Gold Badge Citation – Alan Bearman

The presentation was made by Chief Executive, Katy Spicer, during a concert at Sidmouth Folk Week, August 2014. The citation was read by Steve Heap and written by ***Sarah Coxson*** *and* ***Steve Heap****.*

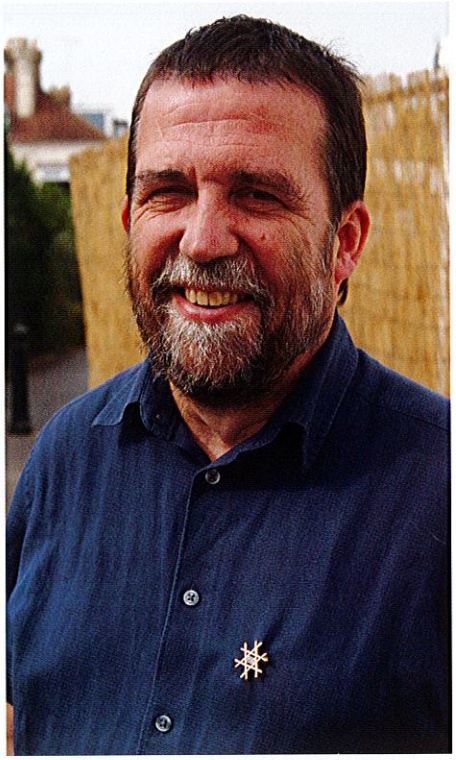


Photo: Derek Schofield

Born in 1954 in Whitechapel, East London, and growing up on the East London/Essex border, Alan Bearman first became interested in folk music in the early 1960s, as with so many contemporaries, through the early Bob Dylan albums. He began attending festivals in the 1970s and started his first folk club at The Lord Brooke in Walthamstow in 1976, which later merged with Leyton's Three Blackbirds club in 1978 to become the Chestnuts Folk Club in Walthamstow – a club renowned for its broad and interesting booking policy. His involvement in a number of community festivals based around the club through the early and mid-1980s – and his talent for showcasing the very best in folk music – led to him being asked to become Song Producer at Sidmouth Festival in 1987, the year in which John Heydon, John Dowell and I took over the festival from EFDSS.

Leaving his day job as a teacher at Christmas 1987 (in his words 'escaping at the height of Thatcher's attack on education'), Alan joined me at Mrs Casey Music (MCM), working on the agency as well as with the Sidmouth and Towersey festivals. He became Artistic Director (Dance and Song) at Sidmouth in 1990 and Artistic Director in 1992, a role which came to an end after the fiftieth festival in 2004 at the point when we 'retired' from the event. During his years with Mrs Casey Music, Alan programmed Towersey Festival (through until 2012) as well as various others that came our way, including Farnham Folk Day, Folk in the Fall for the Southbank Centre and Evolving Tradition weekends for the Barbican Centre. He was also programmer and consultant for the Association of Festival Organisers for many years and held the same role for Folk Arts England.

As well as programming, Alan devised and edited *Direct Roots: The Guide to Folk, Roots and Related Music and Arts in the British Isles* published by MCM in 2001, with volume 2 in 2003. He and I also teamed up to write *The Promoters' Guide* for Folk Arts England and Jazz Services.

His role at The Chestnuts Club continued into the 1990s and he also worked as programmer and consultant for EFDSS between 1998 and 2000.

When we left the Sidmouth festival in 2004, Alan asked, 'What are we going to do now?' Well, there was a well-known folk group looking for a new agent so Alan set up his own music agency Alan Bearman Music (ABM) with Waterson:Carthy, Chris Wood and Martin Simpson amongst the first artists to join. The agency has expanded since and has a roster of established and rising talent in the folk world: from Martin Carthy and Dave Swarbrick to The Furrow Collective.

His festival programming continued with Towersey Festival and two opportunities arose in Northern Ireland (thanks to family and professional friend, Becky Morris of Smallworld Music). He programmed Ards International Guitar Festival between 2005 and 2008 and Festival of the Peninsula in Newtonards between 2005 and 2007.

In February 2011, ABM co-curated *Common Place*, their first mini-festival at London's Kings Place with Chris Wood and Karine Polwart. This was followed by *Lau-Land*, *Purpose and Grace* with Martin Simpson and *Outlandish Nights* with Emily Portman and Alasdair Roberts. ABM continues a close relationship with Kings Place, moving into their Music Base in 2013 and working with their Marketing Director Mike Green on their folk programming.

Both Alan and I were delighted when he was asked to return to Sidmouth for the 2012 festival as Artistic and Marketing Director, and he continues in that role whilst colleagues at ABM work on the festival and keep the agency going. Sidmouth is, in many ways, Alan's natural habitat, with his keen eye for programming detail and real commitment to bringing traditional music to both new and established audiences.

From the outset of his involvement in folk music, Alan has remained consciously (some might say stubbornly) out of the limelight – keen to let the music he loves do the talking. As one regular Sidmouth artist has commented: 'There is always the inevitable but welcome head round the door (or through the window) from Alan Bearman just to say "All right?" and then he'll disappear off to the next venue.'

He is considered by many – colleagues and audiences alike – to be a safe pair of hands in his programming roles; someone who has the utmost respect for, and understanding of, grassroots traditions as well as being open-minded to new music and young talent. He has previously cited Martin Carthy as a musical hero because, in his words, 'he stands apart as an example to all with his love of the music and willingness to always go the extra mile in sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm.' In his own field, Alan does the very same.

Alan is proud that EFDSS have bestowed this honour upon him, but you can be sure he would certainly rather not be listening to these words, choosing instead to retreat to a safe distance (probably bird-watching in Suffolk), and asking us to stop making a fuss. He would certainly want to acknowledge the support and opportunities provided by all those who have worked with him over the years. Special thanks go to John Dowell, John Heydon, Becky Morris and all those who have been part of Alan Bearman Music. And, for the long-suffering(!) and undiminished support, of his partner Jane and daughter Florence.

Finally, it has been a pleasure to have worked with, learned from and collaborated with Alan since the 1980s. I know of no other front-end person who has managed to stay in the background whilst making such an everlasting and memorable impact on the UK's folk music scene.

Steve Heap is the founder and director of Mrs Casey Music and general secretary of the Association of Festival Organisers, and was festival director at Sidmouth, 1987-2004, and at Towersey, 1975-2014. Sarah Coxson is a freelance folk arts administrator and deputy editor of fRoots magazine.