Creating a new song cycle from traditional songs

By Jo Freya
The Full English

The Full English was a unique nationwide project unlocking hidden treasures of England’s cultural heritage by making over 58,000 original source documents from 12 major folk collectors available to the world via a ground-breaking nationwide digital archive and learning project. The project was led by the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and in partnership with other cultural partners across England.

The Full English digital archive (www.vwml.org) continues to provide access to thousands of records detailing traditional folk songs, music, dances, customs and traditions that were collected from across the country. Some of these are known widely, others have lain dormant in notebooks and files within archives for decades.

The Full English learning programme worked across the country in 19 different schools including primary, secondary and special educational needs settings. It also worked with a range of cultural partners across England, organising community, family and adult learning events.

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### Additional Resources

A video of the final performance of The Ballad of Mary Dimoline by students from Branston Community Academy, Lincoln, is available for free download from [wwwefdssorg/resourcebank](http://wwwefdssorg/resourcebank)
Introduction

This pack presents the materials used and developed as an inspiration and starting point for a creative music making and song writing project with Year 9, 12 and 13 students from Branston Community Academy, Lincoln. It also includes the new songs created through the project and performed as a contemporary song cycle based on the local tale of Mary Dimoline, and presented at The Full English national showcase Conference in June 2014.

The project offered Branston Community Academy the opportunity to work with two established folk educators Jo Freya and Liam Robinson. Together, they worked with the Music Department investigating local tunes and songs within The Full English digital archive and other local collections.

The starting point for the project was the traditional song *Rufford Park* which was used as a spring board for telling the story of Mary Dimoline, a local character and thief who was eventually caught and kept at Lincoln Castle before being moved to London and then became one of 180 convicts transported on the Navarino, 5 October 1840. The tale of Mary’s life was put into song format by Jo Freya. The students then worked with the artists to develop their own song cycle investigating the context and motivation behind Mary’s actions, her trial, and imagining her reaction to life on board a transportation ship.

The project illustrated how students can create a song cycle inspired by local characters and events using existing traditional material, and also the potential of exploring around the story to create a piece of music that lasts for 15/20 minutes.

Rob Amey, the Head of Music at Branston Community Academy identified the benefits of the project as follows:

“For Year 9 students it provided a level of tuition and guidance that is difficult to achieve in a mixed ability class of 30 students. To the more able students it allowed the musicians to extend their musical skills, e.g. compose and improvise music in a supportive environment. For Y12 and 13 students it provided an opportunity to perform music in folk idiom which can be used for performance and composition units on their BTEC level 3 courses.”
The Musical Process

When starting this project in a mixed ability group of students, it felt important to strive to find ways to engage all at the level they were capable off whilst also challenging them to engage in a way they might not be used to.

In order for them to feel like they owned they process we wanted them to feel included in all decisions from the start whilst continually referring to our brief of engaging them with The Full English digital archive. The beginning of this process set the scene for all work that followed.

The Beginning

Due to the time allotted and in negotiation with the staff we were working with at the school, we felt it better to go in with a topic. Had we had more time we could have built in a research element to look up historical matters relevant to their area both within the archive and in other general resources on line etc. However, this was actually done in advance and hence the story Mary Dimoline as she was linked to the prison at Lincoln Castle.

Stage 1: we did a story board exercise. We gave them the basic facts about Mary and split them in to small groups. They were asked to flesh out the story and think about why she might have done what she had done.

This led to a beginning, middle and end following the basic steps of:

- Where had she come from?, her background etc.
- What happened? i.e. an explanation of why stealing first began
- How this continued and resulted in her eventual capture conviction and transportation?
- What happened next? Mary gets her revenge and escapes.

Stage 2: having fleshed out the story we now had the framework on which to look at song writing. We started this with everybody involved initially and then over subsequent weeks split the group so that those who really wanted to carry on with the song writing could, and those who wanted to begin playing the music could.

