

Country/Folk

Albert Hall

Robert Shelton

It was rather a splendid weekend for followers of folk into country music: the forty-sixth annual Festival of the English Folk Dance and Song Society drew large throngs to four performances on Friday and Saturday. Out in the Wild West, at the Hammersmith Odeon, Emmylou Harris and the Hot Band last night gave the first of two shows in their triumphant return to London.

The Albert Hall shows have, of course, become a bit of the national culture by now. As in the past, the event featured splashes of colour, casts of hundreds, sword dancers, Morris men, chin music, clog dancers, strathspeys, reels, pipers, dulcimers, the lot! Quite a bit to dazzle the eye and ear, and not quite as antiquarian as one might have anticipated.

Considerable attention was focused on two old-timers: Jim Cooper, a dulcimer player who used to be a busker, and Sam Sherry, a clog dancer whom the years have not robbed of energy. Visiting the festival from Montreal were Les Sortilèges, a Canadian folklore troupe of considerable invention and novelty. I found the Loftus Sword Dancers most irresistible. Their acrobatics and ribbons of steel seemed like something out of an Olympic competition, all the more remarkable for their traditional roots.