

# Up!

AUGUST 2022

SOUND



Making the world  
a better place -  
one page at a time

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# Up Front!

Greetings from Up! Central, and welcome to your new 'sound' themed issue.

Inside you'll find all our usual features and interviews with the movers and shakers who do great stuff month in, month out, bringing love and light to everyone's lives. And what stories they have - read on!

We're also delighted to be able to thank the National Lottery Community Fund for once again showing their faith in Up! Community Group. Their support enables us to continue our work in bringing people and communities together, and we've got lots of exciting new projects planned. Keep an eye on our website - [www.positivelyup.co.uk](http://www.positivelyup.co.uk) - to find out more.

Talking of new projects though, when you've finished reading this month's issue, you'll find the back page contains a very simple but effective way we could all help those in need ...

Bridget & Harry x



*This month's front cover features a painting by Sarah O'Dowd.  
Check out p.7 for more of her wonderful artwork.*

# Chirp Up!

MIKE FIELDING

**Up!** talks to an author, active environmental campaigner, fundraiser and RSPB species sponsor about his passion for our feathered cousins

**Thanks for agreeing to talk to us, Mike. Having spent time with you on a hillside, your ability to immediately distinguish between bird calls is remarkable! How long have you been observing them?**

I can pinpoint the exact moment I became interested in birds. It was a walk with a schoolboy friend (who was a farmer's son) along a country lane. I'd not long moved from an urban environment, and he drew my 'towny' attention to a yellowhammer. He also recited its song 'little bit of bread and no cheese'. I remember being spellbound with this creature's unbelievable beauty. That night I set about trying to draw it. I was eight years old, and a lifetime passion has remained ever since.



After that it became a way of life for me; as birds are probably the most easily visible of our wildlife, it's just a case of taking notice of what's around you. Where the jigsaw really comes together is by being 'tuned in' to the environment. Most of us have the ability to see, but not everyone can be bothered to look, and the same applies to our hearing. There's a fundamental and major difference between hearing and listening. Being able to listen (often



above the perpetual din of life) helps us to be acutely aware of our environment as well as sub-consciously 'monitoring' the well-being

or otherwise of that environment.

So if we look at bird song as music and slowly learn the various instruments, we find ourselves spatially placed in a wonderful three dimensional world that many of us ignore, it's simply a case of allowing oneself to be 'tuned in'. As John Cage once said, "music is all around us if we can be bothered to listen".

So my advice for learning bird song would be to understand that birds never really stop singing, so start with the familiar ones first. Everyone can recognise a robin, so learn its song first. As Spring progresses, other instruments start to join in. The song thrush seems to delight in finding new phrases, so much so that they will repeat one, then try another, repeat that and so on, often for hours from the same spot. By mid-April the air will be alive with other maestros, including that wonderful virtuoso soloist, The Blackbird.



# Chirp Up!

MIKE FIELDING

When you're familiar with our resident birds, then it's just a case of waiting for the other parts of the orchestra that have spent the winter 'gigging' in Africa to join in the performance. Perceived chaos suddenly becomes 'Mendelssohn', perhaps without structure, but certainly music to the ears. Remember the first instruments on earth made by man were bird-flutes to mimic the planet's oldest orchestra.

**Do birds' voices ever change over their lifetime? We once read for example that the blackbird's catalogue of songs expands as it gets older ...**

There are many different aspects to bird 'song' or more correctly 'vocalisations'. Birds are fantastic mimics - they have the ability to reflect what they can hear so their songs and calls often reflect their location and, as with humans, they can have very distinct dialects. Some birds can have multiple variations of their particular call which, after fifty years of personal experience, still presents challenges today. So yes, just as the human voice can be varied in pitch and other characteristics, so can the song, and particularly the 'call' of a bird.

To explain, songs are delivered by birds when they have found a territory. They use that song to attract a mate, then 'defend' that territory - telling others of the same species, 'hands off, this is my spot!'

Calls on the other hand take many different forms and are made as either alarm notes or by larger species that do not 'sing'. Storks, for example form the percussive section to the orchestra by

rhythmically clattering their bills, whilst others have strange 'mechanical' sounds, such as the nightjar or storm petrel.



**How come such tiny creatures can produce such volume? Is it something about their biology?**

Yes, good question! One of the unbelievable wonders of the world - how on earth does the tiny wren, weighing no more than ten grams, produce such an ear splitting, penetrating song?



Unlike the human larynx, songbirds have what is known as a syrinx, allowing them to 'vocalise' more than one sound at the same time and the biology is also different to the human voice box. Therefore bird sounds are completely polyphonic, delivered at the same time and often with varying pressures, producing a

# Chirp Up!

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spectacular subtlety of variation, something humans are unable to achieve. Unlike the larynx, the syrinx is located where the trachea forks into the lungs, making this way of delivering sound five times more efficient than humans – hence the spectacular sound of the wren.

**During lockdown everyone noticed birdsong more, due to the absence of humans. However, with the return of avian flu many birds are in trouble. What can we do to help them?**

Sadly, every negative aspect relating to our environment has something to do – directly – with man's activities. This includes bird flu or A/H5N1 which is caused by an increasing human population and its insatiable appetite for cheap chicken. During lockdown many people had no option other than to explore their local environment, resulting in a much greater awareness of our natural world. And, for a short while, people were referring to the 'post-Covid world' and how different it would be.

My own personal memory from that era was the sight of what seemed like hundreds of jet aircraft parked at Norwich Airport during a relaxing of lockdown, but it sadly hasn't taken the world very long to simply forget and move back to exactly where we were. Unfortunately, I personally don't see any signs of things getting any better for humanity and the creatures that inhabit the earth. The best we can do is become educated to the real facts. Join Greenpeace, join The Green Party, join the RSPB, join your local Wildlife Trust. At the end of the day, capitalism generally stands for exploitation and everything boils down to money.

We can make a difference by financially supporting those organisations and businesses that support a sustainable and thriving planet – and use your vote for those political parties who advocate green politics rather than just talking about them.

