

[front page](#)

[news](#)

[back issues](#)

[comment](#)

[letters](#)

[advertise](#)

[subscribe](#)

[about us](#)

[contact us](#)

[back page](#)

Show of indifference

When the word came through that The Leisure Review was required to attend a folk festival Mick Owen girded his loins and sharpened his pencil.

“Where were you when Wigan won the FA Cup?” is not a question many people outside of the Lancashire town itself will ask in years to come. The people in the Elephant and Castle in Holmfirth seemed as interested in the last knockings of domestic football’s showpiece as they did in the blokes with guitar, banjo and beer- glass microphone holder sitting in the bay window and playing everything from Bowie to The Jam via Elbow and whoever made The Rocky Road to Dublin famous. Roberto Martinez may have felt constrained to speak at length to a roving camera at Wemberlee but none but a few in this part of Yorkshire were paying any heed.

Roberto and his ilk would do well to remember that fame is a funny old thing. Some places, for example, are just famous, some seek fame – as did the nouveau Swindon when it sought to make a tourist attraction of a road junction – and some have fame thrust upon them. Into this third category – or categorie troisieme to use the language of the Tour de France which is due to pass through Holmfirth in 2015 – must go the home of Clegg, Compo and Nora Batty. When the Tour arrives, this little West Yorkshire town, which climbs away from the River Holm like a shuffling herd of the stunted, tough, local sheep, will briefly be lit up by a procession of police motorcycles, sponsors’ floats, bike-laden, liveried team cars and something over 130 professional cyclists. The excitement around the Tour’s visit is already building in biking circles and doubtless the little town will be buzzing come the day but currently, as with the football, nobody seems that bothered.

Holmfirth, like one of the aforementioned sheep grazing on the verge of a blind bend on the A6024 as it winds down from Holme Moss, remains largely unmoved by keruffles of these kinds. The short, sharp climb from the village of Holme to the radio beacon that soars from its summit is the nearest English cycling has to an iconic mountain pass. It is the Moss that has drawn the Tour to this part of the world but chances are the sheep will merely blink as the peloton passes by and refuse to be disturbed, intent instead on grubbing some sustenance from the meagre grass that struggles for life in the thin soil, which is all the local millstone grit will allow. All things in these parts – landscape, sheep, architecture and people – take their cue from the rock they cling to and dalliances like a cycle race or indeed a folk festival are passing fripperies.

The Holmfirth Festival of Folk, with its clog dancers, sea shanty sessions and singarounds, is a treat, which is to say The Leisure Review is being treated to a visit by our companion who heard folk doyens Show of Hands on the Simon Mayo programme on Radio 2 and thought spending an evening in their company with 600 -plus other, mainly middle-aged people would repay the investment of £18 per head.

Taking care with your money is a Yorkshire cliché but it does at least mean that it is possible to enjoy this particular music festival without risking penury, even as the Tory government bleed the veins of the man on the Huddersfield omnibus to feather the nests of their banking pals.

www.theleisurereview.co.uk

“The Holmfirth Festival of Folk, with its clog dancers, sea shanty sessions and singarounds, is a treat, which is to say The Leisure Review is being treated to a visit by our companion”

The Leisure Review is supported by:



The Leisure Review is written, designed and published by:

tlr.comms
TLR Communications Limited

Show of Hands do not much like Tories. Or bankers. Indeed their set features two anti-banking songs along with others protesting the loss of industry in variously Cornwall, Sheffield and Youngstown, which is in America and is of course a Bruce Springsteen composition. Their totemic Arrogance, Ignorance and Greed from the band's 2009 album of the same name has lost none of its currency; not because of any value in the song but because the true depth of the venality of its target has even yet to be fully revealed.

The band is as eclectic in its targets as it is with its sources but everything they offer an unsettled Holmfirth audience is washed with their own soap and comes out looking – well, sounding – largely similar. Steve Harley, a man with more musical influences than most, accords the Picturedrome the accolade of being the best venue he has ever played – and he's played the Albert Hall – but Steve Knightley is unlikely to agree. His scripted off-the-cuff remarks between songs first thanks those who have brought their friends along, then thanks everyone for contributing to Show of Hands' first sell-out appearance at the atmospheric old cinema and then says we must police ourselves if we want the noise-makers off to desist. The raked flooring of the old cinema's stalls, the remnants of its gilded upper circle and the new, scaffolded balcony offer superb sight-lines and what seem to be excellent acoustics. The space is quirky and intimate but on this Saturday evening some patrons have drunk too deep at the well of folk's twin brother, the fountain of real ale, and the chatter emanating from the raised bar area at the back of the auditorium spoils songs, introductions and the mood of the evening alike.

The opening act of the evening is Miranda Sykes, a six-foot player of the double bass, and her mandolin-playing mate Rex Preston. They are really good. Their mood is bright between songs but the music itself seems best listened to, not just heard, while sitting at tiny tables, drinking red wine in a smoky bistro somewhere. She, like Harley, has played the Albert Hall and she is the best part of the evening.

In case you were unaware Show of Hands is a duo and, while Sykes plays with them and vocally and instrumentally contributes tone, depth and colour, she is largely ignored in the "banter" from "the boys". One such tale involves the man in Exeter who makes Pete and Steve their instruments. The man, a truculent and broad Devonian it seems, once went to a Show of Hands concert. Asked if he had enjoyed the show, he demurred, saying he liked Pete's fiddle playing but found Steve's songs a bit dreary.

"I agree with their guitar-maker" was a line just waiting to be written but fish and chips from Hollowgate Fisheries, eaten while watching tipsy Yorkshire folk dancing to the memory of the diddly diddly music they had just heard in their local, soon dispelled any tendency to negative punditry. Those boys can play; and the girl. Their protest may share Marlon Brando's lack of focus (Girl in small town : "What are you rebelling against, Jonny?" Motorcycle gang leader Brando: "What have you got?") but it is a joy to find people prepared to take on energy suppliers, the town of Cromer and William Hague's posh minders with equal gusto and with precise, professional musicianship.

With the growth of folk as a genre acceptable beyond its small coterie has come a need to define it. Steve Knightley offers two or three insights as the evening progresses but the town of Holmfirth has the last word. As the night ends, old ladies with blue rinses, industrial-sized, rugby-playing fathers of three and flighty young things with gauzy clothing and a hazy grasp on detail all drift off to their various beds, all made happy by Show of Hands' modern take on the old themes of story-telling, remembering and protesting.

The band is slick, polished and wearing much better clothes than your reviewer can afford but they come from the same stock as the young

man with the guitar and the mournful take on Eton Rifles strumming in the Elephant for his own amusement and the entertainment of a few passers-by. Folk is music of and for the people and, if it comes in various shapes and shades, well so do we.

Mick Owen is managing editor of The Leisure Review.

***The Leisure Review*, June 2013**

© Copyright of all material on this site is retained by *The Leisure Review* or the individual contributors where stated.
Contact *The Leisure Review* for details.