

Mel Paul & Mary Lacey

There will be few readers today who will remember the days, not that many years ago, when a West Midlands based band, Billy Farnsworth & Shiloh worked the Country music circuit and were well loved by many fans. Indeed, in those days they were great favourites in Nottingham and great friends of Ken Freeman, founder of North Country magazine who used to run a club in Kirby In Ashfield.

So what has this short excursion down memory lane got to do with Mel and Mary? Well, in short, not a lot except Mel Paul was the lead guitarist with Shiloh. Eventually band leader Billy Farnsworth had to leave and for some time they continued on their own as Shiloh but never quite reached the same popularity as they did with Billy. Eventually a new band was formed called Nevada and again this was short lived. Finally they became Mels Fargo.

A young Irish girl, Mary Lacey, from nearby Solihull joined the band as lead vocalist and Mel, as band leader, was extremely impressed with her powerful voice. Mary originated from a musical family in Belfast, in fact she has two brothers who are both professional musicians in America. Her first love of music came from hearing it around the house which is the Irish

tradition. Her grandmother, who was blind, often used to sing to her and today her live show will often include a stunning acapella version of He Moved Through The Fair in tribute to her grandmother.

Mary had not been with Mels Fargo very long when Mel underwent a huge upheaval in his personal life, a long time friend, Billy Paul who was at one time the saxophonist in the Raymond Froggatt band came home from a gig one night and collapsed and died. Mel was stunned and decided to embark on a different lifestyle and moved to North Wales. He felt that Mary had the capability to carry on with another band but Mary dug her heels in and in a truly female fashion said she wanted to form a duo with Mel and no one else.

At that time the distance between Mel and Mary was 137 miles and Mel thought that the practicalities of such a duo might be in surmountable. However Mel and Mary decided to give it a try and formed the current duo, at first confining themselves to working in areas where either Mel or Mary lived, although now they work nationally such is the success they have enjoyed. The duo is fully professional. Mel plays several instruments including guitar, banjo, drums



and keyboard and performs lead and harmony vocals. Mary does not play an instrument but performs both lead and harmony vocals. The duo have been together for 16 years and have gone from strength to strength. To date they have recorded 10 cds, three of which have an Irish flavour, while the others are a good mix of old and new Country.

Mel and Mary both agree that one of the things they enjoy most are the delightful people they meet around the circuit. We have met some great people says Mel and they will travel

miles just to see us.

To bring you up to date, Mel and Mary still travel up and down the country bringing good Country and Irish music to all their fans. Over the years Mel and Mary fell in love and set up home together in Derbyshire seven years ago where they are very happy. They have also become international performers playing in Spain, Italy and Malta. They go to Malta each year in January for eight or nine weeks where they perform three or four nights a week as well as enjoying a bit of warm weather and leisure time.

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