

‘Appreciation, encouragement, and courtesy’ Pauline O’Brien

The first folk club I went to in my teens was run by a great MC, appreciative of all performers and particularly encouraging to those starting out. He took the view (which I share) that everyone must start somewhere, and it isn’t until you perform in front of others that you know how your efforts will be received. I imagine that we all, whatever our experience level, have occasions when a performance doesn’t go quite as rehearsed.

50 years on I run the Folk and Acoustic Club in Long Melford. When the previous MC stood down, the club might have closed had two of us not volunteered to run it together. The other person no longer attends so by default, it’s down to me.

We are fortunate in not having to pay for our room which is upstairs away from the main pub area, allowing even the quietest performer to be heard (although on occasion we do compete with an amplified act in the bar!) We don’t have guests - no subs taken to pay for them - and often we are each other’s audience.

Attendance numbers vary; the average is about 12. One memorable night there were 30 of us which provided some non-performing audience, and we almost ran out of seating space. It’s never happened since, but you never know.....The positive side of a low attendance number is the fewer there are, the more songs and tunes we get to play.

Evenings are run on a sing around basis. We don’t have a booking in system. I have seen this work successfully and see the possible drawbacks. Whether the attendees are local regulars (who I’m thankful to say turn out in all weathers) or those visiting from further afield, they give each other the appreciation, encouragement, and courtesy they deserve, an attitude prevalent in almost every folk club I have been to over the years.

For information about the Long Melford club, please contact poboap123@gmail.com

(Our picture shows Pauline and brother, Mike Thomas at a fundraising concert in Sudbury, Suffolk)

