

Nancy Kerr and James Fagan - Biography March 2002

Winners of the inaugural *BBC Radio 2 Horizon Award* (2000)

Traditional and original music from Northumberland, Australia and beyond.

"Quite simply the most refreshing, impressive and compelling new combo I've seen for ages. " **John Kirkpatrick.**

"Nancy Kerr and James Fagan have that magical quality of stage presence and, since they performed at our festival and taught at our college, I have been besieged with requests to have them return - requests that I found echoed my sentiments precisely. They are consummate professionals and a joy to deal with. They are also my first booking for 2002!" **Warren Robinson, director, Goderich Celtic Festival, Ontario Canada**

Nancy Kerr and James Fagan is a well-loved duo with an international following. They combine highly skilful and innovative performance with accessibility, warmth and stage presence. Rarely are duos so full in sound; Nancy's earthy and exquisite fiddle and viola playing dances with the striking rhythmic texture of James's flat-backed bouzouki, while their rich singing both as soloists and in harmony evokes the stories of the songs they choose and write. They approach their music with energy and infectious smiles. Rapid musical communication with one another and the audience makes their performance spectacular and unforgettable.

THE ALBUMS

New CD "between the dark and light" released March 2002, Fellside FECD167.

Starry Gazy Pie 1997, Fellside FECD127

".. an album that should be at the top of the shopping list for anyone who likes traditional music." (**Living Tradition**)

"There's a real celebratory feel about the whole thing... which makes it as appealing as it is timeless." (**Colin Irwin, Folk Roots**)

"...just class, class, class." (**Cornstalk Gazette, Australia**)

Scalene 1998, Fellside FECD137 - *Featuring the trio of Nancy, James and Sandra Kerr* "It's hard to fault this CD in any way. There's an interesting choice of material, excellent playing and singing and a high standard of recording - highly recommended!" (**Buzz**)

"The singing soon wins over a listener while the instrumental sets can be quite incendiary, particularly the hornpipes, which make the feet feel light and ready for dancing" (**Dirty Linen**) "four stars, 1 reckon!" (**Traditional Music Maker**)

Steely Water 1999, Fellside FECD145

Includes their very popular versions of "Anderson's Coast" and "Reel de Pendu"

"... without doubt one of the most enjoyable and unaffected acoustic albums of the year!" (**Lira, Swedish Roots magazine**)

"A highly impressive offering from a class act." (**Folk on Tap**)

"Rich and full, with a depth of emotion and passion which few artists ever reach." (**English Dance and Song**)

"The choice of songs is inspired... the tunes are fleet-footed and full of dash... a positive, sparking release." (**Rock and Reel**)

Profiles

NANCY KERR: violin, viola, voice, guitar

"One of the best bits of unaccompanied singing I've ever heard... haunting and assured."

Tim Arthur, English Dance and Song.

"...an exquisite violin and viola player..." **Young Tradition Award**

Nancy is the daughter of Sandra Kerr, the well-loved English singer-songwriter, teacher and performer, and Northumbrian piper Ron Elliott. As a young fiddler growing up in Northumberland she had the great fortune to be a pupil of the late and great Will Taylor. Her first professional tour came when just fourteen, with Alistair Anderson's group Syncopace. Since then she has been in constant demand as both a fiddler and singer, working internationally with Eliza Carthy in their groundbreaking duo, which produced three CDs with Mrs Casey Music. She has led classes in both fiddle and singing all around the UK for all age groups, including many workshops for Folkworks in the Northeast. She has also run fiddle classes at the last three National Folk Festival Summer Schools in Canberra. In addition to her skills as a singing fiddler, Nancy has a large knowledge of the traditional English ballads, and more recently a passion and flair for crafting her own. Her songs 'Steely Water' and 'Songbirds' have already been performed by the likes of Maddy Prior and Sisters Unlimited. She has recorded with Sandra Kerr, Eliza Carthy, John Kirkpatrick, Sarah Jones, Brian Peters and many others.

"A fiddle and viola player who combines the crunchiest of rhythmic bowing with exquisite tone and superb musicality, she is also the possessor of a clear and delicately ornamental singing voice." **Rootsworld**

JAMES FAG AN: guitar-bouzouki, voice, guitar, and piano

Colin Irwin, Folk Roots "...clearly an engaging talent. "

English Dance and Song " ...Pagan's singing is rich, smooth and would make anyone happy just to hear it. "

Cornstalk Gazette "... a strong positive singer with a voice of immense character. "

James, like Nancy, inherited his interest in music, being a member of Australia's premieres folk-singing family, The Pagans, with his parents Bob and Marg, and his sister Kate. James is well respected as a specialist player of the Irish flat-backed bouzouki, the guitar-shaped version of which has become his trademark. He has given workshops and master-classes on this versatile instrument around Australia and the UK, and in Canada with Nancy for the first time in 2001. His strong and melodic singing has also helped him make an impression wherever he performs. He has recorded with The Pagans, Alistair Hulett, Jimmy Gregory,

Eliza Carthy, John Kirkpatrick, Luke Daniels, Liz Doherty and Margaret Walters among others.

