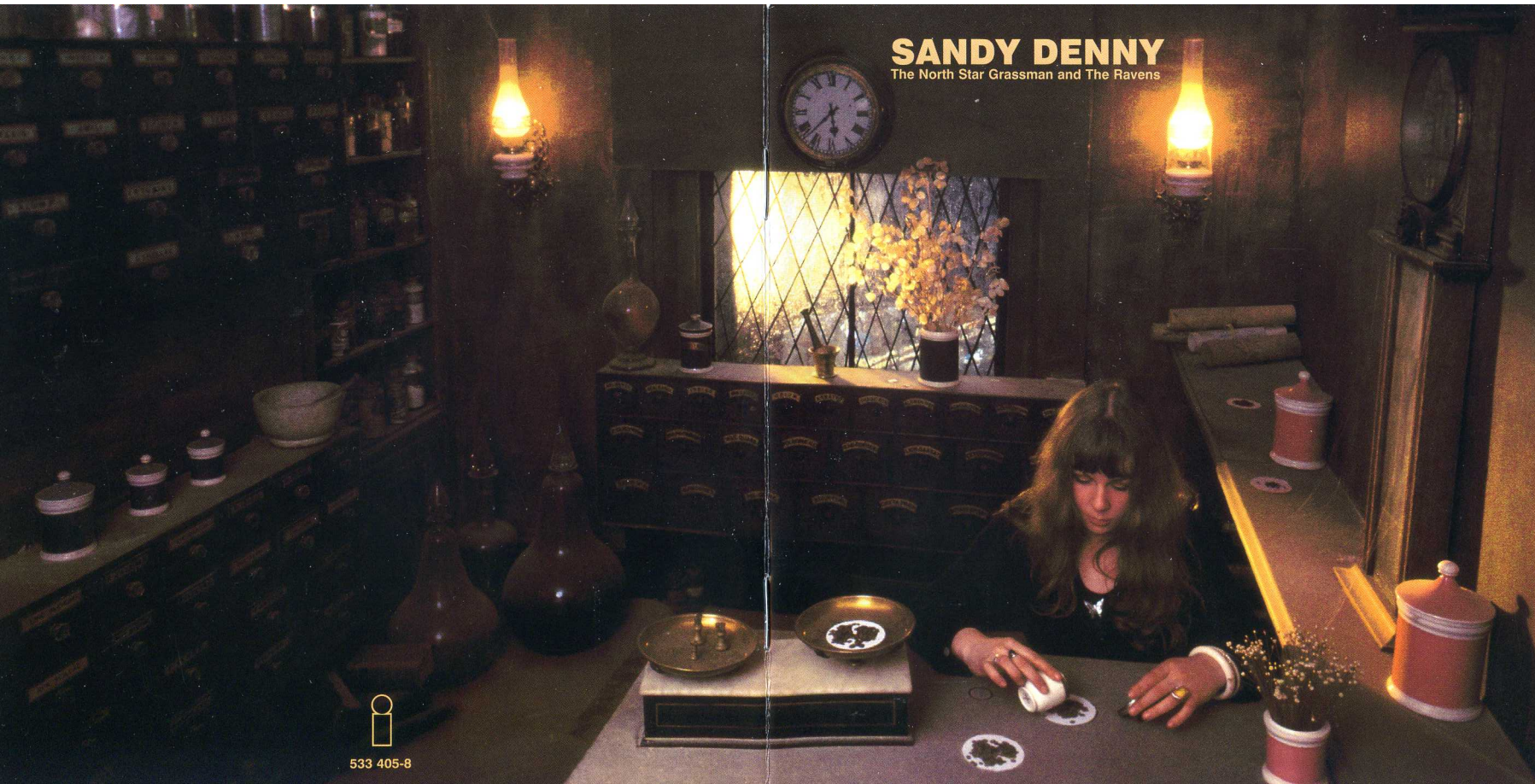
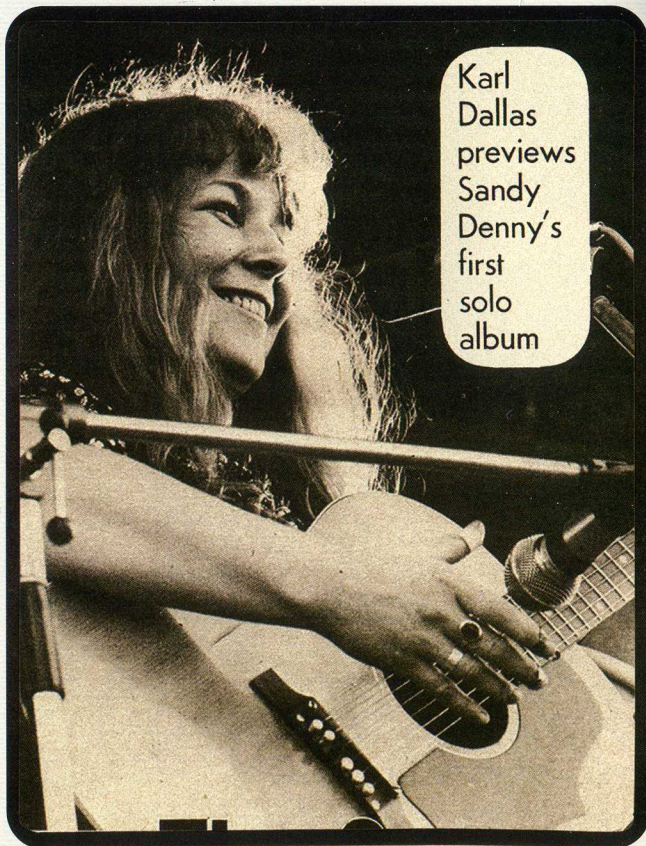