**OK, here's the million-dollar question. What's your favourite bird and why?**

Perhaps not the prettiest of birds, but my favourite bird would have to be the Corn Bunting. Sadly now extinct in Northumberland, virtually extinct in County Durham and in real peril elsewhere in the UK. When I was at school in the 1970's I accidentally disturbed a nest that was located in an uncultivated grass field



behind our school, adjacent to a housing estate and one of several sites they could be found around South Tyneside where I lived. They were a local bird. They are such an old fashioned bird, one that evokes Constable, black and white pre-war film, sunny summers of long ago. Their struggle directly mirrors that of the past thirty to forty years of explosion in consumerism, greed, want and neglect. They slowly disappear, whilst the society that knows the price of everything and the value of nothing moves in. As I have said in my book *The River Coquet – A Personal View*, how I miss their jangling keys call in the summer air.

# Chirp Up!

MIKE FIELDING

Finally, give us a couple of birds which are easy to identify by their song ...

Robin, an easy one and one of our birds that despite the millions lost each year to domestic cats, have managed to adapt and even thrive in suburbia. It's often been said that their song becomes more melancholy as the seasons progress, but you'll find them in your local park even if you don't have a garden. They can generally be heard all year round.

And as mentioned, song thrush. Listen for them early in spring. Not as 'fluty' as the blackbird but instantly recognisable by the way they repeat each phrase. They will often sit on the highest branch or a TV ariel delivering their song for hours – even at night.



You can read more about Mike and his work [here](https://www.voert.digital/mie):  
<https://www.voert.digital/mie>

You may also want to check out the following:

RSPB  
<https://www.rspb.org.uk/>

The Wildlife Trusts  
<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/>



*You must hear the birdsong without attempting to  
render it into nouns and verbs*

**Ralph Waldo Emerson**

*Only to the rude ear of one who is quite indifferent  
does the song of a bird seem always the same*

**Rosa Luxemburg**

*A bird does not sing because it has an answer,  
it sings because it has a song*

**Maya Angelou**

*Those who wish to sing ... always find a song*

**Swedish proverb**

# Word Up!

## YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF SOUND

### Giggle Poem

He's just tall enough to reach the knob  
and giggly with the power  
to close the door in grandma's face.

"Where's the baby? Where's he hiding?"  
I ask as if I can't see his little fingers  
pulling the door ajar—checking  
with one blue eye if I am still in the hallway,  
watching. The game requires an audience.  
A grandma willing to sit on the blue carpet,  
legs spread in a V, ready to be ambushed  
over and over by a laughing whirlwind,  
clad in a neon yellow sleeper. The fleece fabric,  
soft as his wispy blonde hair, tickles my cheek  
as he tumbles into my arms for a quick hug,  
before charging back behind the door to play again.

I want a picture. But my phone is downstairs  
and I don't dare break the mood, trying to capture  
a moment which will never return, except in this poem,  
where his laughter will never stop bubbling from his belly  
and his busy legs will never be too big for footed jammies.

*Jacqueline Jules*

wooden bridge stretches  
across cloudy horizon  
crunchy gravel path

*Jessica Swafford*

### The Zone

Is that the sound  
of rain on the roof  
or small arms fire?  
Fetch my gun, son,  
and an umbrella.

*Tom Sterner*

### Singing the Stitches in

He leads the grey horse slowly home,  
blood dripping from it,  
yells for First Aid, rugs.  
The stable girl leaps to it,

brings the twitch, that loop of torture  
wrapped around a horse's upper lip  
and tightened like a tourniquet until  
the horse can barely breathe.

No, he roars, not that, you fool!  
Rub him down and rug him, then get out!  
She hurries through the tasks,  
lugs the muddied tack away,

is busy cleaning when she's startled  
by a sound, a soft low croon.  
She tiptoes to the loose-box door,  
surprised to find her boss is humming

to his horse. The horse, mesmerised  
by song rests its head on its owner's back  
lets him clean the wound,  
stitch the skin flap back to living skin.

*Gill McEvoy*



# Brush Up!

STEVE LOWE

**Up's outdoors man introduces us to a remarkable artist**

Wandering amongst fields and hedgerows on a warm summer evening, the sounds of skylark shouting from the heavens, the sigh of the wind in the tall grasses and the raucous call of rooks as they prepare for night, are nothing short of magical.

Close your eyes and you can imagine the activity, the scene illustrated in noises of all different types. The rustle of leaves, chirruping grasshoppers and unseen birds calling their mates from deep within the tangled branches, hidden from view but visible in sound and identifiable by their distinctive song.

On a night-time visit to the coast in winter, darkness may cloak the spume-topped waves, but their head-banging force on cliffs and scars paints a picture that your eyes cannot see.

Our hearing provides another element to the sensation of nature, creating a soundscape to match the visual and tactile elements of the things that surround and stimulate us. We take it for granted, or many of us do. I certainly counted myself amongst that group, blessed to still have the tools to maximise my experience.

I hadn't given it much thought, if I'm honest, and even if I didn't know what that bird was on first sight, my ears would normally help me to identify it. I have never considered what an absence of one or more of those sensations would be like.

I came across Sarah O'Dowd via her stunning



landscape art works. Full of energy, life and power. Evocative of the places I know and love so well. The coast and hills of Northumberland with its ever-

changing moods, its drama and balletic movements, moody and mellow at the same time.

Sarah's art spoke to me immediately. Vivid, sparkling, dark, brooding, accessible and inspiring, lively and noisy - and that was just the pictures! Describing herself as "a deaf Northumbrian artist with a westie (Maddy)", Sarah is someone who inspires me hugely. Not just her artworks though as she wears a lovely warm smile whatever her circumstances. We make each other laugh and I count myself extremely fortunate to have her as a great friend.

A native of Northumberland, Sarah has a B.A. Hons in Fine Arts from Newcastle University. Her work reflects that background and is strongly personal, contemporary and subjective - romantic, even.



I asked her how she "replaced" sound in her work (something I would find really hard) and she replied, "Soundlessness intensifies my visual

# Brush Up!

STEVE LOWE

response, even though I can just about hear things like waves crashing and splashing (one of my favourite sounds), the wind and the pitter-patter of rain with my hearing aids.

