

‘The Hills of Devon’; the story behind a Lockdown song

It is always good to have an unexpected pleasant surprise and a special song composed, sung and recorded by one of our own members during Lockdown



was just that. We were busy arranging a programme of entertainment by and for our Exmouth and District u3a members in December 2020 when one of many e-mails caught my attention. It contained a recording of

‘The Hills of Devon’ by Deirdre Mackness; I listened to it once and then played it over and over again. The strong lyrics with Deirdre’s well-chosen words and beautiful voice certainly captured the essence of living by the sea with the distinctive red cliffs of the World Heritage Jurassic Coast. So what to do next!

I wanted to share the song with as many people as possible. “Have you heard this fabulous new song by one of our own members?” After contacting Deirdre our small planning committee decided that it was a must for our Xmas online entertainment and it was a great success. The ‘chat’ box of ‘Zoom’ was full of congratulatory comments. So much so that we decided to devote one of our regular Thursday morning online sessions to Deirdre’s story and song.

So it was in Lockdown this February that we heard the background to Deirdre’s song. It had come about following an emotionally difficult year in 2019 with the death of Deirdre’s best friend in May. In November of that year Deirdre ended up in a brace for 7 weeks having broken the meniscus in her left leg. With time on her hands Deirdre had time to grieve for her friend and to really look around. From her hill top home Deirdre saw the ocean change every day, the sun rise, casting warm colours across the sea, then sparkling, with the noise of the waves being joined by the sound of people chatting to their dog walking friends on early morning walks. As the light changed throughout the day, the hills seemed to rise from the sea until the sun set and the sky darkened.

As soon as Deirdre was able to get out and about again she made the most of the wonderful seascape on her doorstep. Walking on the pristine beach and staring up at the awesome red cliffs a tune and words came together over time. Despite the restrictions of Lockdown Deirdre was determined that her song would reach further than the few people who heard it as she went on her daily walks. She found a talented local musician, Simon Carter who could play by ear and his wonderful arrangement on the keyboard was saved and sent to Rapunzels, a one man recording studio in Seaton.

Finally in December 2020 with her own song now successfully recorded Deirdre sent the recording to John Smith who organises our u3a band. He sent it to me as Chair and with Deirdre's permission I set about adding photographs for an audio visual sequence of 'The Hills of Devon'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsZES6wwojk>

Living by the sea the RNLI is very close to our hearts and vital to locals and visitors if they ever find themselves in difficulty, so donations for Deirdre's song will go to the Lifeboat station in Exmouth.

Contact: Deirdre Mackness <https://u3asites.org.uk/exmouth/contact>

Photo: Exmouth's Red Cliffs by Christine Chittock, CPAGB

Christine Chittock, Chair and Speakers' Coordinator, Exmouth and District u3a

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