**SANDY DENNY**  
The North Star Grassman and The Ravens







Karl Dallas previews Sandy Denny's first solo album

WE always knew Sandy Denny had the capacity to make a brilliant record, and we were right.

I've just been listening (and listening and listening) to an advance copy of her September 3 album, "The North Sea Grassman and the Ravens."

It is the album we hoped for from Fotheringay and never got, for though the personnel is far from identical, at its most successful this record often sounds like the accomplishment of everything Fotheringay were so obviously striving after. Also, despite the impressive names working with her, this is far from the super group ego trip it might well have become.

Nor has Sandy done what I thought and rather feared she might, and put herself up on that superstar throne vacated by Joplin and so wisely left vacant. She could have done it, just listen to what she does with Brenda Lee's "Let's Jump the Broomstick" on this record if you doubt for one moment that she does not have that elusive combination of talent and personality which could make her one of the world's top female rockers.

But Sandy has always been a band singer. Even in the days when she was a solo folkie toting her guitar around the clubs she was basically a band singer waiting for the right band to turn up. Then it did, and for a while it was called Fairport Convention. Though Fotheringay's potential was much greater than anything they actually achieved before they broke up, they were not in the Fairport class, but now

that Richard Thompson is freedancing again the result is a Fairport-plus-Fotheringay sound that is actually much greater than the sum of its constituent parts.

The good thing is that as Richard is also working together with Sandy in her live appearances, we can expect to hear something approximating the sound of this beautiful record.

One of the remarkable things about it is its internal cohesion. Not since Procol Harum's "Salty Dog" have I heard a record in which one song succeeds another with the same sort of inevitability, making the entire record a work of art. "Salty Dog" may come to mind, perhaps, because in Sandy's record there is also a recurring image of the sea, which is not restricted to her own material, for we have also the traditional "Blackwaterside" and Dylan's "Down in the Flood."

Perhaps water has some significance to Sandy, for the most effective song she did with Fotheringay was undoubtedly "The Sea."

Many of the songs seem to be commenting upon the traumas of the breakup, though of course they may have a more personal reference we're not a party to. The opening

## The Sea and Sandy

is an example to lesser engineers.

If someone thinks of issuing "Jump the Broomstick" as single (and it moves enough to make it into the charts), I can imagine some of our schlock disk jockeys dismissing it with the remark that they prefer Brenda Lee's original. As an original, so do I, and I bet Sandy does too, but the point is that this treatment is a commentary upon it, which takes the original as its starting point.

