, it's about local people, art, promoting the area, including the beer, food, and musicians. They have always been keen to encourage families and they find that the children who attended the first festival are now involved in the weekend as adults.

Finn joined FolkEast's Youth team post-Covid and from there the 'Youth Moot' was born. It continues to grow from strength to strength, taking on board feedback from its participants each year to improve the experience for those aged 12-18.

From FolkEast to the [East Anglian Traditional Music Trust](#) who have worked collaboratively with the festival on a strand of the Music Trust's National Lottery Heritage Funded project 'Vaughan Williams' Folk'. Alex Bartholomew, Director/Administrator of EATMT presented a short slideshow accompanied by a performance of *Bushes and Briars*, an audio one of the final performances recorded at FolkEast by the project's 9 young musicians who had been part of a youth mentorship programme run by Finn and his colleague Emma Beach.

Alex then went on to present the rest of the project which is in the process of being completed. The project showcased the East Anglian manuscripts that had been collected by Vaughan Williams, promoted local researchers' works, findings and publications and from these has taken songs and tunes into schools and community groups across the region to showcase local heritage by a range of local musicians.

EATMT Trustee Lindsay Want then joined Alex and presented a potted history of the Trust, taking the audience with honesty through the at-times-bumpy journey from 2000 to 2023 and sharing the Trust's ongoing success in engaging young people as future ambassadors and project leads. As part of this overview-journey, Lindsay introduced EATMT Patron, Gloria Buckley MBE, who has brought along many Gypsies and Travellers to the events run by EATMT over the years and so Gloria was next to take to the floor.

Like many of us I suspect, the strong and raw presentation from Hazel and the team was still striking a chord - so it was with Gloria. She often found herself transported back to her childhood where she shared with us a wonderful – often very amusing, and often very humbling – recollection of her time growing up as a Gypsy. Gloria then went on to tell us about her work with her late husband Trevor, on their site that developed organically, working alongside the village community of Beck Row in Suffolk, and changing perceptions. They also worked alongside the local enforcement officer as more and more families joined her site and the education officers where she helped get the children into school, helping them to read and write. Her work with her late husband earned them both MBEs.

After a break for lunch, a leg stretch and catch up with old and new friends, we returned to our seats and to Hannah Mears-Young – Programme Manager of the [National Youth Folk Ensemble](#) Who showed the latest film of the Ensemble which was made during a residential at Halsway Manor. The group meet just four times a year and then perform across the country in festivals under the Artistic Direction of a top-class musician for 2 - 3 years. Jo Freya is the Ensemble's current Artistic Director and despite undergoing cancer treatment, Jo is able to continue in her role shaping the programme and enabling this young group of musicians by working remotely.

This Ensemble is now part of the Arts Council England and Department for Education funded group of 15 National Youth Music Organisations (NYMOs) – which includes organisations from a range of genres such as the National Youth Orchestra and the National Youth Jazz Collective. Hannah also discussed their Engagement Programme with music hubs and organisations across the country which gives opportunities for young people to discover and play folk music.

EFDSS's Education Director Rachel Elliott then took to the floor. She welcomed Jen Cox who joins the EFDSS team as part-time [Dance Development](#) Manager in December, as well as briefly highlighting EFDSS' [Inclusive Folk](#) programme for disabled young people.

With no chance for the post-lunch droop, in came a cleverly timetabled workshop led by singer, song writer, and fiddle player [Georgia Shackleton](#). Georgia gave us a superb insight into her work as an educator and musician. Taking inspiration from East Anglian traditional songs, and often reworking them as well as composing folk songs based on the environment, Georgia works 1-2-1 in local high schools in Norfolk, at festivals and summer schools with young people as well as working for Music in Hospitals and Care. Georgia then went on to share how she approaches the teaching of a new song and got us all up, stretching, warming up and singing *Once I had a True Love* – learned from the singing of Phoebe Smith - one of the singers (and songs) from the Gypsy and Traveller Voices in UK Music Archives resource collection. Georgia used entertaining prompts and showed us how she uses a stimulus bag of props. A thoroughly enjoyable participatory session!

Marcus Patteson, [Executive Director of Norfolk Community Arts](#) (NORCA) was next up. Despite being fairly local to the area, we hadn't been aware of just how successful this local arts participation and engagement charity has been. In its 22 years of existence, it has run 100 projects and received over £4m in funding giving opportunities in music, dance, film making, creative writing, opera, and carnival.

NORCA runs Sistema Norwich – an approach to free music education in Norwich based on a Venezuelan model and very different to the Whole Class Ensemble Tuition (WCET) approach often used in schools. It also runs the Norwich Summer Sessions – another free set of events promoting local, regional, and national musical talent, including folk artists. Marcus's passion for Brazilian music is responsible for the Carnival Arts programme that is run as part of Norfolk Community Arts and alongside all of this activity, they work with schools and run one-off events. It was hard not to be swept along by Marcus's drive, enthusiasm and passion and it is truly inspiring to see a small local arts organisation successfully delivering such a wide range of activities in Norfolk – many of them free.

The final speaker of the day was Suzanna King, who works for [Friends, Families & Travellers](#) which is a Brighton-based national organisation that supports Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people as well as New Travellers in the UK. Suzanna is writer and director of [Crystal's Vardo](#) – a play that she wrote 13 years ago and is still being taken across the UK into schools, prisons and at events. So far, it has reached over 14 thousand young people.

Crystal is a Romany Gypsy and has been bullied at school. The play takes her through her family's history, celebrating their heritage and economic practices. The play always involves actors from Gypsy, Roma, or Traveller communities and is forever evolving, with a post-show Q&A session which helps to keep ideas fresh. During Covid the play was filmed and digitised for schools and prisons to increase access. Resource packs are given in advance to participating groups so they understand the aims of this performance. 'Travelling Tales' is a new project that Suzanna is also involved in which is about to hit the roads – a micro-museum storytelling space using Crystal's Vardo.

To end the day, Esbjörn facilitated a short coming-together in small groups encouraging us to discuss personal and group 'take-aways' from the day's presentations, and we concluded, amongst other comments, how important to us all a sense of identity really is – likewise the promotion of the living tradition.

A truly inspiring, humbling day in a safe space for everyone to share their work with like-minded people. Thank you to Hazel for bringing us to UEA and to Kerry and the EFDSS team for making the event happen.

We have all come away, grateful of our links to each other and with fresh ideas to move forwards.

Alex Bartholomew has worked as part time Director/Administrator of East Anglian Traditional Music Trust (EATMT) since 2018 and has worked for the Trust in an administrative capacity since 2001. Alex is also a musician playing fiddle for Skylarking Ceilidh Band and she teaches violin, piano and music theory part time.

Lindsay Want joined the board in 2012 but has been involved in the Trust's activities since 2004. She is a marketing consultant and copywriter, with experience in the tourism sector and also writes regularly for magazines. Lindsay is a busy singer and musician and has had two talented stepdancers for offspring in the past, with one still advocating, educating and sharing the tradition!

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