



# “The start of lots of beautiful things”

I went to Ethno in 2015, and that was the first time I'd been to Tandem as well, and my friend J told me about it. We were a bit late, it had already been going for a couple of days, and we came for the last two or three days, Ethno 2015, and it was fantastic, really wonderful experience. Ethno and Tandem made me more connected to Oxford again, as well as connections with people from other places that I met. I still remember them fondly.

I knew it was a sort of eco-festival, which I think really excited me, and new people coming there on bikes, and also that there was this kind of European element to it... I turned up, and everything was a little bit chaotic! The first thing we did was have a big communal meal in the barn there, I just remember it was a lovely feeling really. Just everyone sitting down, having food together - that had been made from

food waste I learnt afterwards - and then we were thrown into rehearsals immediately and it was clear that things had already been worked on. I think the first one I heard was a Welsh song - Ar Lan Y Môr - which ended up being the song that we opened with, a really beautiful song about your love having been like a red rose, or a white lily, it's in Welsh.

I brought my fiddle and played with the group... I think it was about 15 of us, and then we performed on the first night of Tandem, the opening act, and it was just a lovely lovely weekend. Wonderful experience. I remember I didn't know anybody but I felt really welcome. The performance was just... I hadn't done that - I'd played in a ceilidh band before but hadn't done that many performances that people were properly listening to what you're doing, and it was really nice to sing

and perform that and have the audience be silent. I remember on the last tune we all went off stage playing and that was wonderful! I still remember the tunes, some of them.

Also we did it without any music as well. I think that was actually that was the first time I'd performed something properly all by ear without any music, and that was... that makes it totally different I think. Now I play more without music than with music, but it's listening when you're playing, and going with the sound and the feel of it rather than the notes on the page and I think slowly over time the more you do it the more you trust that you can hear your way to the right sound. I think the thing with having the music there makes it seem as if there's only one way of playing the tune, or only one way of performing... you realise 'oh actually there's different ways

of doing it', and if it goes a little bit wrong it doesn't matter you can usually pull it back.

When I think of Ethno music I think of so many different colours. It feels like very colourful music. Music that's traditional, not necessarily written by anybody but it's been reworked and has new life.

It's not this big divide between the performers and the audience, it's encouraging everyone to make music and bring music that they know to the table. And I think this is true of lots of folk music... they say it's not really meant to be about the ego, it's meant to be about the story of the song, or the story of the tune, and the tune itself. And also I just think Ethno music always sounds really great. It's the kind of music I want to listen to! It made me really want to keep playing music in different ways, other than just being in ceilidh bands, like made me want to sort of experiment more with music, to jam with other people more. It made me want to move back to Oxford even though it took several years to finally do that! It kept the link there. It made me listen to a few different types of folk music. I learn more by ear and less by rote and yeah, and it made me able to play, I think maybe 'oh I can actually play in more settings or with more different people because of Ethno'.

I found it quite a healing experience because my Dad had passed away the year before and it was on the solstice weekend and he was quite pagan. He used to mark those times, and also he loved folk music and he introduced me to folk music, so in a lovely way, I felt like I was honouring him as well. I felt like he would have wanted to join, and would have been so annoyed that he couldn't have been involved with it when he was younger, because I remember him saying to me, things like 'if you just want to play music in pubs all your life... just do it!'

It was all just mixed in with Tandem as well, I met so many people through that, it was just a beautiful weekend, beautiful weather, and people sort of popped in and out a lot.

Part of the performance was one that was improvised, and that was super cool. It was the start of lots of



beautiful things. And a beautiful thing in itself. Subsequently I've gone and volunteered for Tandem twice - people who are involved in Tandem festival are now my very close friends.

Ethno's an amazing thing - I almost couldn't believe it existed when I heard about it, I thought 'this is so great!', people from all over the world coming and swapping tunes and making friendships, and it's just... it just felt how life should be. It was this amazing combination of tradition, traditional tunes and songs, but then this amazing new energy, of global energy of connecting people around the world and feeling like, through music I could connect with probably anybody, and learn something about their culture and background and create something together.

**As told to: Maya**

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