

Pete Shutler obituary

Accordion player with the Yetties, the folk group that plays the theme tune for the Sunday omnibus edition of The Archers

- Derek Schofield
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The Yetties performing with Pete Shutler, centre, Bonny Sartin, left, and Mac McCulloch. Photograph: Mjroots

The Yetties were one of the most popular English folk music groups from the 1960s through to the present day. Starting in folk clubs and festivals, they took their music to a wider audience in theatres and concert halls. Comic songs and singalongs were added to their repertoire of traditional folk songs and tunes, especially from their home county of Dorset. Their lead musician, on accordion, was Pete Shutler, who has died aged 68 of cancer.

Pete, backed by Mac McCulloch on guitar, took the lead on the band's instrumental pieces, while the third member of the trio, Bonny Sartin, led the songs. In their early days Bob Common, who left the group in 1979, played percussion and sang, and for a while in the 80s they were joined by Roger Trim on fiddle. It was Pete's accordion that led Barwick Green, the theme tune for the BBC Radio 4 series, The Archers; the Yetties' version has introduced the Sunday morning omnibus edition for almost 40 years.

Pete was born in Mudford, near Yeovil, Somerset, but the family moved over the Dorset border to the village of Ryme Intrinseca. He went to school in the neighbouring village of Yetminster, and it was there, in St Andrew's scout troop, that he met the other three members

of the group. Their rural childhood included helping with the harvest and scrumping for apples: idyllic perhaps, but many village homes still lacked electricity and running water. The four lads started folk dancing with the local Women's Institute, and then formed the Yetminster and Ryme Intrinseca junior folk dance display team which, fortunately, a tongue-tied master of ceremonies at a display abbreviated to the Yetties.

Soon they added folk songs to the dance displays. Pete was already an admirer of the Scottish musician Jimmy Shand, and learned the accordion in order to play for the dancers. With the local folk musician Bryon Bonnett, Pete, Mac and Bob became the Ranters folk dance band. Eventually, Bryon dropped out and the Yetties embraced both songs and dance tunes. They enlarged their song repertoire by listening to the West Country singer Cyril Tawney, and established their reputation at the Sidmouth folk festival, where they bridged the gap between the growing folk song revival and the established folk dance scene.

After a variety of jobs, Pete worked for Yeovil council, which suspended him for taking time off to moonlight with the Somerset band Adge Cutler and the Wurzels. In 1967 The Yetties turned professional, and their first recording, Fifty Stone of Loveliness, was released two years later. They were signed to Argo Records, owned by Decca, who released an album a year through the 1970s. In total, The Yetties recorded 49 albums, plus several DVDs.

The records all included folk dance tunes as well as songs, with Pete taking the instrumental lead. He added the concertina, penny whistle and bowed psaltery, but it was his accomplished accordion playing that the dancers enjoyed, giving the necessary lift to the traditional tunes. Some of these tunes were Irish or Scottish, but among the English tunes were those from the family of Thomas Hardy. For their 1988 album, The Musical Heritage of Thomas Hardy, The Yetties recorded a wider selection from the novelist's family tune manuscripts, with readings about village musicians from Hardy's work. Pete was centrally involved in this project – which included a tune book and concerts – with Trim playing Hardy's own fiddle.

Pete's accordion was also heard on an album of folk songs recorded by Bob Arnold – Tom Forrest in The Archers – and on a 1977 recording of Laurie Lee reading Cider with Rosie. The band also collaborated with John Arlott on an album of cricket stories, poems and songs. As the Yetties' manager, the broadcaster Jim Lloyd had led the switch from folk clubs to concerts and radio. They performed on Radios 1 to 5, but especially on Radio 2, where they had their own series, Cider and Song. The British Council circuit took them all over the world, from Nepal and Malaysia to Canada and Sudan. The need to communicate with people whose first language was not English contributed to their enhanced stage performances, with props and visual humour. A Yetties concert was always about fun and entertainment, and they worked

hard to create the intimate atmosphere of a folk club in the concert hall.

Like his fellow Yetties, Pete was unpretentious and unassuming. He was as happy playing at the monthly Yetties Music Nights in Sherborne, helping out a local ceilidh band, or teaching a young musician as he was performing on concert stages. The Yetties retired in 2011.

Pete is survived by his wife, Marian, and their two children, Jamie and Sarah.

- Peter Cecil Shutler, folk musician, born 6 October 1945; died 21 September 2014

Below is an autobiographical article extracted from 'An A to Z of the Accordion, Volume 4' (by Rob Howard) that written by Peter Shutler. Thank you to Rob Howard for supplying.

Shutler, Pete *Pete Shutler, of The Yetties, tells his story...*

Pete Shutler, the accordion, and The Yetties...