Stage 3: We decided to use two existing tunes from The Full English digital archive for two of the songs and to allow the students to create their own songs for some of the others. This importantly allowed the mixed abilities to work on a blues cycle that engaged both the younger guitar students through the chord structures and the older students through improvisation etc. The lyric writers and singers learned to massage
the words into the tunes editing them constantly so that they still made sense but could be sung easily.

**Conclusions**

Where we used the tunes from The Full English digital archive the students still adapted them anyway to their own lyrics. This was gratifying to see as it is exactly what happens within the aural folk traditions, and has done for centuries.

Their favourite pieces were the ones where they had created both the tunes and lyrics. Rather than a reflection that The Full English tunes were not good, it had more to do with the students feeling so proud of being ‘allowed’ to input on such a scale and comes back once again to them owning the material and the process.

_Branston Community Academy students final performance at Town Hall, Birmingham_ (photographer: Roswitha Chesher)
Warm Up Rounds

There are three rounds included in the pack. Whilst they are not part of The Full English digital archive they are still traditional and have been chosen as Jo Freya finds them extremely useful in teaching sessions and uses them constantly. With all rounds Jo tries to get participants of all ages to learn by ear and without reference to words.

Ave Maria: This has been around for years and Jo learnt it originally as part of the Girl Guides. There are probably other notated versions of this but this is as I remember it. This is particularly useful as the words can be replaced with anything you feel is relevant e.g. ‘singing is a pleasure’, ‘why am I so sleepy’ etc. You could ask for suggestions that would scan with the rhythm of the music and change from one to another set of words.

Pot of tea: Whilst this is American by origin the fact it’s about tea links it nicely to the UK and can be used in conjunction with conversations around stereotypes and whether they are based in truth.

Historically, the use of the ‘ticket teller’ machine referred to in the song “won’t it be just the ticket” (illustrated through actions) refers to the old style ticket machine where the conductor used to roll a printed ticket off which is relevant to modern history and projects about London etc.

This song has actions but is also a useful one to ask them to suggest actions. The use of actions helps people to memorise words and vis versa. As this piece is syncopated and claps occur just before the syncopated vocals it is a good one for getting everyone’s brain in gear. Jo uses this predominantly with Key Stages 1 and 2, and also with adults and mixed groups.

The only action they might not suggest is the one illustrated today to show the ticket machine and is a good one to include alongside any they might suggest.

Pray for Rain: The origin for this is not known. It relates to drought and could be used as part of discussions on the environment and how environmental change affects different parts of the world resources etc. The vocal range of this song is quite wide and more complicated than most rounds. This is a good one to teach older students particularly if they are part of singing groups. It has a very ‘classical’ sounding tune that, whilst hard to learn, becomes a fast favourite because of its melancholic beauty.
Warm Up Rounds

Ave Maria

Pot of Tea

I like a nice pot of tea when I wake up in the morning. Just as the sun is rising... and a dawning... won't... it be... just the ticket floating on the sea... sipping... cups of tea.

Pray For Rain

In summer the flowers wilt... the flowers wilt... the streams run dry... I pray for rain... I pray for rain... I pray for rain... I pray for rain...
Rufford Park

The version used here is the one noted from the singer Joseph Taylor by Percy Granger. Further verses were added to the songs by Patrick O’Shaughnessy, a researcher of Lincolnshire folk song. The extra words were taken from a broadsheet displayed in Mansfield, Nottingham in 1851 detailing the trial of four men for the murder of a gamekeeper.

This song is historically interesting because of the showdown between the poachers and the keepers, which was more likely to have been about the enclosure of previously free open land than about poaching itself. Additionally, the sentence of transportation and the lengths and realities of those sentences make interesting discussion points when linked to social status and poverty. Many areas of England will have their own stories of transportations and the crimes that the individuals committed for comparison and development. Local study centres are useful starting points for further information.
The Ballad of Mary Dimoline

By Jo Freya, 2014

This song was sung to the tune of ‘Rufford Park’ as a demonstration of how to use existing material and massage it for another use.