And if anyone objects that Sandy is a folk singer, not a rocker (you mean they're two different things) I'll only point out that jumping the broomstick in lieu of a wedding ceremony is a folk custom which goes back to the days of witchcraft. So there.

Which takes us to "Blackwaterside," which stacks up alongside Sandy's other great recordings of traditional songs, like "A Sailor's Life" and "Reynardine" and "Banks of the Nile."

The song that will really copulate with your mind, however, is "John the Gun," which is not merely a very powerful lyric, with an expectedly twisting melody line to match, but it also has a guv'nor fiddle solo from Barry Dransfield.

The title song, with its images of a wandering sailor (the sea again) searching for the North Star, seems to echo Sandy's own quest for musical perfection. It follows, and the record ends, with "Crazy Lady" which seems to issue in a more relaxed, more quietly confident mood in her work which would be nice, for if anyone has the right to be quietly confident about her ability, that person is Sandy Denny.

There is some immaculate work on this track from the world's boss, pedal steel man, Buddy Emmons, but here, as throughout, the brilliance of the soloists cannot obscure the fact that this is Sandy's record, first, last, and in between.



## Disc One

1. Late November 4:25
2. Blackwaterside 4:07
3. The Sea Captain 3:07
4. Down In The Flood 3:17
5. John The Gun 4:35
6. Next Time Around 4:20
7. The Optimist 3:21
8. Let's Jump The Broomstick 2:40
9. Wretched Wilbur 2:34
10. The North Star Grassman  
And The Ravens 3:25
11. Crazy Lady Blues 3:21

{Tracks 1-11 the original album, released as Island ILPS 9165}

12. Next Time Around {Demo} 5:06
13. Walking The Floor Over You 5:09  
{Duet with Richard Thompson}
14. Lord Bateman {Instrumental} 4:25 \*
15. If You Saw Thru' My Eyes 2:37  
{Duet with Ian Matthews}

## \* Previously Unreleased

Disc One: All songs written by Sandy Denny and published by Warlock Music Ltd., except tracks 2 & 14 Traditional, arranged by Sandy Denny and published by Warlock Music Ltd., track 4 written by Bob Dylan and published by B. Feldman & Co. Ltd., track 8 written by Charles Robbins and published by Carlin Music Corp., track 13 written by Ernest Tibb and published by Campbell Connelly & Co. Ltd., track 15 written by Ian Matthews and published by Campbell Connelly & Co. Ltd.

Disc Two: All songs written by Sandy Denny and published by Warlock Music Ltd., except tracks 5 & 10 Traditional, arranged by Sandy Denny and published by Warlock Music Ltd.

Disc One: Tracks 1-11 © 1971 Island Records Ltd., tracks 12-14 © 2010 Island Records Ltd., track 15 © 2010 Mercury Records Ltd.

Disc Two: Tracks 1-5 © 2010 Island Records Ltd., track 6 © 2010 BBC, tracks 7-9, 11-12 © 1997 BBC, track 10 © 2007 BBC.

## Disc Two

1. The Sea Captain {Demo} 3:14
2. The Optimist {Demo} 4:31
3. Wretched Wilbur {Demo} 2:38
4. Crazy Lady Blues {Demo} 3:32
5. Lord Bateman {Demo} 6:13
6. Late November 5:12
7. The Lowlands Of Holland 3:15  
{Tracks 6 & 7 BBC Session, 'Bob Harris',  
24th August 1971}
8. Blackwaterside 3:38  
{BBC Session, 'Sounds on Sunday', August 1972}
9. The North Star Grassman  
And The Ravens 3:42
10. Bruton Town 4:45
11. Next Time Around 4:46
12. John The Gun 3:13  
{Tracks 8-12 BBC 'In Concert',  
Paris Theatre, 16th March 1972}





"If I was in America, it might not have been nearly as hard for me to get off the ground," Sandy Denny told me when I interviewed her in March 1977. "I think a lot of it is that people just don't think they're a permanent fixture over here... I think it's difficult for people to totally accept that you're part of the musical establishment in this country. And then, of course, if you haven't had a number one record it's difficult to get across..."