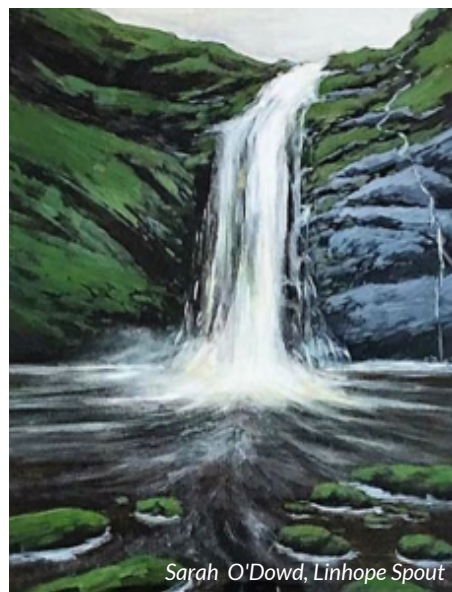
But I sometimes take out my hearing aids to imagine what it would feel like with sounds and I do it through colours, patterns and brushstrokes. My work highly demonstrates rhythmic flair and a well-structured composition also found in music. I have developed an individual technique to give that response a 'voice'".



Like myself, Sarah has a great love for Northumberland. We are both drawn to the power of its wild hills and coastline. For me, they provide harmony, for Sarah they inspire her attempts to capture their beauty and drama.

"For example, when I see a stormy sea, I will use dark colours and dramatic brushstrokes and I wipe away the oil pastels with turps harder. For sunsets, I use warmer colours and gentler brushstrokes".

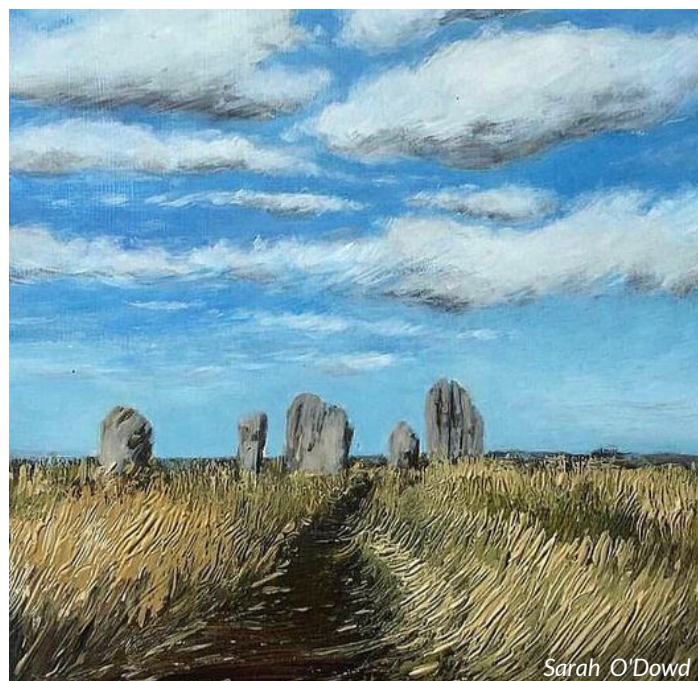
She adds, "as another example, in my painting of



Linhope Spout, I could really sense the energy of the water flowing as soon as I saw it. With my hearing aids, I listened intently for the sounds of the crashing waterfall, the flow of the

stream and the wind in the forest trees. The smells and skin sensations added to the image I was building up. It was magical and I transfer those senses to my painting.

A lot of my surf paintings are 'noisy' or bold brush strokes. I guess I express my impression of noise through the weight of the brushstrokes".



Asked about her early life and inspiration she answered, "I've been profoundly deaf from birth and was brought up orally until I discovered British Sign Language at the age of 13. School was a mixed bag; like many others I experienced

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STEVE LOWE

Loneliness and isolation, although I had a group of deaf friends of my age who became lifelong friends. I was very determined!

I am obsessed with birds, but I cannot hear them even with my hearing aids as they are too highly pitched. My deaf son David can, as he has a better audible range than me - Grrr! For me, seeing birds in flight is musical and orchestral. I hope to capture that through implied movement, within the landscapes I paint”.

Sarah’s grandparents lived next door to one of the famous Ashington Pitmen Painters and she used to watch him paint. This would have given her an encouragement to be expressive and to paint what she saw. Luckily, a good art teacher at school recognised her potential and encouraged her to develop her skills, eventually leading to a fine art degree from Newcastle University.



*William Turner, Dutch Boats in a Gale*

“I don’t have any preference for a specific painting, but I am greatly influenced by the paintings of William Turner and his dramatic skies, expressive colourisations, turbulent often violent marine paintings. Another favourite is German



*Emil Nolde, Anatomy of Light and Water*

Expressionist, Emil Nolde. His late paintings are vibrant, moody and his skies are spectacular”.

Sarah’s art is often displayed in local spaces, such as Woodhorn or in displays at Gallery 45 and I love to spend time gazing at the landscapes and hearing the mood she has captured. Currently her work adorns the Maritime Centre in Newbiggin, and this setting is really accessible for the public to appreciate a local talent.

I can think of no better accolade to Sarah than to say that she is a maestro of communication. Her art speaks more coherently to me than my pitiful (but improving) BSL vocabulary does to her. Go and have a look/listen for yourself.



*An experienced wildlife professional, Steve currently works freelance with Northumberland Rivers Trust as well as undertaking work with volunteers on local heritage and archaeology projects.*

*His hope is to leave the world a better place.*

*If you'd like to learn more about Sarah and her amazing artwork, check out the following links:*

<https://www.facebook.com/landscapeartist.sarahodowd.9>

<https://www.sarahodowd.com/exhibitions>

<https://www.instagram.com/deafnorthumbrianartist/>

[https://twitter.com/art\\_chick1971](https://twitter.com/art_chick1971)

# Word Up!

## YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF SOUND

### **Hear the Sounds**

As our world closes down becoming increasingly smaller, skies less streaked by contrails....wildflowers on roadside embankments breath again.

Our ears should be opened once more as there is time to meditate and contemplate....if we try maybe we will be able to hear the sounds....  
Of the wingbeat of a hoverfly....a heartbeat in a kingfisher's egg....the rustle of a hovering Kestrel's tail feathers....

The shudder of a water lily as cherry blossom falls upon it.... consequential ripples on water.... Falling tears from wearied eyes....snowflakes melting on window panes....

The yawn of a weary Woodworm at rest as ancient trees rot on forest floors.... unfurling ferns and mushrooms breaking cover in sun dappled woodland....Clematis tendrils creaking their way sunwards....

The crash of Dandelion clocks colliding on the breeze....the footfall of a Centipede on pine needles....the vibrations of a Spider's web....The whirr of earthbound Sycamore seeds....

An avalanche....of sun dried sand down rolling sand dunes.... the bubble wrap pop of seaweed under foot....the weary sigh of an oyster....the whinny of seahorses....

