

Living Cornwall

HUER'S CALL

Football, fit women and exposing some real male feelings

One of the best things about being older is not having to care about your image. Gone are my macho days, if I ever had any, gone are days when I cared about being cool. By now I wear the face I've earned, live the life I believe in, and only care about the opinions of those I love.

And that is so liberating I wish I could give some of my experience back to my former self, or to other younger men.

Take yoga for example. My wife used to do yoga while I patiently explained that I didn't regard it as my sort of thing and went off to play some pleasantly violent games of squash instead. Even squash was regarded as pretty wussy by my friends of the rugby field, but you get the point. And then one day I gave my aching knees and ankles a rest and went to a yoga class. I soon learned that yoga is challenging enough to bring the most macho of men to tears – it involves skirting around the very edge of your physical capabilities without actually falling off the threshold of pain, and is hardest for those who have concentrated on strength and muscle at the expense of flexibility. After a year or two, I wanted to get round all

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the men I know and tell them what they were missing. Yoga makes the body comfortable again, puts it into balance, heads off problems like back pain and hip troubles and other ills inherited from an active life, makes you more relaxed. But, no, nearly every yoga class I've ever been to is attended by a majority of seriously flexible women with hardly a boho male in sight.

Emotions, too, are still a no-go area within men's society. I listen to women talking, their interest and concern with each other's lives, loves, families and other soothing and supportive chat.

We don't do that. We like to talk about footie and fit girls and machinery, all areas safely cordoned off from anyone's personal feelings. Men on their own can lower their guard and let some of their vulnerable humanity out, but in a group it's unthinkable. Gay or what?

Another area I'd like to release is men's ability to be silly. You'll sometimes see this in unguarded moments when they are with their young children. When they think no-one's looking, they'll make faces, play games, make up stories and show off in the most outrageous way. When we're looking, dignity descends once more, blocking out all that lovely innocent instinct for fun.

Men have come a long way, taking part in childcare, attending births, even washing up, but they still don't realise that the image of the hard and silent rogue man-of-few-words is a joke we're all in on. Relax boys. No one's impressed. See you at yoga...

Power and passion of Mama Brenda captured in lost Paris concert tapes

BY SIMON PARKER

*Oh would there were a sea from
Rame to Marsland
And the Tamar was as wide, as wide
could be
And Cornwall was some island in the
ocean
A refuge in this ever-changing sea.
Oh if I had but the strength to lead
an army
Or the wit to argue well and win the
day
I would place a silver net around my
country
And let her children take their own
again.*

A voice is only ever as good as the song it is given to sing – and that was undoubtedly the case with the coupling of Richard Gendall's magnificent *Silver Net* and the soaring vocals of Cornwall's First Lady of Song.

Silver Net is one of six tracks written by the Menheniot composer and Cornish language champion featured on a new CD by the late Brenda Wootton. And their inclusion is a reminder of the successful collaboration of these two great Cornish talents.

Entitled *All Of Me*, the 19-track compilation represents the West Cornwall songstress at the peak of her power and popularity. A triumph of technical skill and dedication as much as musical dexterity, the CD's quality is likely to be a revelation even to those who were fans of Brenda Wootton during her heyday.

The story of *All Of Me* began back in May 1984 when Brenda was on a visit to Paris for a series of concerts, culminating in six sell-out shows at the famous Bobino theatre, which once hosted the likes of Edith Piaf, Jacques Brel and Josephine Baker. Accompanied by Camborne Town Band – an inspirational fusion in itself – and her regular trio of Chris Newman, Ray Roberts and David Freeman, Brenda was on top form, singing in English, Cornish and French.

The eclectic programme included Gendall compositions (*The Land I Love*, *The Mystery*, *Pyu A Wor*, *My Land and Lyonesse*), alongside gorgeous ballads, a naughty version of *Little Eyes*, a spirited *Sweet Georgia Brown*, and an original arrangement of *Summertime*, plus the ubiquitous *Trelawny*.

One of the six Bobino concerts was recorded and the master tape given to John Knight as a memento. John, at whose Coverack studio Brenda had recorded a number of albums, said there were never plans to release the live recording and the original reel to reel tapes lay unopened until last year. Such tapes from the era are famously fragile, he explained, but luckily John discovered they could be saved. After countless hours of sympathetic post-production work, balancing, editing and general restoration, the sound achieved on the CD is as perfect at least as this pair of ears can detect.

"I was privileged to be Brenda's



Brenda Wootton with composer, author and Cornish language champion Richard Gendall, who wrote some 90 songs for her. Below: The original tapes from the Paris concert



recording engineer and friend for many years so I am delighted to have discovered these unheard recordings and to have made this special album," said John. "In some ways it's a compilation because the repertoire contains songs from across her career, but it also features new versions of familiar songs. "What makes it exceptional for me is the live ambience, encapsulating Brenda doing what she did best, which was standing in front of a spellbound audience, weaving her magic. Brenda was the 'real deal' – she wasn't contrived by the media or manipulated. She was a Newlyn girl whose every fibre was hell-bent on taking her beloved country to the world long before Cornwall was chic and fashionable."

"Parisian audiences took her to their hearts. They adored the middle-aged grandmother in flowing

'Parisian audiences adored Brenda – you had to be there and to see it to believe the adulation she received in Paris'

John Knight

gowns, who was big and bold, warm and wistful, tender and teasing, throwing her arms wide as if to embrace each one of them. "What people tend to forget today is just how big she was in France back then. You had to be there and to see it to believe the adulation she received in Paris. At that time she couldn't walk down the street without people stopping her to talk or to ask for an autograph. The French clearly adored their 'Mama Brenda'. The *All Of Me* CD is a wonderful historic record of Brenda at her best and wowing a discerning, sophisticated Parisian audience, singing about Cornwall, its culture and history."