My mother, grandmother and one of my great-aunts all had pianos in their homes, but no-one ever played them. They were old, creaky, out of tune instruments, but as a youngster, I found, through trial and error that I could pick out the tunes of some of the hymns, songs and carols that we sang at school. My first encounter with the accordion came in 1955 – I was ten and staying at my grandmother's house. She used to have the wireless on all day, listening to programmes like *Housewife's Choice*, *Workers' Playtime*, etc. And then, one day, I heard it – a sound I immediately fell in love with. It was Jimmy Shand playing the *Bluebell Polka*. This was a big hit at the time, so it was played a lot.

When I was 12 the Women's Institute started folk dance classes in the village hall at Yetminster, and a lot of us kids went along, learning to dance to music supplied by an old *Dansette* record player perched on the stage. Sometime later we formed the Yetminster and Ryme Intrinsic Junior Folk Dance Display Team, performing around the area at fetes and festivals. It was at a folk festival in Hitchin, Herts, that the MC shortened the dance group's name to the Yetties – the name we still use today. Mac (who plays guitar in The Yetties) and I decided we would like to start playing for dances, and he managed to get an old 120 bass accordion, whilst I borrowed a much smaller one. I was able to play the tunes on the right hand while Mac learned to play the bass on his. So, between us we had what sounded like a proper accordion. Our first dance was on a Saturday night in Yetminster Hall, the caller being our gym teacher at school (nice enough bloke, but mightily feared in the gym!). By the interval we had used up all the tunes we knew, and had to repeat them for the second half. When we got to school on Monday, feeling quite pleased with ourselves and hoping for a bit of praise, the teacher concerned just said, "*I'd stick to dancing if I were you*".

When the Yetminster group eventually came to an end we joined the nearby Yeovil Dance Club where we met Bryon Bonnett. He was a pianist and church organist, and just getting into playing accordion for folk dancing. He helped me buy my first 120 accordion, gave me a few playing tips, and I settled down one long, hard winter to learn to play with both hands. Night after night I struggled with one tune to make my hands do the right thing. It's a wonder the accordion survived – I could have thrown it across the room on many occasions. But eventually it all fell into place. I could play that tune, and soon found that I could play any tune I could memorise. Every Thursday, Bryon would pick up Mac and I, and we would spend the evening with Bryon playing tunes from music, and no learning by ear. After a few months Mac changed to guitar and we soon

became ready to play at the Yeovil Dance Club. Bryon used to take us to monthly music workshops where, because everyone read music, I did at first feel rather left out, but then I discovered vamping and by learning to make the chords on the treble keyboard I could join in with anything they played. I learnt a lot at those workshops, not just from the superb musicians who instructed us, but from all the other players. With Bryon as the leader we formed The Ranters Dance Band and began playing at dances all over the West Country. This was like a dream come true for me; there I was, just like my hero Jimmy Shand, sitting on stage playing the accordion. At the same time I took over as musician for the Wessex Morris, having already dance with them for a couple of years.

Some of us lads from the Yetminster dance group went to the Sidmouth Festival and came away inspired by the singing of a young folk singer called Cyril Tawney. We learned a lot of his songs plus some others and started singing at little events around the area. As singers we were The Yetties, and as a dance band we were The Ranters. And so the whole world opened up from the quiet, sheltered village life that I had been brought up in. Everything was music, song and dance – meeting many new people – ‘posh’ folks who didn’t treat you like a peasant!

We went to festivals, folk camps and Morris Ring meetings, and music became a way of life. In 1964, we started a folk club in Yeovil and through this we got to know singers and musicians from all over the country, and even overseas. We were even able to book Paul Simon for a tenner!

In 1967 we decided to turn professional. Well, we thought if it lasts for three months, so what, it will be fun.

The three months turned into 40 years – too long to write about here. Forty years of folk clubs, festivals, concerts in theatres, halls, churches, barns and open air venues. The Yetties have done tours for the British Council over South East Asia, Africa, Europe and Newfoundland; LPs, tapes, CDs and DVDs, radio and television programmes – and all because I heard Jimmy Shand on the wireless when I was a kid.

I still like Jimmy Shand’s music and was fortunate enough to meet him on several occasions. The first time was when I was on holiday in Fife. I was at a drinking-cum-music party in Pittenween, talking to an old fiddle player called Jack Ramsey. I related my story about hearing Jimmy as a kid, and he said, “*I’m an old friend of Jimmy’s. I’ll take you up to meet him*”. I thought this was just the whisky talking, but no, a couple of days later he picked me up and we set off for Auchtermuchty. I spent a lovely afternoon with Jimmy and his wife, Anne. We talked about music and accordions, drank tea, Jimmy played the *Bluebell Polka*, and then signed a copy of his biography for me. It was a splendid afternoon, but the time came to go. I thanked them both, and was just about to leave when Jimmy said, “*By the way, Pete, that’ll be £7.99 for the book*”.

It was worth it, and I still treasure the book – and I like to think that I still play folk dance tunes with those crisp, sharp Shand-like notes. And so, on into the fifth decade, and hopefully the sixth. I’ve still got a lot to learn. Pete Shutler, Dorset (2009)