

## Steve Ashley – Bio

Steve Ashley was born in London, England on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1946. By the early sixties he had enrolled at Ealing Art College, and on weekends performed traditional folk songs in West London folk clubs. By 1964 he had relocated to Maidstone where he studied Graphic Design. In Maidstone he met the late Peter Bellamy and the pair helped establish Maidstone Folk Club. Ashley joined the College blues band, The Tea Set, as vocalist and also played harmonica. Having graduated from College, with a post as graphic designer at The Observer newspaper, Steve returned to London in the autumn of 1967. He began writing songs and formed the duo, Tinderbox, with Dave Monday. The pair cut one single for Polydor, "Farewell Britannia" but it was never released. Having already worked with Shirley Collins on a 1968 session for BBC Radio 1's Night Ride, hosted by John Peel, the following year Steve contributed vocals to the Shirley & Dolly Collins album "**Anthems In Eden.**"

In 1971 Ashley signed a song-publishing contract with Harbrook Music, and that year Anne Briggs cut his "Fire And Wine." In April 1972 Steve was invited to join the Albion Country Band. The line-up featured Ashley Hutchings, Simon Nicol, Dave Mattacks – all ex-Fairport Convention, plus Sue Draheim and Royston Wood, and the band signed with Island Records. Wood and Ashley shared the lead vocals, but the band disintegrated after six months. Steve then formed Ragged Robin, an aggregation that stayed together from January till October the following year. The line-up included Richard Byers, Brian Diprose and John Thompson. The band appeared at the 1973 Cambridge Folk Festival and cut an album with Anne Briggs titled "**Sing A Song For You**" that was finally issued in 1995. When Ragged Robin broke up, Ashley continued working with Byers, in a duo.

Ashley cut his debut solo album "**Stroll On**" [1974] for Gull Records. It was produced by Austin John Marshall, and included string arrangements by Robert Kirby, who had worked with Nick Drake. Folk Review magazine named it the Contemporary Folk Album of the Year. Soon afterwards, one of the tracks, "The Spirit of Christmas," was included on the legendary English folk music compilation "**The Electric Muse**" [1975]. Ashley's sophomore solo recording "**Speedy Return**" [1975], was produced by Kirby. As well as touring Europe, Steve also performed in the USA and Canada in support of his first two albums. In the States, those albums were released by Motown Records !

In 1978 the Steve Ashley Band was formed and they played the Rotterdam Folk Festival. Fiddle player Chris Leslie and Steve then formed a duo and they worked together throughout the eighties. Early in the eighties, Ashley made a pair of cassette only albums, featuring original anti-nuclear songs, for the UK Peace Movement, under the title "**Demo Tapes.**" The first tape featured members of Fairport Convention and was produced by Dave Pegg. "**More Demo Tapes**" [1985], was produced by Dik Cadbury and Bruce Rowland. "**Steve Ashley's Family Album**" [1982], his fourth album, was co-produced with Dave Pegg, and released by the Fairport label, Woodworm Records. The session players included members of Fairport Convention. Ashley, Pegg, Nicol, Leslie and Bruce Rowland went on to perform the "Family Show" in concert, based on the songs featured on the album. The album was reissued in 1991 by The Road Goes On Forever label.

Ashley's sixth solo disc "**Mysterious Ways**" [1990] was released by Lighthouse Records, and featured Steve's next band which comprised of Chris Leslie, Dik Cadbury, Al Fenn, Alleyn Menzies, Steve Harper, Jim Sallis, Ian Munday and Lawrence Wright. The band went on to tour the UK and appeared, that year, at the Cropredy, Cambridge and Glastonbury festivals. Steve also continued to tour Germany, Belgium, Holland and Italy as a solo act. His first two solo albums were reissued in 1990 by the German label, Line Records. In 1992 Steve Ashley retired, although during 1995 he contributed incidental music to a Roger Deakin television documentary about horse racing, "**Stable Lads.**"

A seventeen-song compilation "**The Test of Time**" that featured material from all of Ashley's previous releases, plus the tracks "Down By The Old Embankment" and "Over There In Paradise," was issued by Market Square Records in April 1999. That year Steve performed at Cropredy, and in late '99 toured the UK with guitarist Al Fenn [ex-Decameron, ex-Magna Carta]. Market Square also issued "**Stroll On Revisited**" that year, and the disc featured additional tracks. The Bert Jansch tribute album "**People On The Highway**" [2000] included Ashley's performance of the title cut from the Scot's 1965 album "**It Don't Bother Me.**" Topic Records issued a collection of new Steve Ashley recordings "**Everyday Lives**" in April 2001.

Topic's 4CD compilation "**The Acoustic Folk Box**," a survey of English folk music during the period 1960-2000, included "Once In A While" from "**The Family Album**." In December Fledg'ling issued "**Within Sound**," a 4CD boxed set of Shirley Collins recordings, and the collection included the previously unreleased duet "Honour Bright" by Shirley and Steve. Over the years Ashley has contributed to albums by Marc Ellington [1975], Ashley Hutchings [1987] and Richard Thompson [1992]. In the spring of 2003, Market Square reissued Ashley's album "**Speedy Run**."

Discography :

Solo : "**Stroll On**" reissued on CD in 1999 [1974] ; "**Speedy Return**" reissued on CD in 2003 [1975] ; "**Demo Tapes**" cassette only [1980/81] ; "**Family Album**" [1983] ; "**More Demo Tapes**" cassette only [1985] ; "**Mysterious Ways**" [1990] ; "**The Test Of Time**" [1999] ; "**Stroll On Revisited**" [1999] ; "**Everyday Lives**" [2001] :

Arthur Wood  
Kerrville Kronikles 09/03  
[865 words]