The sound of rainbows landing upon crocks of gold....Can you hear a beard grow?....

Close your mind to the tick and the tock, the tock and the tick....to hear the swish of the pendulums swing.... the movement of time on a sundial....

**Roy Heath**

# Listen Up!

TONY WILSON

Are you sitting comfortably? Then we'll begin ...

Thanks for talking to us, Tony. There must be something in our DNA that makes us want to listen to stories. What do you think is the attraction?

First of all, it's a pleasure to be asked!

Stories are fundamental to our understanding of the ways of the world. I'm not just talking about children. As adults we like to read stories that give us an insight into our own lives and shared experiences, good and bad ... and ... without getting into theories of self-image and our own consciousness ... we're blimmin' nosey! A story can let you safely see another perspective, another lifestyle, another culture, behaviour that is both fascinating and possibly life-threatening, and it gives us a chance to pose ourselves the question of what we'd do if we were in the protagonists' situation.

A spoken story can become an all-encompassing, totally immersive experience, where you can be taken on a journey and given license to use your imagination to 'fill in the colours' of the tale being told. It takes us to a place that is very comforting and welcoming and can often make us forget about real life.

We're a species of storytellers even if it's just how we got to work today, what we did last week or who said what to whom. There's this rarefied idea that you have to wear a lot of funny hats, a rainbow-blot test of a waistcoat, tell tales that have a king and a dragon in them and juggle muesli. We all tell life stories and 'traditional' storytelling is just a hop and a skip from that - and it is compelling to listen to someone else's story.

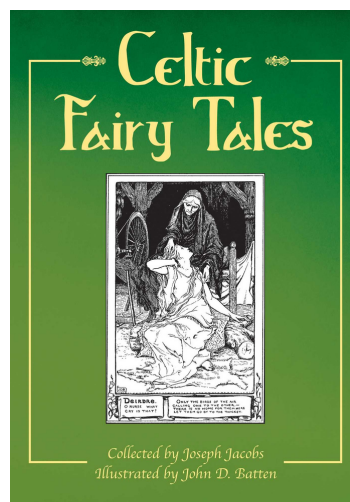


How did you first get into writing and performing?

I have always been a singer; at school, in the church choir and at home with my mother, who was very fond of musicals and would recount the storyline and break into portions of the songs at the appropriate moment.

My family read me stories on a very regular basis. In fact, my dad used to read me the *Beano* or the *Dandy* at the bottom of my bed by visually describing each panel and re-telling the dialogue. He would go through the whole of the comic like this. I was very lucky. I'm sure it had a huge effect on my own ability to visualise a story.

I was always interested in English, one of the few subjects I enjoyed at school. It was a book I found, many years later, when I was a teacher changing



classes that got me into traditional stories. At the bottom of the cupboard, amongst the blotting paper and old text books, was a book called *Celtic Fairy Tales* collected by Joseph Jacobs in the 19th Century - and I was hooked. It spurred me on to start writing, initially

# Listen Up!

TONY WILSON

as something for my children - a story that turned out to be "Gerach's Road". I recorded it as a cassette and played it to the children as the story grew. Other people got to hear it and seemed to like it so I had 1,000 copies made and distributed them to friends and family and as an 'in' to literary clubs and places that supported the spoken word.

Fast forward to 1999, I had joined a folk band that had a full schedule of tour dates well into the new millennium and I felt as if I was settled for life as a musician. Then ... they had a falling out, everything got cancelled and I was out of work!

I remembered how someone had told me I should be a storyteller. I pulled in a lot of favours from friends in different schools throughout the country, charging them petrol money and the cost of a B&B or a Youth Hostel bed. I then traveled around the UK, making up how to be a storyteller for real. I made a lot of mistakes and got things wrong until it all fell into place. I gained a reputation as a storyteller who was cheap and delivered the goods, entertaining and educating the whole range of primary ages.



It was a lot of hard graft but it worked. I organised tours and I was in demand, touring for about 100-150 days of the year with an enormous vocabulary of stories. I also wrote children's songs and got



the most performance experience I'd ever had.

In Summer 2010 I was invited to go and perform for children aged 3-18 in International Schools in South America. At first I thought it was a hoax but it was the real deal! I would tour for 3-6 weeks once or twice a year in different countries and continents, primarily across South America, but also in Spain, China and Korea. It was a fabulous experience and continued until 2019. I'm so fortunate to have been given these opportunities and had the chance to see more than any tourist would ever see. Don't get me wrong, it was hard work - but the things I've seen and done in places I'd only seen in James Bond movies were all worth it.

## What type of stories do you think people like hearing? Is there a formula?

If I knew the formula I'd be a genius! It's important to tell a story 'with' people rather than 'at' them. You need to read the room and see how they sit, react, listen and participate. Most importantly ask what they want to hear, especially with children and teachers as an audience.

It was important to research beforehand and I became a 'pocket genius' on subjects as diverse as steel making in the Rhonda Valley, industrial revolution trades in Redcar, The Romans in Britain, The First World War and a wide variety of historical figures such as Florence Nightingale, Napoleon and George Stephenson. I'd then use this knowledge to write a story using their words and their ideas.

# Listen Up!

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**So, we have to ask - what's your own favourite story?**

If I was pressed, I'd go for "The Three Golden Heads Of The Well" from *Celtic Fairy Tales*. It was the first story I learned by heart and I practiced it every night for about a month with my own children. I can still feel the same enjoyment and compliments that they gave me at the time and it has carried on with me to this day. It's also available as a [free Ebook](#) from [gutenberg.org](#) if you'd like to hear it for yourselves.



**Your stories come from all over the world. Do you think people from other cultures respond differently or is it a universal thing?**

There are a lot of different genres specific to certain countries. For instance, I found in Japan there's a thread that concerns caves and rivers and water monsters. Chilean stories have a lot of fables that explain natural meteorological and geographical phenomena, while the vast majority



of Indian stories bear an astonishing resemblance to what we understand as the main bulk of European fairy tales - yet they pre-date them by many centuries. So there's a commonality of content, just a variation in the protagonists and settings.

I found that telling a Mexican folk-tale in English in the centre of Mexico City to Latin American students and telling a Russian Vampire Story in English to Students in Hong Kong had exactly the same effect ... they enjoyed being immersed in a good story.

