

La Gomera

Tim Hart, long term La Gomera resident and founder member of electric folk band Steeleye Span, died of lung cancer on Christmas Eve at the age of sixty-one. His home was in Lomo del Balo, in the upper part of Valle Gran Rey.

He will be sadly missed by his family and those of us who knew this quiet, pleasant man. His passing has been noted in the international press, as befits a key figure of the English folk-rock music scene of his era.

Tim's story is a multi faceted one, as is often the case with individuals who have emigrated and started new lives and more probable still when the previous existence encompassed a certain amount of fame and fortune and all its implications.

Born in Lincoln in nineteen forty-eight, Tim's father was the Rev. Cannon Dennis Hart, a vicar of St. Albans. I remember Tim's delight when non-alcoholic beer was first produced in Spain. The word SIN, meaning without alcohol, featured prominently on the label, causing much mirth when taken to the U.K. as a present for his father.

Like most young musicians looking for a break, survival necessitated a series of temporary jobs. The young Hart spent time as hospital kitchen worker, bookbinder, civil servant, clerk and blacksmith, whilst teaching himself to play guitar, banjo, fiddle, mandolin, melodeon and Appalachian dulcimer. In nineteen sixty-six, Tim began performing with Maddy Prior, whom he had met at St. Albans folk club. They toured English folk clubs together, and their youthful zest and remarkable vocals guaranteed them bookings on the burgeoning folk circuit.

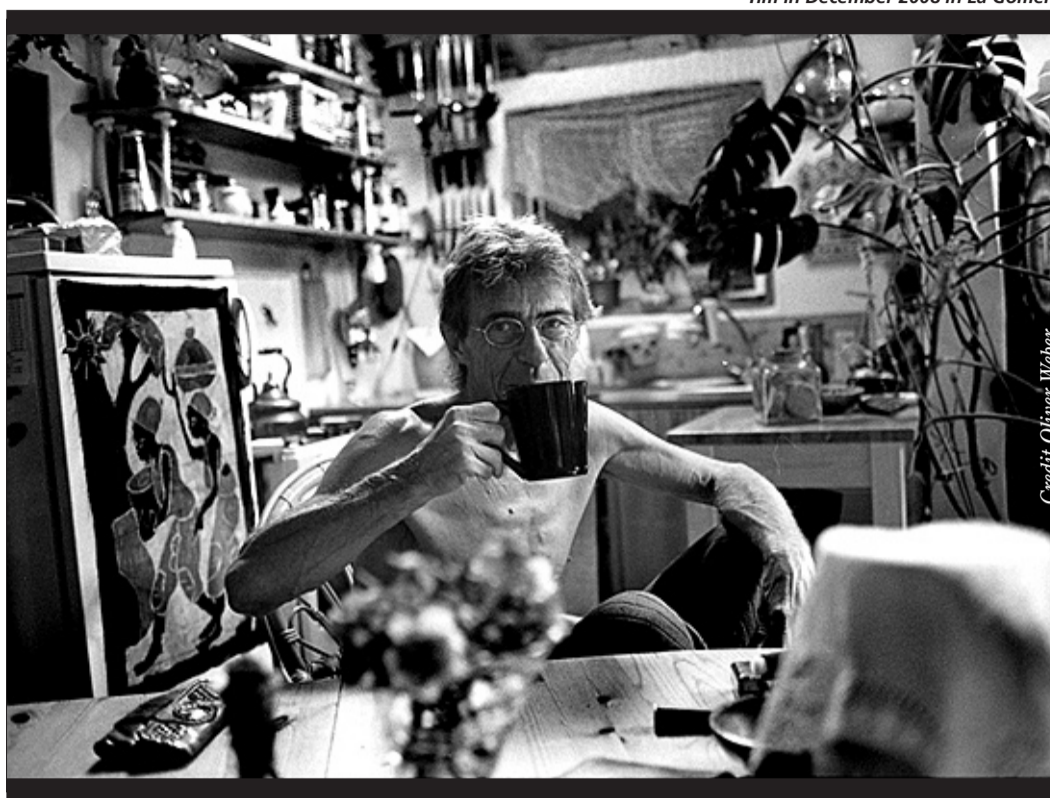
The duo recorded the *Folk Songs of Olde England* albums for the Teepee label in 1968 and 69. These were the days of uncomplicated recordings, with - as he remarked - the photoshoot for the album cover taking longer to complete than the album it decorated.

Steeleye Span was born when musician Ashley Hutchings left Fairport Convention to form a new band at the end of the sixties.

His search for daring folk musicians able to perform traditional folk songs with modern instruments led him to the Hart-Prior duo, and the rest is music history.

The name of the band was largely Tim's choice. It came from the Lincolnshire folk song, Horkstow Grange, which was one of many such songs preserved by collector Percy Grainger at the beginning of the twentieth century. The song features a character called John 'Steeleye' Span and Tim liked the name.

