

Music: Square Roots

'Our special transatlantic bond is music'

A Muswell Hill music fan has spearheaded the launch of a charity to celebrate Britain and America's shared folk heritage.

Liz Thomson was inspired to found Square Roots while editing a book about Bob Dylan.

"I thought 'what if you could do a concert - before everyone can't play anymore - in Washington Square New York which is the crucible of the folk revival and call it Bringing it All Back Home'" she said. "I'd gathered a coalition of interested people and realised if I started something in the UK it could give me a platform to work from."

The charity aims to secure folk's musical legacy and nurture a new generation of musicians by curating events, concerts, conferences and exhibitions on the people, places, history and of course music.

"For centuries music has criss-crossed the Atlantic, changed and enriched by each journey. Folk music in the form of 17th Century ballads went out from England with The Pilgrim Fathers and from Ireland and Scotland through emigration. It spread out to

the Appalachians and came back to us in the 50s with skiffle, went back again, merged with rock and became folk rock in the 60s.

"The real special relationship between the UK and America is a musical one."

Thomson and co-founder Anthony Keates feel that in the year Dylan, Joan Baez and Martin Carthy turn 75 it's time to rediscover and celebrate some of their neglected contemporaries.

"There's an awful lot of

interest in folk music with Sam Lee, Mumford&Sons and The Unthanks but also a hidden heritage that lots of young people don't know about - such as what Ewan MacColl was doing here in the 40s and 50s, or why there was a great political alignment with unions and communism in New York in the 30s that led to folk music being associated with left wing protest.

"Pete Seeger, and Woody Guthrie who wrote This Land is Your Land both fell victim to Senator McCarthy and were a great influence. Dylan took it new levels.

"All the songs that came to us as skiffle were written by Guthrie who like Stenbeck was from the dustbowl. He was commissioned to commemorate the building of the dams. The Columbia River songs came out of that. Lennon and McCartney started out doing skiffle."

Thomson did a music degree and spent her teenage years playing guitar in folk

clubs before going into music publishing and journalism.

"As a teen I was the only one I knew listening to Leonard Cohen and Dylan. Folk music still moves me more than anything else. I can't explain why," she says.

She believes that folk songs are just as much part of our cultural and industrial heritage as anything else.

"It's such a rich social, political and historical area of study.

All this material could be lost if we don't bring it together. It's important that we create an archive so it's preserved in all its forms."

She added: "We live in a transient age. This material has already lasted and we must ensure that rising talent get a chance to hear it and are aware of the tradition they are inheriting."

Bridget Galton

■ Square Roots' first three events take place at The Green Note in Camden Town. On February 22 they will celebrate the "mother of folk music" the late Appalachian singer and song collector Jean Ritchie, who inspired Dylan, with an evening of guitar and dulcimer. On March 23 is guitarist Wizz Jones and on April 13 Bonnie Dobson, a key figure from the 60s New York Folk revival. folktracks.org



■ Anthony Keates, singer songwriter Virginia Thorne and Liz Thomson

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