**So what's next for Tony Wilson, then?**

In September 2016 we were in Costa Rica - I always traveled with my wife (these were opportunities too good to experience alone) - and the prospects were good. I was fully booked up in the UK until the middle of the following year and this far away from home, the internet was 'lumpy' and unreliable, so I didn't keep up with my e-mails once the tour had finished.

Coming into land at Heathrow my phone went ballistic with messages and e-mails. Every other time it had been a bombardment of bookings and possible dates for me to perform at schools in the UK, but this time it was different. The Government had imposed massive cuts of £30,000 from most schools in the Primary sector and, overnight, I had become an extravagance that they would have to cancel. I was receiving messages saying

# Listen Up!

TONY WILSON

that, when it came to a choice between books, pencils and paper or having a storyteller in their school ... I would have to go. Suddenly, at 63 I was unemployed and unemployable.

It was a shock but I returned to the only other thing that I knew how to do, and that was to sing and play music. I buckled down and started to re-establish myself on the folk scene. It all went well, I'm not a stranger to hard work and enterprise. By 2019 I was getting regular festivals and folk clubs bookings ... and then of course the world came to a standstill!

But over the past few months I've been releasing a series of collections of my recorded and videoed work on YouTube, not for posterity but to



share the knowledge, fun and entertainment I have experienced over the past 23 years.

So here I am still pushing the boulder back up the mountain and sometimes thinking that I'm only holding the rock until it decides to roll back down. But I'm ever-optimistic - work is coming in and I'm writing, playing and singing more than ever with a thousand stories in my heart.

You can find out more about Tony on his website:  
[www.tonywilsonfolksinger.co.uk](http://www.tonywilsonfolksinger.co.uk)



*No story lives unless someone wants to listen.*

*The stories we love best live in us forever.*

**J K Rowling**

*You're never going to kill storytelling, because it's built in the human plan. We come with it.*

**Margaret Atwood**

*I'll tell you a secret. Old storytellers never die.*

*They disappear into their own story.*

**Vera Nazarian**



# Word Up!

## YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF SOUND

### Midnight Poem

It wouldn't be a proper power failure if  
something didn't drop to the floor at night making  
a noise that carries no familiarity.  
Some falling objects do crisply announce themselves.  
A plastic cup falling in the bathroom goes "Cup!"  
A pack of thawed schnitzels hits the kitchen floor, "Pack!"  
A dropped book's hard cover echoes front to back, "Book!"  
But with the light switch now a powerless clicker,  
something has slid from something and the noise was "Thaff."  
So I am the owner of a self-described thaff.  
If I step on it in the dark, will I break it?  
Will I stain the already ugly rug with it?  
Suddenly the refrigerator susurrates.  
Lights glow. We'll see now what dares call itself a thaff.

*Mark L Levison*

### Sing a long

Sing out the breath, words falling everywhere between us  
We have only just met  
But here we are noisily shouting out the same words to the same music  
At more or less the same time.

After each song we send smiles along the line to each other  
Like pass the parcel.  
All alive, awake, engaged in rhythm  
Wanting the hour not to end.

*Ali Rowland*

### Country Music

Cocooned in air-conditioned cars,  
a couple is propelled past ponds,  
farmhouses, fields and barns,  
radio blaring songs of broken hearts,

while here, birds sing, dogs bark.  
Cows moo and goats bleat.  
Wind whistles in the trees,  
whispers across undulating wheat.

Our children laugh, splash in the water  
of a meandering creek  
as our footsteps brand soil  
in fields of grain, sunflowers and clover.

*Wilda Morris*

# Playing Up!

RUTH HARVEY

**Up! chats to the street musician who plays all the happiest notes**

**What was your first solo outdoors gig with your recorder like? Were you nervous?**

Yes, I'm always slightly nervous because I want people to enjoy my playing and also, I want to get it right. As soon as I start playing though (and hopefully get positive reactions!) the nerves go away.

My first one was at Tynemouth Metro Station and I felt very 'wobbly' about playing in public! But after giving myself a talking to, I put a cap on the ground and started. Not long into my set, a little boy with special needs accompanied by his Grandad stood in front of me and watched, utterly transfixed. After a long while of listening and putting a few coins in the hat, his Grandad led him away, saying "We'll have to go, son, or you'll have to put more money in!" That was enough for me - it made my day!



**Why do you think music is important in today's busy society?**

Music is hugely important, as it has such power. A lot of people are struggling at the moment, and music can completely change your mood. It can



bring a lot of joy and happiness and be very uplifting, as I know personally.

During one outdoors performance over lockdown I was approached while playing by a lady on a mobility scooter. She stopped, listened ... and then began to cry. Eventually she reached inside her bag. She had no money, so instead handed me a packet of biscuits! Initially I didn't want to take them from someone who perhaps couldn't afford it, but she explained how much the music had meant to her and she wanted me to have something. After that we were both moist of eye!

**Do you find music helps break down barriers? You've told us how people often come up and chat to you at events while you're playing ...**

Yes, my main aim is to give people the same passion and enjoyment as I get from the music. I also hope to help people in any way I can through the power of music. The first thing people ask me is, 'is it a recorder?' as people often have very negative experiences of the instrument. Then

# Playing Up!

RUTH HARVEY

they ask a bit about me before opening up and chatting about themselves.

I was doing a session in a residential home and one of the staff came and explained to me how there was an elderly man who couldn't come to the main room, being bedridden. I went along to chat with him and it turned out he'd been a sailor and loved shanties. Well, I just happen to know a fair few of them, so we were away! Honestly, the transformation that happens to people when the music really connects ... it's priceless!

**Many people's first experience of playing recorder was at school. Is that how you began?**

Yes, I did start at school, but after a while I went on to play the clarinet. I was in bands and orchestras for years, I even ended up leading some of them. Eventually, as the years went by, life took over and I gave it all up for a good while. I only came back to it some time later.

I returned to the recorder and soon ended up playing in the local ceilidh band, which I eventually ran. I also went on to teach recorder at local primary schools. It's like progressing in anything - you have to put in a lot of hard work, but it's



definitely worth it. Sometimes, no matter how well-practiced you are, an occasion can seem overwhelming. You'll find yourself playing in a session with a world-renowned musician and think "Aargh, I'll never keep up with this!" But you just need to stick at it and trust that you'll be ok - and you always are!

**Last question, what's your favourite kind of music?**

Traditional, or 'folk' music is my favourite. It's the music of the people and accessible to everyone. It's all about emotion and passion, see?