A watch, two knives, a table cloth
Some feathers for our bed
Silk handkerchiefs, some money too
Or so the masters said

Chorus      So women all, do hear my call
            And watch those dear to you
            For some of them tell stories tall
            Let’s hope it’s but a few

Forced on hard times I stole one day
My husband said I should
He’d hurt his back and couldn’t work
Although I thought he could

My husband fled and left me here
My son denied his part
My daughters too they would not come
Oh how it broke my heart

I know I stole I cannot lie
It was not out of greed
I had to find a way to cope
My family to feed

If they’d prove kind and stand by me
I’d gladly go in peace
To help them live I’d take the sting
For seven years at least

Chorus 2     So let me tell you from my cell
            It isn’t worth the pain
            Fourteen years of living hell
            And treated with disdain

www.efdss.org
Horkstow Grange

Collected from George Gouldthorpe of Barrow on Humber 1906 by Percy Grainger
www.vwml.org/record/PG/5/195

In Horkstow Grange there lived an old miser
You all do know him as I’ve heard say
It’s him and his man that was named John Bowlin
They fell out one market day

Chorus: Pity them what see him suffer
Pity poor old Steeleye Span
John Bowlin’s deeds they will be remembered
Bowlin’s deeds at Horkstow Grange

With a Blackthorn stick old Steeleye Struck him
Often’s had threatened him before
John Bowlin turned round al in a passion
He knocked old Steeleye into the floor
A Hundred and seventy years ago

Devised by students of Branston Community Academy, Lincolnshire, April 2014

Melody: Horkstow Grange

A hundred and seventy years ago
A Girl born poor married a farmer
They lacked money and fertile land
Which caused great stress, no one could calm her

Chorus:
Pity them that see her suffer
Pity Mary Dimoline
For stealing she will be transported
Crimes too large for just a fine

Her husband he was weak and feeble
He was selfish and angry too
Mary was at the peak of anger (the peak of peak of anger)
She had nothing else to do

Chorus....

Her husband he came down with a fever
Mary choice was made quite clear
To starve or rob was her decision
Poverty her greatest fear

No Chorus
170 Years Ago

Branston Community Academy students/Traditional

A hundred and seventy years ago, a girl born poor married
a farmer. He had no money or fertile land it caused her stress no one could calm her.

Plenty them that see her suffer, Plenty Mary Dim online, For

stealing she will be transported, Crimes too large for just a fine.
It All Began

Devised by students of Branston Community Academy, Lincolnshire, April 2014

It all began in the light of the day
I saw potatoes and stole them away
It wasn’t my fault I couldn’t resist
I stole and stole I had to persist

When I was young I felt it felt good
Stealing and stealing I felt I should
Controlling my habit was too hard for me
Whatever I did I couldn’t break free

It became so hard for me
Stealing and stealing it led me to greed
I felt the pressure was mounting on me
Because I have four mouths to feed

My daughters wanted more than we had
It led to me to do something mad
To keep them safe I’d rob or kill
I didn’t do it just for the thrill
It All Began
Branston Community Academy students

Bm
G
It all began in the light of the day I saw the po-ta-toes and stole them away It

Em
F #
wasn’t my fault I couldn’t re-sist I stole and stole I had to per-sist It

Bm
G
all began in the light of the day I saw the po-ta-toes and stole them away It

Em
F #
wasn’t my fault I tried to re-sist I stole and stole I had to per-sist

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It All Began
Branston Community Academy students

Bm G
It all began in the light of the day I saw the potatoes and stole them away It

Em F# was'n't my fault I couldn't resist I stole and stole I had to persist It

Bm G
all began in the light of the day I saw the potatoes and stole them away It

Em F# was'n't my fault I tried to resist I stole and stole I had to persist

The Full English: www.vwml.org
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Mary’s Crime – blues progression in A

Devised by students of Branston Community Academy, Lincolnshire, April 2014

She was arrested on suspicion of theft
She had a watch box and a Vinaigrette

Repeat refrain
   She was tried in the ancient keep

Just to add to that, she stole coins and seals
This started long ago when she stole potato peel
   She was tried in the ancient keep

Two ounces of feathers of which she had no need
For all of these things she was tried in the ancient keep
   She was tried in the ancient keep.