Sandy never did have that number one record; yet her influence, both as a singer and a songwriter, would endure long after Sandy herself died in 1978. At the time of her death she was barely into her 30s, but the quality of her work was such that, even today, decades later, Sandy is routinely cited as the greatest female singer these isles have ever produced. She is regularly name-checked by such luminaries as Kate Bush, Robert Plant, Judy Collins and Pete Townshend; while rising stars such as Rachel Unthank and Joanna Newsome cite Sandy as both an influence and an inspiration.

Bafflingly though, Sandy Denny remains largely unknown to the public at large - but how very different it might have been if this, her debut solo album, had been released immediately following her departure from Fairport Convention in 1969. Instead, Sandy meandered for a while with the short-lived Fotheringay. And by the time *The North Star Grassman And The Ravens* was released in September 1971, the momentum had been lost.

Sandy did manage to win the prestigious Melody Maker award for Best Female Vocalist two years' running - and it's easy to forget just how important such accolades were back then. But even so, it was tough for an independent woman to carve out a career for herself in the music business in the early 70s. Sandy was determined to fashion her own future in an era that was not only male-dominated, but which demanded a gruelling schedule of live appearances to help promote record sales - the result was a workload that would make today's divas swoon.

## Sandy's 1st. Solo:

It's called *The North Star Grassman and the Ravens*.



"They stood upon the deck, as the ships went out to sea,  
She ynd it took the sails and left the land a memory.  
All upon the shore for to wonder why the sailor goes.  
All to close their eyes and wonder what the sailor knows."  
Some words from "The North Star Grassman and The Ravens"  
By Sandy Denny



Sandy Denny's 1st. Solo Album as singer and writer is out now on Island ILPS 9163



Only now, more than 30 years since her untimely death, is the name and the music of Sandy Denny becoming better known. And where better to begin an appreciation of one of the UK's finest female vocalists than with her solo debut... *The North Star Grassman And The Ravens*.

Hard to believe, but at the time Sandy released this mature, reflective album, she was still barely 24 years old. Yet she was already a veteran of the mid-60s folk circuit... besides singing with the Strawbs, Fairport Convention and Fotheringay, Sandy also became the only guest vocalist ever to record with Led Zeppelin - gracing the band's titanic fourth album, on which she duets with Robert Plant on 'The Battle Of Evermore'.

*The North Star Grassman* acts as a perfect introduction to the work of Sandy Denny. Having cut her teeth on the burgeoning folk club circuit in and around London during the 1960s, it seemed appropriate that in March 1971, the first song she cut for her first solo record should be the traditional 'Blackwaterside'.

Sandy's fondness for 1950s rock & roll (a penchant she pursued on 1972's *The Bunch*) is evidenced by her cover of the Brenda Lee hit 'Let's Jump The Broomstick' - although folk scholars were quick to point out that "jumping the broomstick" was in fact a tradition that stretched way back to 16th Century gypsy marriage ceremonies!

There was one further "borrowed" song, Bob Dylan's 'Down In The Flood', on which Sandy duets with fellow ex-Fairporter Richard Thompson. The song was culled from Dylan's 1967 Basement Tape session with the Band, which Sandy would first have heard in her Fairport days, probably during 1968 when the original 12 track white label album was being passed around London song publishers.







But Sandy's departure from Fairport in December 1969, just months after recording *Liege & Lief* - a landmark album recently voted the Greatest Folk LP Ever, had been prompted by her desire to devote more energy to writing songs of her own. So the remaining tracks on *The North Star Grassman...* were, as Sandy was fond of saying, all her own work. And those eight songs - the lustrous tracks which made up the true heart of the original 1971 album, have since become the core of the Sandy Denny song catalogue.