For the same reason I am absolutely passionate about gospel music; all those lovely harmonies do something to you - there are some songs I can't get through dry-eyed!

And when I get home, it's Stevie Wonder's *Songs In The Key Of Life* all the way ...



## Little-known recorder facts ...

- The recorder dates back to England in the Middle Ages.
- The instrument's name is no accident, coming from the same root as 'recording, or setting down', with the tradition being to learn a tune and play it from memory.
- The recorder was massively popular in Shakespeare's time, and makes an appearance in both *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
- Henry VIII was a massive recorder fan, collecting 76 of them before his death. He could play them all, too!

# Word Up!

## YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF SOUND

### Close Living

#### *Matins*

solemn clock salutation,  
upbeat kettle warms the chorus

fridge hums aria - Madame Butterfly  
freezer laps lithe waves on the shore

chunky tea pot intones benediction  
cup clinks, masts in the wind

next floor neighbours' music monotone  
like someone reading a poem badly

ground floor neighbours howl for Georgie  
as she runs along the back lane, heedless.

#### *Vespers*

Kitchen clatter, preparing dinner  
ballet on the radio as I pirouette

downstairs neighbours now on talk shows  
canned laughter and gravely voices

ground floor neighbours howl for Georgie  
as she runs along the back lane, heedless

next doors dog takes offence -  
dashes after Georgie, barking, barking

neighbours call in unison for dogs to stop  
the house hushes ready for evening

**Rona Fitzgerald**

### Pass it round

The women sang as they  
worked the cloth,  
pound and pull, pound and pull.  
Their song kept time and  
its sound would wrap  
the weary task in joy.

The sailors sang as they hauled the line,  
heave and pull, heave and pull.  
Their song kept time as they  
raised both sails and spirits  
up aloft.

Miners' songs came soaring up  
the shaft as caged hearts rose  
surface-bound, homeward bound.  
Full-throated harmonies that grew  
as coal-blackened men drew up,  
to greet the sunlit day.

The purpose of these songs  
will not be found in cloth or sail,  
their pull-together call for work has gone.  
But we still sing in common cause  
to pass it round, to pass it on,  
with spirits rising up aloft to  
greet the sunlit day with joyful sound.

**Gerda Pickin**

Next month's theme is -  
CLOTHES

Feel free to interpret the theme as you see fit  
and send up to 3 poems  
(no more than 20 lines each please) to:  
[admin@positivelyup.co.uk](mailto:admin@positivelyup.co.uk)

# Sing Up!

JEN WILSON

## Up!'s marine biologist on the music of the deep

If you have an impression in your mind of the ocean as a tranquil, and calming place, then I'm afraid you are sorely mistaken.



Of course, most of us will have witnessed the noisy anger of crashing waves, smashing over rocks, piers or promenades, sensed the danger there, probably felt over-awed and possibly even soggy. But that's literally just scratching the surface. Below the waves (themselves a major source of underwater noise), it is anything but peaceful. After all, if we can hear all that crashing whilst standing on the shore, just imagine what it must be like immediately below.

On top of that (or rather, under that, you know what I mean!), there's rain, undersea landslides or rocks shifting, hydrothermal vents and even volcanoes or earthquakes. Although yes, to be fair, the last few are rarer, especially around the UK coastline.

Still noisy though, and I haven't even got onto the critters yet ...

You're probably aware of the classic 'songs of the sea', those tapes that were so popular around a decade or more ago, combining the haunting beauty of the humpback whale with a melodic backdrop, designed to aid sleep or meditation. I certainly had a few, and my parents still have a little pod-like device in the corner of their dining room which makes 'sounds of nature', one of which is of course whale song. Interspersed with the high-pitched squeals of orcas, they make for stunning listening, and there are plenty of options still available via Spotify and the likes today.

Of course they're beautiful, and that's why we listen, but have you ever stopped to think about why they're singing? What are we actually listening to, as we drift merrily off to sleep, or focus on our breathing? Truth is, it certainly isn't relaxing to them... and for a start, it isn't singing really, not in the sense that we as humans understand the term. To us, singing is joyful, or worshipful, a way of expressing ourselves, or even something to dance to. The 'songs' that the whales sing are, in fact, vital communication. The sounds are used to find each other when separated from family groups, to let others know they are present, to warn of danger, to find mates, and to let others know where food may be located.



It's been shown that with humpback whales, all the individuals in the same geographic area will

# Sing Up!

JEN WILSON

ultimately end up singing the same song for a given period. On that note (he he!), a study showed that over a 19-year period, a group of whales (although some notes and 'phrases' were reused) did not sing wholly the same song twice during the yearly cycle. Language evolves for them, just as it does for us. And it does give me the wonderful image of an old whale returning to the seas of its youth, and only knowing 'old' songs, just unable to communicate with the trendy youth it's now associating with. Of course, in reality, what sounds there like the lovely plot of a *Finding Nemo* spin-off, would probably result in the whale being unable to find a mate / its own pod, and potentially starve to death, so we won't go down that road.

One of my favourite creatures, the orca, is also highly communicative. Anyone who's seen *Free Willy* should remember the scene where poor Willy is spy-hopping, communicating with his family on the other side of the wall. We'll skirt over the fact that they used the name of an actual humpback whale as his mother in the film, but the bare bones of the facts are there. Again, pods speak their own language, and between the two tribes of orca, the transient and resident, there are different patterns which can be identified. When it comes to communication

though, one group of orca have perfected something which I find a lot more terrifying than 'speaking skills' - that of 'agreeing to maintain radio silence'.



For many years, it was thought that the animals simply started using very high-pitched sounds whilst on a specific hunt, but following advancements in technology, it was found that actually, small groups of orca can break away from the main pod, and enter 'stealth mode', especially useful when going after prey with good hearing, such as seals, the key prey of the transient tribe.

Now, it's one thing for an individual to decide, by itself, to stay quiet so it can sneak up on a seal or two, but quite another for a group of them to collectively decide "we're hunting now" and formulate a plan. And if you've seen the footage of a small group of orca tipping a seal or penguin off a small piece of ice and into the sea, you'll know these are animals which can plan. See, not at all terrifying! Whilst you're looking for the



# Sing Up!

JEN WILSON

seal-hunting, also look for when the same act was tried on a BBC crew filming for David Attenborough ...