The Ancient Keep

Branston Community Academy students
The Nutting Girl

Collected from George Leaning by Percy Grainger of Barrow on Humber 1906
www.vwml.org/record/PG/5/160

There was a brisk young damsel, she lived down in Kent
She arose one summer’s morning and she a nutting went
There was a brisk young farmer, was ploughing of his land
He called to his horses and sweetly bid them stand

Chorus
A nutting we will go my boys, a nutting we will go
With a white cockade all in our hat we’ll make a gallant show

He dropped himself down on his plough a song for to begin
His voice was so melodious it made the valleys ring
Now then the brisk young damsel was nutting in the wood
His voice was so melodious it charmed her where she stood
Mary’s Revenge

Devised by students of Branston Community Academy, Lincolnshire, April 2014

Melody: Based on The Nutting Girl, collected Mr George Leaning of Barton upon Humber by Percy Grainger 4th Aug 1906

As the ship sails for a new land
These chains are holding my hands
I haven’t got a friend to my name
All alone I feel my shame
But now I’ve got myself a plan
I’ll fight as hard as any man
My revenge I will take
And a new life I will make

Chorus
I’ll fight for my life and a life worth living
I’ll fight as hard as I can
I’ll fight for my life and a life worth having
I’ll fight like any man

The Captain made me scrub the deck
So I went and broke his neck
A guard he threatened me with a sword
So I threw him overboard
They made me carry the toilet pale
So I scratched them to death with my finger nails
The guard he threatened to take my life
So I stabbed him with a stolen knife

Now I’m in complete control
I won’t do as I’m told
To be in charge it feels so good
Who would have thought I could
Once I was a farmer’s wife
Now in charge of my own life
Finally I’m totally free
With the open sea in front of me
Mary's Revenge

Branston Community Academy students/Trad

As our ship sailed for a new land these chains are holding my hands. I haven’t got a friend to my name, all alone I feel my pain. But now I’ve got my self a plan, I’ll fight as hard as any men. My revenge I will take And a new life I will make. I’ll fight for me life and a life worth living. I’ll fight as hard as I can. I’ll fight for me life and a life worth having I’ll fight like any man.
Jo Freya

Jo Freya is a highly experienced musician, composer and workshop leader working throughout the UK and in mainland Europe. She is a multi-instrumentalist and singer, specialising in saxophone which, when she began, placed her as a maverick in the Folk music world but ensured that she developed her own style of Folk Sax and the ability to specialise in multi-instrumental folk ensemble workshops.

As a keen collaborator, Jo formed Freyja a European women’s band designed to raise the profile of women in instrumental music. She went on to have collaborations with a mixed British/Breton project Belen and with Dutch band Maalstroom. Keen to innovate and develop as a composer Jo has been mentored by Master of the Queen’s Music, Judith Wier.

A team player with a unique range of skills that means she has inspired dancers, instrumentalists and singers she can currently be seen with Blowzabella, Moirai and in Christmas shows with Michael Morpergo.

Liam Robinson

Liam Robinson is a musician, singer, educator and organiser. He is based in Lincolnshire but works throughout the UK and has appeared in North America and a host of European countries. He plays Melodeon and Concertina as well as singing, calling dances and leading workshops. Liam’s primary interest is in the music and songs of Lincolnshire and he has released two CD’s of songs and music from Lincolnshire. Liam’s knowledge and enthusiasm, as well as his desire to get people involved have helped him build up a great reputation in all he does.

www.minimorris.co.uk
https://www.facebook.com/TheLiamRobinsonDanceBand
http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZKjZwRTs2HRFqOZi12UbdQ
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