



Norma Waterson: English Folk Singing

Telling a Story

NORMA WATERSON:

To make a good singer you need to be able to tell a story and if you tell it well, then people will say ooh ooh they're a good singer. But that's it. I think that's the basis of traditional music.

I'm not saying traditional singers have to have bad voices, I'm not saying that. But you can get people with the most beautiful voices in the world and if they can't tell a story, you get bored, you know, you want to know what's going to happen in the next verse, you want them to draw you into the story...

because if there's one thing that traditional music is about, it's the stories, all the songs of love and life and death and marriage. Everything that the human being does is all wound up in traditional music and I think it's a fascinating music because a lot of it... some of it is light frothy music but a lot of it is very very dark music, with incest and murder and that's what human beings do so it's all in that music.

I like a little chat with the audience because I think you engage them and I think that defines you in the end. And they come in and they sit down and they look at the stage and it's very nice for them too to be able to have a little repartee with whoever's singing. I love that bit, I love that bit of it. I don't want to be somebody who just stands on a stage and doesn't say anything.

The one thing about traditional music is that it says something, so I think the two go hand in hand. Yes the venue last night, was very... it was big enough but it was small enough so you feel it's intimate, you feel at one with the audience. The worst kind of venues are when it's absolutely enormous and you're a long way from the audience and the audience are all in darkness and you can't see them, and this music is people's music, it's not big star music, it's people's music, so you like to be able to see the people.