Marine mammals are not the only species which generate noise in our oceans though, far from it.



There are snapping shrimp, which, when heard collectively, apparently sounds like walking across dried twigs. Crabs snapping their claws would also be comparable, but unfortunately, they aren't quite as soulful and fun as Sebastian! In addition, seahorses make clicking sounds, and other fish can make noises such as pops, whistles, grunts, more clicks, or even purrs.

Noise then, forms a vital part of underwater communication, and one which, if disturbed, can severely harm not only individuals, through what's known as 'permanent threshold shift' or 'temporary threshold shift' (i.e. permanent or temporary changes to the sensitivity of an individual's hearing), but also to populations. After all, if animals cannot find each other, or hunt, then the future of that population begins to look a little uncertain.

As humans, we've been making the underwater world noisier for decades. Shipping, development of oil and gas platforms, construction, blasting, the list is seemingly endless. And unless carefully managed / mitigated, this can cause significant problems. Luckily, through mechanisms such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, or the Marine Noise Registry in Scotland, it is carefully managed.

Which means that our marine mammals and other critters are free to sing (and more importantly, hear) another day!

*As well as being a full-time marine biologist, Jen also writes historical fiction.*

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/jenniferwilsonwriter/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/inkjunkie1984/>

Blog: <https://jenniferwilsonwriter.wordpress.com/>



**Did you know ...**

- At any given moment all males in a group of humpback or blue whales will sing the same version of a song, even when separated over large distances. Whales in another region or hemisphere will sing a completely different song, but in unison with other whales in their area.
- Humpback whale song can be heard from a distance of 20 miles away.
- The complex vocal performances of humpback whales can last for tens of minutes, often repeated for many hours. An album of their songs gained worldwide fame in the 1970s and is still the best-selling recording of nature sounds ever made.

# Word Up!

## YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF SOUND

### Plum

Plum.  
As in pudding.  
Plum,  
as in plush.  
Plum,  
as in plump.

Plum pudding plum pie plum brandy plum plum!!

Thump.  
The thump a plum makes  
when it drops, oozing,  
fat, to ground.

Thump,  
as in plumping  
a cushion.

Thump.  
  
As in the firm plum  
of my heart,  
pumping  
its way through  
my days.

*Gill McEvoy*

### The Sound Of Silence

Sometimes the silence speaks  
louder than the words,  
louder than the music  
as loud as the sounds  
inside my head.  
Sometimes the silence shouts  
and I turn on the radio  
and open the window  
and block up my ears  
to shut it out.  
Once it was a welcome guest  
entering as others left.  
Once it was a time of peace,  
a quiet time alone,  
a rare time alone.  
Now it's all there is,  
that deafening silence.

*Lynn White*

### House Sounds

i  
Bibsy's been dead for ten years but as I rock in the recliner,  
I hear something behind me, expect her to bound into my lap.

ii  
The swish and crackle against the house  
telegraph messages from the night wind.

iii  
Slap, splatter, plop. I jump from bed,  
rush to the window, see a shadow race from the yard.  
In the morning, I clean up the remains of melons  
swiped from my garden and thrown against the house.

iv  
Ants invade my kitchen, make no audible sound.  
Floor boards do not creak below their sticky black feet.  
My house has not yet learned their language.

*Wilda Morris*



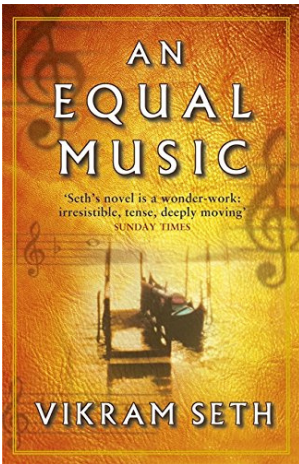
# Read Up!

JENNA WARREN

Up!'s literary reviewer charts her favourite music reads

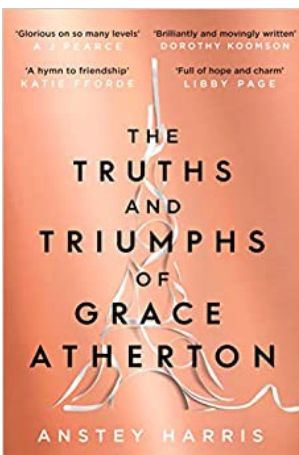
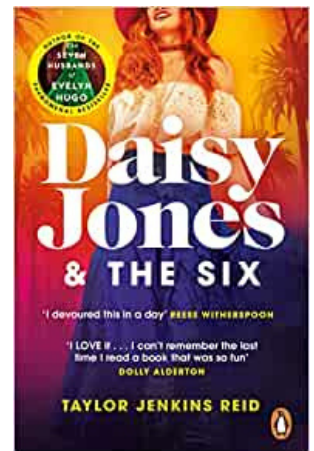


I'm very excited about this edition, because it means I can write about one of my favourite subjects: novels featuring music and musicians. My own debut novel, *The Moon and Stars*, is set in the world of musical theatre and follows a classically trained singer, so this is also a chance for me to look back over some of the brilliant books that have inspired me over the years.



Firstly, I would highly recommend *An Equal Music* by Vikram Seth. This beautiful novel is about two musicians: violinist Michael and pianist Julia. Michael was once in love with Julia, but he hasn't seen her for many years. One day, he spots her on a London bus, and manages to contact her again. The two musicians embark on an affair, but Julia has a secret which is gradually affecting her ability to play. Music can be so difficult to describe, and Seth captures classical music beautifully. I also love the characters, particularly the various members of Michael's string quartet and the way he describes the different dynamics between the performers.

*Daisy Jones and The Six* by Taylor Jenkins Reid is a fabulous novel about the rise and fall of a rock band in 1970s America. The novel is written from multiple points of view, including the seven members of the band, so reading it is akin to watching a music documentary, or reading a music biography written in interview format. Once again, it's a story about dynamics between performers: each member of 'The Six' has different and sometimes conflicting ambitions and desires. It is also a love story between singer-songwriter Daisy Jones, and Billy Dunne, leader of 'The Six'. I loved this book, especially the unusual format, and I found the ending very poignant. I thought about it for days after reading.

