

# ‘We owe a lot to the folk clubs’: Broomdasher’s 10 years of song

The vocal quartet look back on their decade-long musical journey



Broomdasher: from left, Deena Marcus-Jedamzik, Richard Cryan, Margaret Moore and Jo Swinhoe

**I**n the folk world there are many fine examples of family groups, their harmonies honed around firesides over the decades. Songs passed from one generation to another, stretching back into time and forward into the current wonderful traditional singing we hear in the Copper Family and the Wilsons, for example.

For other groups, they are a “family”, made through friendships and a shared love of music making. So it is with Broomdasher.

We’re an a cappella folk quartet who celebrate 10 years together in 2026, and have, over the years, reduced from our original 16 to the current four voices.

It was in 2016 that Jo Swinhoe, then singing in Cecil Sharp House Folk Choir and a relative newcomer to the folk scene,

decided that if she wanted to sing more folk songs, maybe forming a group with others was the answer.

Fast-forward 10 years and the group have been on a journey which has taken us to many of England’s finest cathedrals, as well as outstanding folk festivals such as Sidmouth and local folk clubs which gave us our start, such as Loughton Folk Club in east London.

“When I’m thinking of how a song should sound,” says Richard Cryan, a long time folkie and responsible for many of Broomdasher’s arrangements, “I think of the singer’s range, and what the song is saying.

That helps me decide which voice has the lead, which a descant or harmony.”

Richard explains that Broomdasher create our unique sound by singing a new song together repeatedly, producing harmonies and interweaving lines through an organic, almost magical process.

Broomdasher have earned a well-deserved reputation for our harmonies and storytelling through song.

Our decade-long musical journey owes much to the Cecil Sharp House Choir, where three of the current group met and where the original 16 benefited from Sally Davies’s musical leadership.

As a smaller group we have toured folk shows celebrating an Edwardian eco-warrior (The Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady) and Ralph Vaughan Williams (Pub to Pulpit, celebrating the composer’s transformation of folk songs into hymns).

Collaborating with Paul Hutchinson’s Coracle band and John Palmer, we performed in

cathedrals and festivals, taking folk music to new heights and new audiences.

Now the group are back performing in folk clubs and enjoying the grassroots of folk music, where both new and traditional folk songs are celebrated equally.

“We owe a lot to the folk clubs who gave us our first outings,” says Margaret Moore, whose background is in both acting and singing.

“Our first club bookings in 2017, to Loughton, the Ram Folk Club and Brackley, showed to us that singing our songs about whaling, love lost and found and playful tales like Daddy Fox isn’t just fun – it’s our way of keeping the stories and traditions of folk music alive for everyone to enjoy.”

Sourcing songs has been a joint effort. Many songs were selected for The Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady and From Pub to Pulpit to fit a theme. Now we are expanding

our repertoire, exploring songs from beyond England and discovering some hidden folk gems.

Deena Marcus-Jedamzik has been singing in and around the folk scene since the 1960s and has amassed a vast repertoire of songs that Broomdasher enjoy exploring. Whatever the topic, Deena can generally think of a song to consider. “One of my highlights of the past 10 years,” she says, “is the support and friendship we have given to each other over the years.

“The Covid pandemic was a difficult time for us all, and many folk clubs never recovered from that. To keep our spirits up, and bring a little joy to north London, we used to rehearse at the bandstand in Hampstead Heath when restrictions

began to relax. After a few weeks – of carefully distanced singing, I might add – we acquired quite a regular audience!”

As a final thought, Jo reflects on what the future holds for the group. “We are about to record our fourth

album, which we will provide for the British Library National Sound Music Archive Collection, who have all our recordings, calling them ‘an outstanding example of grassroots folk music today’.

“One of the wonderful aspects of folk singing,” says Jo, “is the development of new songs covering current issues, which the Young’uns for example do so well.”

“Broomdasher’s aim, however, is to continue to seek out older songs like Westli’n Winds or Greenland Whale Fisheries, give them our unique harmony treatment, and have club and festival audiences humming those tunes while thinking about the stories, long after the lights have gone out.”

For more information see [broomdasher.com](http://broomdasher.com).

Broomdasher’s albums are available from [folkondon.co.uk](http://folkondon.co.uk) and [folkondon.bandcamp.com](http://folkondon.bandcamp.com)

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