MADDY PRIOR– EFDSS Gold Badge Testimonial

Maddy Prior is without doubt one of the best known voices from the English folk revival, with a career spanning over forty years which continues today, and several key recordings which will always be identified with her, including by generations born long after the original release of those songs. Her work, however, has extended way beyond her global hits *Gaudete* and *All Around my Hat.*

Born in Blackpool to Z-Cars co-creator Alan Prior, Maddy grew up in St Albans where she came to prominence in the late 1960's in a duo with singer/ guitarist **Tim Hart**, who built a reputation on the folk club circuit, releasing two albums. In the early 1970's they joined forces with **Ashley Hutchings** (of Fairport Convention) and **Gay & Terry Woods**, with the idea of fusing folk song with rock instrumentation and technique. The new group took its name from a traditional Lincolnshire ballad 'Horkstow Grange' - the tale of a character called **Steeleye Span.** As is well known, **Steeleye Span** took folk music out of the clubs and into the charts with a string of consistently strong hit albums, gold discs and world tours. Tim Hart and Maddy Prior remained the core of the group whose changing line-ups read like a Who's Who of British folk until Tim left for health reasons in 1980. Maddy continued to work with the band in its changing line-ups until 1997, when after two massive tours around the release of the album *Time,* she left the band after 28 years, only to return to work with them again from 2002 onwards, and is still touring with them today.

The other long-term partnership of over twenty years has been with Andy Watt's **Carnival Band;** launched in 1987 with the release of **A Tapestry of Carols**- surely one of the most played folk albums on the BBC every Christmas- a collaboration which continues to tour nationally on a regular basis.

Beyond these two major strands of Maddy's work is a string of other collaborations including the .highly successful pairing with fellow singer **June Tabor** entitled *Silly Sisters,* work with **Martin Carthy**, **Nic Jones**, **Danny Thompson**, **John Kirkpatrick**, keyboard player **Nick Holland** and Uillean piper **Troy Donockley**, her husband for many years **Rick Kemp** and their daughter **Rose Kemp,** plus more recently other musicians from the younger generation including **Benji Kirkpatrick, Hannah James, John Spiers** and more**.**

Maddy's great contribution is in part her totally distinctive voice, with its purity of tone- completely true to the tradition but also appealing to the wider audience. Alongside this is the music she has brought to public attention- her deep interest in and knowledge of the ballad tradition, in English traditional songs and in hymns and early music. Her skills as a songwriter are extensive, drawing on her interest in English and European history, in nature and mythology, such as in the song '*The Fabled Hare'* used as part of the music for the BBC wild life programme, with narration by David Attenborough. Her writing has also been inspired by her own family and the area of the 'debatable lands' in Cumbria where she has lived for many years. It is here that in Stones Barn next to her home she has established a centre for regular courses in music and poetry, including those she runs herself in partnership with other folk artists and singers, and the annual *Stepping Stones Festival* in 2012 which has now outgrown Stones Barn to move to Kirklinton Hall near Carlisle.

Maddy is also very generous with her time in supporting the efforts of others whose mission is to bring folk music to a wide public. She is an Ambassador for Halsway Manor, and was a long-term member of the Board of Folkworks, the organisation formed by Alistair Anderson and myself in 1988, participating actively in several Folkworks tours and projects including True North, Eurofolkus and Vocal Chords. Her involvement continued more recently as a member of the Folk Advisory Committee for Sage Gateshead after Folkworks became integrated into this organisation. Maddy was awarded the MBE for her services to folk music in the New Year's Honours in 2001, and is also a Fellow of Cumbria University.

A person for whom the phrase ‘down to earth’ could have been coined, Maddy Prior is, despite her modesty, a hugely significant figure in British cultural life of the past five decades. In a recent conversation, Alistair Anderson summed up the role he felt she has played as *follows ‘Maddy is a very special voice who has led tens of thousands of people worldwide to an enjoyment of folk music’.* And she will continue to do so.

Ros Rigby, Performance Programme Director, Sage Gateshead. Co-founder Folkworks.