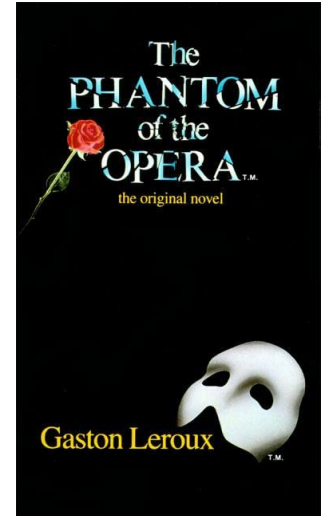


*The Truths and Triumphs of Grace Atherton* by Ansteay Harris tells the story of Grace, a gifted cellist turned luthier. Once, it looked as though Grace was going to become a professional musician, but negative experiences destroyed her confidence while still a student. Now, she makes beautiful cellos. She is also in love with David, a married man. When her relationship with David falls apart, Grace finds solace with two new friends: teenager Nadia and eighty-six-year-old Maurice. Both Maurice and Nadia are talented musicians, and help Grace find her way back to her music, and herself. This is a touching novel of self-discovery and friendship between different generations.

# Read Up!

JENNA WARREN

*The Phantom of the Opera* by Gaston Leroux is a strange novel (in a good way!). I was familiar with Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical before reading it, and consequently I found it a darker, but also more surreal read than I was expecting. Like Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, it's written as if it's based on true events, with the unnamed narrator playing detective and piecing together the famous 'case' using documents and oral histories. But like the musical, it's intensely theatrical, and Leroux captures a wonderful sense of place when describing the Opera Garnier. He also describes musical performances beautifully. Erik 'the Phantom' (actually a reclusive musician who lives beneath the theatre), falls in love with Christine Daae, a soprano. Their relationship is founded on music and begins with him singing to her unseen from behind the walls of her dressing room and offering to tutor her. Music is used for nefarious purposes at various points throughout the novel, but it also plays a large part in some of the book's more poignant moments. This is a dark but ultimately redemptive tale.



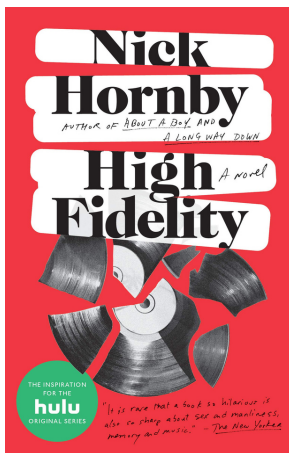
Speaking of music and Gothic novels, I would highly recommend *The Piano Room* by Clio Velentza. This dark but wonderful book tells the dual story of Sandor and Ferdi. Sandor is descended from a family of talented pianists. When he turns eighteen, his parents expect him to attend music school, but Sandor wants to live a different life. So he makes a Faustian pact to summon Ferdi, who is his physical double. One difference is that Ferdi loves playing the piano. The plan is for Ferdi to go to music school in Sandor's place, but things go horribly wrong and Ferdi escapes. While it sounds as though Sandor is the main character, in my opinion the protagonist is actually Ferdi. Most of the novel is about him trying to live his own life and becoming fully human. It's essentially a coming-of-age story with a supernatural angle. I really rooted for Ferdi as a character, and I found the novel unexpectedly moving.

Very different in tone, but lots of fun, is *Mockstars* by Christopher Russell. This comic novel follows Chris and George, two best friends in their early twenties, who want to be rockstars but spent their formative years playing in the school orchestra. They set out on a madcap tour with their indie rock band, Satellite, while trying to lead the rockstar lifestyle. Based on the real-life diaries of the author's own band, this is a warm and funny book with an uplifting ending.

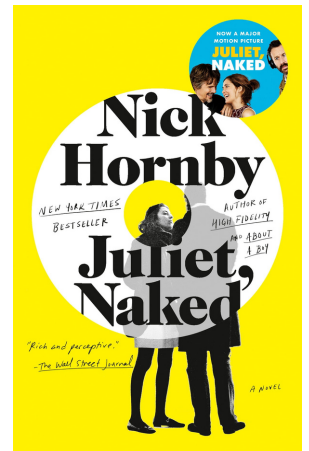


# Read Up!

JENNA WARREN



For fans of comic fiction, I would also recommend *High Fidelity* and *Juliet, Naked* by Nick Hornby. I love these books because while they're both primarily very funny novels about relationships, they also explore what it means to be a fan of music, as opposed to a musician. Rob, the cantankerous main character in *High Fidelity*, runs an independent record shop (complete with staff who have strong and geeky opinions). And *Juliet, Naked* features Tucker Crowe (a legendary and reclusive musician), Duncan, one of his biggest fans, and Duncan's long-suffering



girlfriend, Annie. It explores what happens when fame and fandom clash with ordinary life. When the trio meet, Annie finds herself falling for Tucker as a person, while not being terribly fond of his music. And Duncan learns about the potential pitfalls of meeting your heroes.

*Jenna Warren is a bookseller and writer from Teesside. She studied Theatre and later Creative Writing at university. She runs Book Corner, an independent bookshop in Saltburn-by-the-Sea. Her debut novel, *The Moon and Stars*, will be published by Fairlight Books in autumn 2022.*



## Where Is HoneyB?

Where on earth has HoneyB been this month?

If you think you recognise the mystery location, simply post your suggestion on the Up! facebook group page and tag it #HoneyB.

Good luck!



# Coming Up!

So as the echoes fade on our latest edition, we turn to the future. Our next issue will be all about 'Clothes', so dig your glad rags out of the wardrobe in readiness!

Now, you know we're all about the positives, but that doesn't mean we turn a blind eye to difficult times, and boy do we have hard times coming up. If we mention the phrase 'cost of living crisis' you'll know just where we're headed.

Following discussions with our local foodbank, we knew we had to do what we could to help. Now Up! doesn't have a bottomless pit of money, but what we do have are lots of talented friends. So from this point forward, until times get a little easier, we'll be staging a series of 'Feeding Folk' musical evenings - with the cost of entry being at least one item of food, with all donations then delivered to the foodbank.

Right, here's where you get involved. Many of you are, or know, creative people. Why not organise your own evenings of song, music, theatre, poetry - anything goes! Wherever you are, we are happy to lend our Up! branding to your event - all you need to do is ensure all of the food goes to your nearest foodbank. If you think you could help in your area, just drop us a quick line ([admin@positivelyup.co.uk](mailto:admin@positivelyup.co.uk)) and we'll be glad to help.

United, we will get through this together.

Much love  
Bridget & Harry xx



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