From the wistful 'Late November' which opens the album, and hints at Sandy's fascination with maritime themes and the ocean, the theme continues through 'Blackwaterside' and 'The Sea Captain', before Side 1 of the original vinyl record concludes with one of Sandy's finest-ever compositions, 'John The Gun'. Although scheduled for inclusion on the second album by Sandy's short-lived Fotheringay, the band had split while recording the album, leaving Sandy free to re-record the song for her solo debut. It was, and is, a true gem - besides featuring one of her most impassioned vocals, lyrically 'John The Gun' displays a deft mix of contemporary observation and traditional texture.

'Next Time Around' is a very different song, a cryptic recollection of Sandy's relationship with the talented but haunted American singer-songwriter, Jackson C. Frank. Frank, who only recorded one LP - an eponymous 1965 release, produced by Paul Simon - was badly burned as a teenager at a fire in his home town of Buffalo, an experience which Sandy picks up on in her song.

'The North Star Grassman And The Ravens' and 'Crazy Lady Blues' bring the album to a majestic conclusion. The title track once again echoes with the unharnessed power of the sea, while suggesting a swerve into the wonderland world of Lewis Carroll. And there could be little doubt about the identity of the "crazy lady" Sandy sings of in the album's concluding track.



For this, her crucial first solo album, Sandy had been keen to reunite with Fairport and Fotheringay producer Joe Boyd. But Boyd had recently quit the UK, so another safe pair of hands was needed for the production - and who better than Joe's longtime engineer partner, John Wood, and Sandy's former colleague from Fairport, Richard Thompson - who had himself recently quit the band.

The album finished, all that was needed was a title and a cover. The chosen cover - showing the singer sitting in an apothecary's shop, surrounded by dried flowers, herbs and spices - has kept seekers of Sandy symbolism occupied for decades. But the title proved a little more tricky... Before finally settling on *The North Star Grassman And The Ravens*, Sandy herself had favoured *Slapstick Tragedies*: "I rather liked that title because it's a compromise... I thought of tragedies because I'm no comedian in my music," she told Melody Maker's Ray Coleman, "most of my songs seem pretty traumatic... I can't sing happy songs."

It was a theme Sandy expanded on when I spoke to her some years later: "I always write the song and kind of make it into something which everybody can actually identify with to a certain extent... I did try recently to be a little more down to earth about things, but I do find it rather difficult because I'm a bit shy of people knowing me..."

On its release, *The North Star Grassman And The Ravens* was favourably received. But the hiatus between Sandy leaving Fairport and this, her solo debut, had inevitably taken its toll, and the album only reached a disappointing No.31 on the UK LP charts. However, unlike in today's chew 'em up and spit 'em out music scene, it provided sufficient foundation for Sandy to go on and record three further solo albums.

For this newly expanded edition of the 1971 *North Star Grassman...*, 12 extra tracks have been selected. Culled from the BBC radio performances of the early 1970s which gave Sandy an opportunity to promote her solo debut, they provide an indication of just how powerful a performer she could be when witnessed







live. Particularly striking is a version of the traditional 'Lowlands Of Holland', recorded in 1971 for Bob Harris - her faithful champion - for his Radio 1 evening show.

Perhaps though the most intriguing tracks here are the five peerless demos Sandy cut at the sessions leading up to the recording of *North Star Grassman*... Of these, the most arresting is Sandy - totally solo - on the traditional 'Lord Bateman'. A timeless song, hewn from the folk tradition; one woman and one wonderful voice...

Of all the many thousands of words written and spoken about the late and much-missed Alexandra Elene MacLean Denny, it was a memory that Fairport founder-member Simon Nicol shared with me, in the otherwise inauspicious surroundings of the Eight Feathers' Boys Club in Fulham, that has stayed with me. Remembering Sandy's 1968 audition for the band, Simon laughed as he remembered Sandy asking instead that the already well-established Fairport audition for her! But when she did eventually consent to sing for them, it was an unforgettable moment: "She stood out like a clean glass in a sinkful of dirty dishes...!"

