

SIMON MAYOR

Biography *(by Colin Irwin - taken from the BBC website)*

Mandolin heroes are few and far between. Plenty play the mandolin but few play it quite like Simon Mayor.

At times it seems like he's on a personal crusade to popularise the instrument - recording a series of superb albums, touring many unlikely corners of the world and even presenting his own acclaimed Radio 2 series, *Marooned With A Mandolin*.

Yet despite his status as the nation's foremost exponent of the instrument - as well as its most zealous publicist - Mayor is a surprisingly versatile musician, who is also an outstanding guitarist and a fiddle player with enough swing to have been chosen to play it on the cast album of the musical *Five Guys Named Mo*.

A natural musician (and comic), he is self-taught, initially having learnt the ukulele before being given a guitar and learning it in time-honoured fashion from the Bert Weedon guitar manual which he was presented with on his 11th birthday. After hearing Irish music for the first time he also taught himself to play fiddle.

At Reading University (where he studied Russian!) he joined a variety of bands and played a broad range of music, from rock to ceilidh dance. It set the tone for a musical eclecticism that has been his calling card ever since. He teamed up with the singer Hilary James and they won a national folk competition in Windsor in the mid-'70s. With Hilary's beautiful voice and bass/guitar accompaniments neatly offsetting Mayor's instrumental virtuosity, they set off to make inroads into the British folk circuit.

They have since toured all over the world, mixing considerable technical skills with a flair for showmanship and audience rapport that overcomes language or cultural barriers. They became spiritually attached to the folk movement, but that has never restricted them in the type of material they have performed. They will just as happily play an Irish folk song, launch into a burst of bluegrass, deliver an earthy blues or play an uplifting

classical piece. Indeed, Mayor has made many broadcasts on Radio 3 and is highly respected by the classical world for his individual, yet immaculately proficient classical interpretations. His classical guitar-playing has been widely praised. Vivaldi's *Concerto For Mandolin* is a natural favourite, while another big crowd-pleaser has been the duo's mandolin/guitar treatment of Handel's *Arrival Of The Queen Of Sheba*. All interspersed with Mayor's trademark offbeat wit and repartee.

In the 80s he formed the band *Slim Panatella & The Mellow Virginians*, an amazing feel-good acoustic band concentrating on old-time American and western swing music, again demonstrating Mayor's versatility with some top-notch country swing fiddle and bluegrass mandolin. He and James also became deeply involved in children's music, writing over 60 children's songs together between 1985 and 1991.

He went on to form *The Simon Mayor Quintet* with Gerald Garcia, Richard Collins, Martin Allcock and, of course, Hilary James, tearing up the rule books and instruction manuals and once more playing everything from ragtime and swing to Celtic music, Chinese and Brazilian folk tunes, Irving Berlin, Mozart, Ravel and Tchaikovsky.

All the while he and Hilary James have continued to star at folk festivals and club nights in all corners of the world, while maintaining a high profile with radio broadcasts and a successful recording career. He has also become involved in tutoring, with two mandolin videos, *Mandolin Essentials* and *New Celtic Mandolin*, featuring mandolin, mandola, mandocello and the extraordinary mandobass played by Hilary James and invariably featured on the publicity material. He's also had high-profile backing from Frank Kilkelly on guitar and Beryl Marriott on piano. The band reached its full fruition with the outstanding 1999 album *Mandolinquents*. Have mandolin will certainly travel.

Daily Telegraph

"Simon Mayor is a real find." *Gillian Reynolds*

Trad Mag (France)

"Musicien-virtuose Simon Mayor surfe avec une telle maestria que chaque évocation est un véritable moment de jubilation."

Living Tradition

"The most beautiful bell-like mandolin sound I have ever heard"

Cosmopolitan

"Britain's leading hot-fingered mandolin virtuoso"