

Rod Stradling got involved in folk music in the mid-20th century traditional way, first via skiffle and then attending London's legendary Singer's Club. It was while running a folk club at the Fighting Cocks in Kingston that he discovered the melodeon via Jim Bainbridge of the Marsden Rattlers. Later in the 1960s, following Rod and his wife Danny's move to Camden, they helped to run the influential club at the King's Head in Islington. Unlike the standard folk club model of the day, they booked real traditional performers and included social dancing in the proceedings.

During this time Rod & Danny joined up with Peta Webb and Tony Engle to form Oak, one of the first bands fully rooted in real English traditional music and song, instrumentally influenced by the great old players they were seeking out like Oscar Woods and Scan Tester. Their energetic live performances and 1971 album for Topic were revelations to many.

After Oak, when Rod and Danny had moved to Cricklade in Wiltshire, they recruited a number of young Cotswold musicians and formed what would become The Old Swan Band. Using Rod's traditional sources to accumulate a repertoire, they recorded the 1976 album *No Reels* which was to become a classic. Along with contemporary bands like Flowers & Frolics and The New Victory Band, they provided a refreshing new perspective on, and repertoire for, English folk dancing. It was actually far closer to the tradition than the strict tempo American, Scottish and Irish mixture typical of EFDSS bands of the day, though this didn't prevent them horrifying some old school factions of the Society back then.

In 1977, the Stradlings organised the first English Country Music Weekend in Cricklade. Designed to bring together English musicians of like mind, it was an instant success and attendees demanded its continuation. Rod & Danny decided that the event should move around the country and so it has done, organised by others. Despite a few gap years it still continues and only national circumstances prevented it taking place recently.

Although he regularly denies his abilities, Rod's melodeon playing has been widely influential and includes being a musician for Bampton Morris. But don't typecast him as a "purist." Despite his strong commitment to English traditional music, he's never been shy of a challenge. In the 1980s he joined Maggie Holland, Chris Coe and myself in The English Country Blues Band, which soon grew noisily electric and internationally eclectic as the English ceilidh band Tiger Moth. Simultaneously he pushed the boundaries with Jon Moore, Danny, their son Barnaby and others including members of the Mekons in the reggae-influenced *Edward II* and the *Red Hot Polkas*.

Subsequently Rod returned to more conventional English dance music with The English Country Dance Band and Phoenix, but even then the repertoire often includes tunes from another musical tradition that he loves – that of Italy. Indeed the tune we now know as *The Italian Job* has become one of Bampton Traditional Morris Dancers' staples, showing just how Rod has enriched the collective repertoire, but always in his unmistakably English style.

Outside of live music, 2020 saw Rod's retirement from the editorship of *Musical Traditions* magazine, originally a paper publication which he'd developed into an authoritative online magazine and record company. The magazine has published many features and reviews that filled a much needed gap between peer reviewed academic material and the consumer magazines. On the recording side, the label's CDRs have made available many field recordings of important source singers and musicians who would not be commercially viable enough to warrant a full release.

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