He and Maddy Prior were the backbone of Steeleye Span be-



Tim in December 2008 in La Gomera

Credit: Oliver Weber

STEELEYE SPAN SINGER PASSES AWAY

Tim Hart dies

□ By Barbara Belt

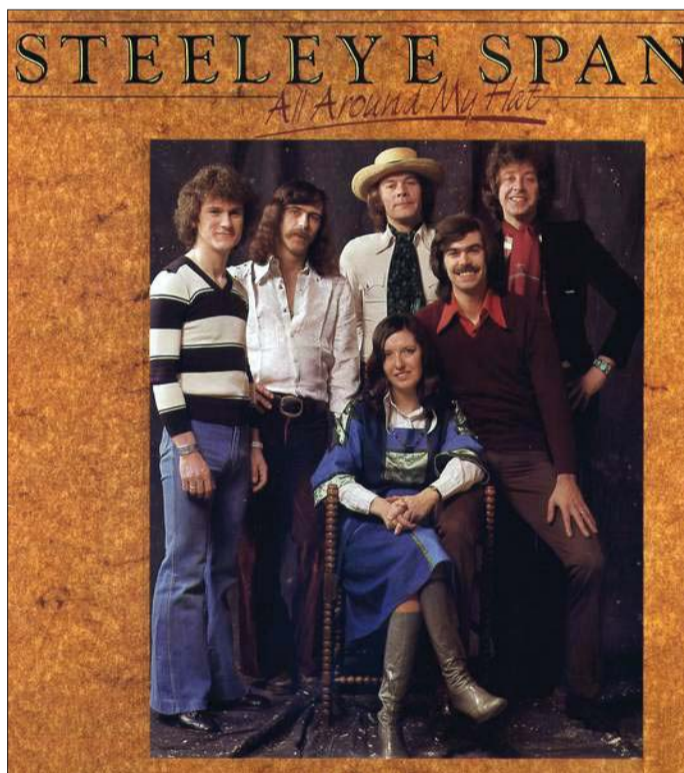
tween 1970 and 1982. The band's commercial peak was in the mid seventies, with tours around the world, most successfully in the United States and Australia. Their memorable Christmas hit, the haunting *Gaudete*, led to a collaboration with Wombles creator Mike Batt, who produced their eighth album, *All Around My Hat*, in 1975. The title track reached fifth place in the U.K. charts.

Expected further commercial success eluded the band and Tim felt that, as he put it, "...enough was enough", resigning from Steeleye Span in 1983 after a farewell gig at the Theatre Royal in Norwich.

He was, by then, married to his first wife Benta, a Norwegian with whom he had son Kim and daughter Sally. His new role as father prompted him to release two albums of nursery rhymes on the Music for Pleasure label, featuring musicians from Steeleye Span amongst others, and he also produced an album called *Eligible Bachelors* with the rock band, the Monochrome Set.

Tim's spell in music management and record producing, together with the break up of his marriage, was inauspicious. A subsequent first brush with cancer, although successfully overcome, left him debilitated by serious health problems and he felt the need to create a new, more peaceful life for himself.

In a press interview with him five years ago about this period of his life, he told me, "...I first escaped to La Gomera at the end of nineteen eighty-seven, and the highlight of that short visit was



All Around My Hat's title track got to N°5 in the UK charts

a hair-raising bus journey down into Valle Gran Rey. An unforgettable place. A year later when the U.K. and I decided we'd had quite enough of each other, I returned for the good of my health.

"For the previous twenty odd years I'd wandered round the world making music, mostly with Maddy Prior and our band Steeleye Span. But all good things eventually fizzle out. Valle Gran Rey seemed like the right sort of place from which to contemplate my future - and I hadn't been here long before I realised that I was already in it!

"I've lived here ever since. I married again and built us a house and now spend much of my time writing, including the first English guidebook to this island, for which I also took the photos."

Tim told me that his second wife Conny from Germany, whom he met through mutual friends in La Gomera, was, "...the love of

my life. We get on so well. I never dreamed a relationship could be so easy. She saved me." Their wedding was an international, multi-cultural affair on an old wooden boat called the Siron, much enjoyed by all of us who were there to celebrate the big day.

Although press reports state that Tim 'abandoned music altogether' when he moved to the Canary Islands, this is not strictly true. When we met in 1988 in Valle Gran Rey, he often played guitar with local musicians. He was interested in the folk music he heard played here, and like any good musician, could turn his hand to accompanying local singers.

He also played with local musicians who had been influenced by West Coast rock music, heard via Valle Gran Rey's first foreign community, the North American draft-dodgers who holed up here

for the duration of the Vietnam War. These budding local rock musicians were very impressed by Tim's prowess on the guitar and delighted to have the chance to

play with him. He hardly spoke Spanish back then, but the music said it all.

More recently, he got together with a group of musicians who had a repertoire of predominantly Irish folk songs and was often to be found, together with bodhran and fiddle players, belting out Irish standards in local, low-key venues. All a far cry from playing to packed stadiums, but music-making nevertheless.

Tim's writing activity was initially concentrated on a loosely biographical account of the adventures of a famous music group, and he spent long days drafting and redrafting his book.

His 'office', as he called it, was Valle Gran Rey's wild and beautiful Playa del Inglés. I was called in to help him with some editing, but it became increasingly obvious to both of us that his heart was not really in it.

His was not the 'look at me I'm famous' mentality. There was a distinct lack of ego, or desire to shock and titillate, and as these appeared to be the main prerequisites for the bestseller, tell-all blockbuster awaited by his publishers, he abandoned the project in favour of gentler activities. He wrote at least one beautiful poem, took lovely, sensitive photographs, enjoyed his Gomeran grandchildren Lucas and Jessica, and went fishing.

The guidebook Tim mentioned in the interview was published as the now popular, *La Gomera: A Guide*. Painstakingly researched and written, with beautiful photographs, the book will continue to be a touching reminder of this unassuming, kind man.