So who was the Newlyn maid who went on to enjoy such adulation? Already singing in village halls while still at school, Brenda became an important figure on the Cornish folk

scene during the 1960s. Her early albums were recorded on Newlyn's Sentinel label, often accompanied by John the Fish, Robert Bartlett and Richard Gendall. Richard, who wrote some 90 songs for Brenda, said: "She was a very good performer and very good at putting it across. In many ways she changed the course of my life because although I had always written songs, she became a catalyst. If it hadn't been for Brenda I wouldn't have written nearly so much. She would come to me all the time, asking if I had a song about a particular subject. And if I didn't have one, I'd write one."

A household name in Cornwall by the 1970s, Brenda recorded some 18 albums during a career spanning nearly 30 years. A Bard of Gorsedh Kernow, taking the name Gwylan Gwavas (Seagull of Newlyn), she hosted a show for BBC Radio Cornwall until her death in 1994.

Brenda's daughter, Sue Ellery, says she is delighted by the release of *All Of Me* and grateful to John Knight for his care and dedication in bringing the recording to life.

"Listening to this CD moved me to tears more than once," she said. "I closed my eyes and relived that fabulous night at the Bobino theatre, with all its Parisian splendour and



Brenda Wootton throws her arms out in pure exhilaration at Paris's Bobino theatre during one of her triumphant 1984 concerts. Below: Cornwall's 'first lady of song' in relaxed mood

Brenda's charisma and consummate artistic skill before me. The CD captures perfectly her phenomenal vocal range, from full orchestral accompaniment to whispered love songs."

The quality of her voice is indeed remarkable, particularly on the tracks where she is accompanied by Camborne Town Band. Neither fey nor folksy, Brenda's voice is rich and gutsy and I defy anyone to not feel a tingle of emotion on hearing *The Land I Love*, *Pyu A Wor* or the superb *Silver Net*. She oozes maturity, confidence, sensuality and mischief.

The appearance of *All Of Me* is already creating a buzz, not only in Cornwall but abroad.

John Knight's wife Gloria, who has been running the project, said: "The response has been quite amazing from people who either remember Brenda or have Cornish connections across the world. What you hear on the CD isn't Brenda the folk singer from Newlyn belting out Camborne Hill, but Brenda the ultimate professional at the peak of her career taking Cornwall across Europe and filling Parisian theatres."

Some say a statue of Brenda ought to be commissioned to celebrate her unique contribution to Cornish culture... but until that day this CD will act as a fitting memorial.

All Of Me by Brenda Wootton (which includes a 16-page booklet) is priced £12.99 (plus £1.50 p&p) and is available on www.brendawootton.com or by calling 01326 280532.



KERNEWEK A living language

KERNEWEK

Yma dhe bub gonisogeth hy ilow hy honan, byttegyns gwariow ilowek a les a-hys ogas ha pub gonisogeth. Yma dhe nebes gonisogethow gwariow ilowek arbennik kepar ha Bollywood hag opera Italek, Spaynek, Almaynek ha Rusek. Byttegyns "an ilowek" re wrug tevi y'n penn west a Loundres ha Broadway. An ilowek eth war an enep arhans y'n ugensves kansvledhen gans fylvow kepar ha The Wizard of Oz, High Society ha Grease. Lemmyn y teu "an ilowek" dhe'gan gonisogeth nyni. Ian Bucknole a waynyas an piwas Govyn Kernewek warlena gans towl gul ilowek Kernewek. Ev re oberis gans ilowek Phil Innes ha treylia an gis Grease ha High School Musical dhe Kernewek. An sywyans yw Skynt an ilowek. An fylm ma yw leun a ganow bewek, nebes ilow hengovek, ha linennow "keusek". An hwedhel y honan a syw maw bohosek hag ev owth assaya hwilas ober. Byttegyns, wortiwedh y hevel bos kerensa a drygh dres oll! Yth esa an fylm diskwedhys rag an kynsa prys yn sinema Aberfal y'n seythenn yw passyes.

SOWSNEK

There is to each culture her music her own, however plays musical spread across nearly and every culture. There are to some cultures plays musical special same kind and Bollywood and opera Italian, Spanish, German and Russian. However the musical has grown in the end west of London and Broadway. The musical went on the screen silver in the 20th century with films same kind and *The Wizard of Oz*, *High Society* and *Grease*. Now comes the musical to our culture. Ian Bucknole won the award Question Cornish last year with a plan to do a musical Cornish. He has worked with musician Phil Innes and changed the genre *Grease* and *High School Musical* to Cornish. The result is *Skint* the musical. The film here is full of songs lively, some music traditional, and lines cheesy. The story itself follows a boy poor and he a-trying to search work. However, eventually it seems to be love that conquers through all! There was the film shown for the first time in cinema Falmouth in the week is passed.

NOTES

I have stuck even more closely than usual to the Cornish word order in the translation so that you can see how different it is. This is important for as many people in Cornwall to appreciate for the cultural and heritage integrity to be preserved. Too many people have the wonderful idea of naming their house in Cornish – but don't check with a speaker of the language. They end up taking a few words out of a dictionary and putting them in the English word order. A couple of examples spotted across Cornwall: An Coth Eglos (should be: An Eglos Coth) and Gwynn Avon nans (should be: Nans Avon Gwynn). So the tip here is to contact the Cornish Language Development office at www.magakernow.org.uk and they will help you.

For more information on the Cornish Language and classes, visit www.magakernow.org.uk. This article is read as a podcast on www.kernowpods.com. A weekly radio programme in Cornish can be heard at www.radyo.kernewegva.com