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*The North Star Crossman And The Ravens* • 17



## DISC ONE

1. **Late November:** Sandy Denny – vocal & piano, Jerry Donahue – electric guitar, Richard Thompson – electric guitar, Trevor Lucas – acoustic guitar, Pat Donaldson – bass guitar, Gerry Conway – drums.
2. **Blackwaterside:** Sandy Denny – vocal & acoustic guitar, Richard Thompson – electric guitar & accordion, Pat Donaldson – bass guitar, Gerry Conway – drums.
3. **The Sea Captain:** Sandy Denny – all vocals & acoustic guitar, Richard Thompson – electric guitar, Pat Donaldson – bass guitar, Gerry Conway – drums.
4. **Down In The Flood:** Sandy Denny – lead vocal, Richard Thompson – lead vocal & electric guitar, Ian Whiteman – piano, Trevor Lucas – acoustic guitar & backing vocal, Tony Reeves – bass guitar, Gerry Conway – drums.
5. **John The Gun:** Sandy Denny – lead vocal, Richard Thompson – electric guitar, Ian Whiteman – piano, Trevor Lucas – acoustic guitar & backing vocal, Barry Dransfield – fuzz violin & backing vocal, Robin Dransfield – backing vocal, Royston Wood – backing vocal.
6. **Next Time Around:** Sandy Denny – vocal, Ian Whiteman – piano, Richard Thompson – acoustic guitar, Tony Reeves – bass guitar, Gerry Conway – drums, Harry Robinson – string arrangement.
7. **The Optimist:** Sandy Denny – all vocals, Ian Whiteman – piano, Richard Thompson – electric, acoustic, 12-string & bass guitars, Gerry Conway – drums.
8. **Let's Jump The Broomstick:** Sandy Denny – vocal, Ian Whiteman – piano, Richard Thompson – electric guitar, Trevor Lucas – acoustic guitar, Pat Donaldson – bass guitar, Roger Powell – drums.
9. **Wretched Wilbur:** Sandy Denny – vocal, Richard Thompson – electric & acoustic guitars, Pat Donaldson – bass guitar, Gerry Conway – drums, Harry Robinson – string arrangement.
10. **The North Star Grassman & The Ravens:** Sandy Denny – all vocals, Ian Whiteman – piano & flute organ, Richard Thompson – acoustic guitar, Pat Donaldson – bass guitar, Gerry Conway – drums, John Wood – sound effects.
11. **Crazy Lady Blues:** Sandy Denny – all vocals & acoustic guitar, Ian Whiteman – piano, Buddy Emmons – pedal steel guitar, Richard Thompson – bass guitar, Gerry Conway – drums.
12. **Next Time Around (demo):** Sandy Denny – vocal, Ian Whiteman – piano, Richard Thompson – acoustic guitar, Tony Reeves – bass guitar, Gerry Conway – drums.
13. **Walking the Floor Over You (duet with Richard Thompson):** Sandy Denny – vocal, Richard Thompson – vocal, electric guitar, Ian Whiteman – piano, Trevor Lucas – acoustic guitar, Pat Donaldson – bass guitar, Gerry Conway – drums.

14. **Lord Bateman (band instrumental, previously unreleased):** Richard Thompson – electric guitar, Ian Whiteman – piano, Pat Donaldson – bass guitar, Gerry Conway – drums.
15. **If You Saw Thru' My Eyes (duet with Ian Matthews):** Sandy Denny – vocals, piano, Ian Matthews – vocals, Tim Renwick – electric guitar.

## DISC TWO

1. **The Sea Captain (demo):** Sandy Denny – vocal, acoustic guitar.
2. **The Optimist (demo):** Sandy Denny – vocal, Richard Thompson – 12-string acoustic guitar.
3. **Wretched Wilbur (demo):** Sandy Denny – vocal, Richard Thompson – acoustic guitar.
4. **Crazy Lady Blues (demo):** Sandy Denny – vocal, 12 string acoustic guitar.
5. **Lord Bateman (demo):** Sandy Denny – vocal.
6. **Late November (BBC Session, 'Bob Harris', 24th August 1971):** Sandy Denny – vocal, piano.
7. **The Lowlands of Holland (BBC Session, 'Bob Harris', 24th August 1971):** Sandy Denny – vocal.
8. **Blackwaterside (BBC Session, Sounds on Sunday, November 72):** Sandy Denny – vocal, acoustic guitar.
9. **The North Star Grassman & The Ravens ("In Concert", Paris Theatre, broadcast March 25, 1972):** Sandy Denny – vocal, piano.
10. **Bruton Town ("In Concert", Paris Theatre, broadcast March 25, 1972):** Sandy Denny – vocal, acoustic guitar.
11. **Next Time Around ("In Concert", Paris Theatre, broadcast March 25, 1972):** Sandy Denny – vocal, piano.
12. **John the Gun ("In Concert", Paris Theatre, broadcast March 25, 1972):** Sandy Denny – vocal, piano.



