



Listen to the band

John Humphreys

(Don't play cards with this man)

Banjo, fiddle, melodeon and percussion

John is the virtuoso banjo player who also happens to play mean fiddle, melodeon and percussion on *The Murmuring of Thieves*. With over thirty years as performer and teacher all over the UK and beyond, he brings massive credibility to the band.



What's the story so far of your musical life?

I played my first gig aged 16 as the bass player in a rock and roll band. Three years later and now in the RAF I bought my first guitar (a Fender Stratocaster) which I still have but rarely play. That's because I saw the film *Deliverance* and for the first time heard a banjo played in the Bluegrass style. I was hooked. Over the next few years I absorbed everything I could in that style. I learned to play the banjo, mandolin, fiddle much to the amusement of my fellow airmen. However, during a month-long squadron deployment to an American Airforce base just outside Las Vegas I managed to play as a guest in an all-female band in a Casino. 20 gigs in Vegas. Good for the CV that. Since leaving the RAF I have been in several Bluegrass bands and spent a couple of years as the fiddler in a Cajun band.

Who influenced your playing?

When I was learning banjo, it was pre-internet and learning material was difficult to come by. However, there were three players in the states that took the instrument to a new level. There must have been many more but the three I discovered were Tony Triska, (the late) Bill Keith and Bela Fleck. Each of them has their own way of playing that transcends the banjo's perceived limitations and despite spending years trying to play like them, I'd be lucky to produce 2% of their fluid, inventive playing.

What instruments do you play, what is their story and why are they special to you?

Mandolin: a 1980 Vanden. I originally bought it just to help me learn the fiddle as it shares the same tuning. Back then, I didn't know how good an instrument I had. Now I know exactly what I've got!
Fiddle: picked up for £75 with the case a bow. When I had it converted to a left-hander, the repair man told me it was a baroque violin that had been updated in the 19th century with a new neck. Oh and the bow was pre-war French. Still, it's good enough for me to saw away on.
Banjo: a Stelling Sunflower. Bought new in 1986 and it been on the road ever since. It's loud and weights about as much as a piano, but it's easier to tune!

What are the challenges and what is the excitement of playing with The Long Road?

Bluegrass and cajun songs tend to stick to the same tempo/time signature throughout and mostly use only fiddle-friendly keys. Playing with the Long Road means playing songs that frequently change time signature and are often in keys that make me wish I'd been classically trained. But that's also part of what makes it exciting. I can't sit back and just play the same old things I done for years. I need to be on my toes the whole time. It's also great to be able to use all of my instruments and to decide what goes where. As the songs are all new and written by Steve there are no previous arrangements. I really can say "I did it my way".

How did you find making *The Murmuring of Thieves*?

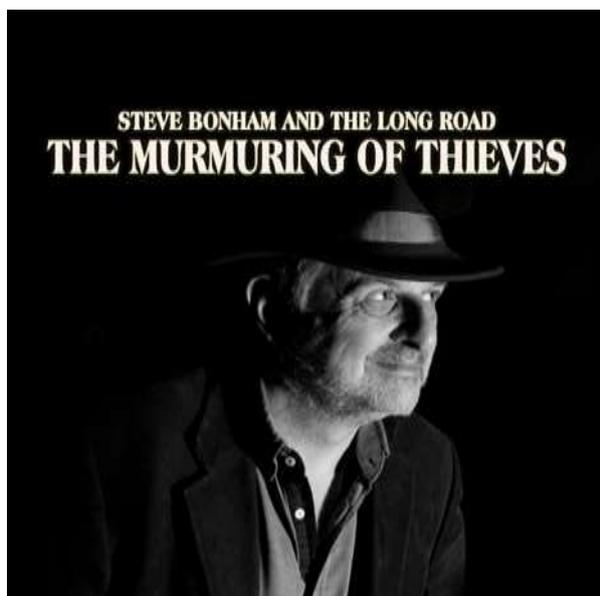


This was my first experience of recording a major studio and I soon learnt that there's no place to hide. Every note you play is going to be analysed. Any variation in timing, volume or tone sticks out like a sore thumb. Because of this, my artistic temperament spent most of its time cowering in the corner especially after making several mistakes in quick succession. Luckily Stuart was quite the diplomat and was careful not to say anything to make anything worse. Many times I've heard bands say how important the engineer had been and how they feel like part of the band. I now know exactly what they mean. Did I enjoy the experience? I enjoyed

the creative process and really like the resulting album but in the studio I was terrified. Would I do it again? Definitely, but next time more beer and fewer sausages.

What are your hopes for the album?

I want it to be well received and liked because it doesn't matter what I think of it. It's what everyone else thinks that really matters. The ultimate would be to unexpectedly hear a track being played on the radio or through someone's open window and be able to say "that us".



The Murmuring of Thieves is available on iTunes and many other digital platforms, and as a special edition CD from www.stevebonham.net/themurmuringofthieves

For more information, contact: steve@stevebonham.net or call +44 7711 788248