Nancy and James offer:

Engagement with audience and their material
Versatility and extensive repertoire
Equal comfort with intimate club venues and large concert performances
Natural, relaxed performance with a mastery of their instruments
Material ranging from lyrical chorus songs to foot-stomping dance music
A spectacular display of musicianship

Nancy Kerr and James Pagan - Live performance REVIEWS

".. .I attended a concert... at the Canterbury Festival [2000] by a young award-winning duo, Nancy Kerr and James Pagan. Miles away from the stereotype of bushy bearded, be-sandalled folk singers in warm woollen sweaters strumming acoustic guitars over warm beer, instead we were treated to an eclectic mix of songs and instrumental pieces collected and new from Britain, Ireland and Australia. Each introduction was a mixture of humour and scholarship, and their chosen instruments.. .were played with an easy and natural virtuosity." Andrew Rose, Editor of the E. J. Moeran website, www.moeran.com

"James Pagan and Nancy Kerr very much did engage... I went to see them twice and was extremely impressed... one of the main pleasures of the week for me, and obviously others, as when I went to buy their CD I found not a copy left...". Hector Christie, Review of the 1998 Sidmouth Festival - The Living Tradition

"It was glaringly obvious why a very confident Nancy Kerr with James Pagan have so many fans in Britain and collected a Radio 2 Folk Award. Their sets were brilliant....". Ray Downes, Review of the 2001 Canberra National Folk Festival - The Living Tradition

"In a perfect universe, folk musicians of this standard would regularly play every folk club in Wales. The irresistible combination of fiddles, flat-backed bouzouki and voices blend perfectly into a sound that is playful, sweet and gutsy, and looks as effortless as brushing your teeth in the morning. From traditional northeastern tunes defined by Nancy as 'fast stompy-stompy' to stunning songs by contemporary Australian writers, it is arguably their self-penned material that is the best of the lot. All demonstrate a love, respect and understanding of their heritage and traditions with an enthusiasm that is addictive.

The past four years have seen James and Nancy graduate from promising young talent to seasoned professionals in their own right, perfectly at home in the recording studio, large outdoor festivals or intimate Welsh folk clubs.... we hope to see much more of Nancy Kerr and James Pagan in Wales in the future." Lucy Whitfield, Western Mail, 1999

Nancy Kerr and James Pagan - WORKSHOP INFORMATION

Nancy and James offer several workshops from one-hour classes through to three or four day instrumental and singing tuition. They have taught adults and children in England, Australia and in Canada. Their classes are highly engaging and challenging but most importantly they are enjoyable.

Classes offered include:

Fiddle: - Nancy has taught at all skill levels with all age groups. While she specialises in English styles her stylistic scope is wide-ranging. She also shares her skills of backing the voice with the fiddle. Her classes on the fiddle and pipe tunes of Northumberland are always popular.

Irish/Celtic Bouzouki/Cittern: - James's classes inspire and challenge players of bouzouki, mandola, mandolin and cittern. He plays GDAD tuning primarily, but players in any tuning will explore the further potential of their instrument, from dynamic rhythm through chord progressions to harmonic and melodic lines.

The Art of Imaginative Accompaniment: - Aimed at players of any instrument, this workshop shows how Nancy and James construct arrangements, and encourage participants to explore their arranging potential.

Singing: - individual or group, solo and harmony

Nancy Kerr and James Pagan - Current COLLABORATIONS

"Scalene"

Nancy and James with Sandra Kerr (concertina, voice, guitar)

Contact Sandra Kerr 01665 712488 **Email** sandra.kerr@which.net

The natural extension of the joyful duo of Nancy and her mother Sandra, with James's rich bouzouki and vocals lifting the trio to another level. They have played to enthralled audiences at Sidmouth, Cleethorpes Festival, Cheltenham Folk Festival, The Australian National Folk Festival as well as many clubs and theatres in the UK.

Nancy and Pagan with Tim van Eyken (melodeon, voice, guitar) **Contact Emerging Music** 01228 670580, **Email:** ken@emerging.demon.co.uk Formed in 2000, this is a very exciting project for all three musicians. They are already appearing at clubs, art centres and festivals. The trio was featured on Tim Healey's folk programme on BBC Radio 4 in 2001.

Nancy and James with Alan Burton (Uilleann Pipes) and **Steve Hunt** (guitar, bodhran)

Contact e-mail jrfagan@hotmail.com or bodhran41@hotmail.com

Two well-loved duos combine for a huge sound rooted in the Irish tradition but branching into Bulgaria, Nashville and Alnwick.

The Pagans

Contact Margaret Pagan, Australia 02 98697473

The Pagans, James with his parents Bob and Margaret and his sister Kate, are regarded as one of the best folk families in Australia. They have been festival favourites in Australia since the 1980s, and in 1997 played at the Sidmouth Folk Festival in England. They are best known for their four-part acapella singing with strong harmonies and material drawn mainly from the British Isles traditions.