## RESULTS ON NEXT PAGES

**BY VOTING SANDY DENNY** top British female singer for the second year in succession, fans have proved they know a lot better than the critics and know-it-alls who sniped at her almost continually during the year of Fotheringay and after.

It was not just an act of faith. For during this essential getting-it-together period, Sandy continued to produce lovely music of which only she, it appears, is capable, seemingly undeterred by the barrage of static and gratuitous advice surrounding her, concluding with the release, last week, of her lovely solo album, and her London concert debut.

The persistence with which she has followed her chosen path may lead you to think she must be very hard-bitten indeed, but it is a strange fact that most of our greatest stars are, in fact, incredibly vulnerable creatures. Sandy shares with the late Janis Joplin a great sensitivity to criticism, and I know that every shaft sunk home. The important difference is that while Janis could be so unsettled by what people said that she performed atrociously, once she starts singing Sandy seems to have left it all behind her, registering that passionate involvement with what she is singing which is so moving in the flesh and on record.

Whatever she is singing, I always find myself wishing she would never sing anything else. If it is a traditional song, I wish she would always be showing up the depths of those great ballad lyrics

contain, unconcerned with proving anything, but just treating the folk song as what it is, one of the best songs around. And then she sings one of her own lyrics, and I pick my way through the dense, allusive imagery, guided only by the rich voice leading me to the



## SANDY BEATS OFF THE SNIPERS TO WIN AGAIN

conclusion like a siren song, and I am left in wonder at the beauty of what I have experienced. And then, with a joke and a half self-deprecatory smile, she'll launch into an old standard like "Silver Threads and Golden Needles" and then that, too, seems to live again. I

forget all the tawdry, unconsidered versions of the songs that have diminished its value to me to the level of Tchaikovsky played by Liberace, and I'm back at the heart of what is really a very fine song. In the days when she was trocking round the clubs, I was always urging

her to get herself a backing group. Then she joined Fairport Convention, and what they did jelled so perfectly, seemed so inevitable, that it didn't seem anyone could ever do anything more perfect than "A Sailor's Life," which even impressed veteran folklorist A. L. Lloyd.

Then she left and there came Fotheringay, and she worked hard at being a member of the band, not just the vocalist, certainly not the superstar with backing group.

I still say it could have worked, but the reasons why it didn't are past history now, and in her own way she has found her way back to her beginnings, the soloist carrying the whole show. It's great that her old associates still love to jam with her live and on record, but if they can't make the pie, then she can do it on her own. She's big enough, now.

KARL DALLAS







Produced by John Wood, Richard Thompson and Sandy Denny  
Engineered by John Wood

Disc 1 track 15 produced by Ian Matthews  
Disc 1 tracks 12-14 and Disc 2 tracks 1-5 mixed by Andrew Batt  
Disc 2 tracks 9-12 'In Concert' produced by Paul Griffin

Strings arrangements on Disc 1 tracks 6 & 9 by Harry Robinson

Digitally remastered by Denis Blackham at *Slye Mastering*  
[www.skymastering.com](http://www.skymastering.com)  
Additional mastering by Simon Murphy

Research and product management by Sue Armstrong  
Coordination for Universal by Joe Black at *Hey Joe*

Sleeve-notes by Patrick Humphries

Original LP design and photography by Keef  
CD package designed by Phil Smece at  
*Waldo's Design & Dream Emporium*, St Albans

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