

Vashti's song for us

Compared to other Witchseason luminaries such as Fairport Convention, Nick Drake, and the Incredible String Band, Vashti Bunyan's star didn't shine quite as brightly when she set out on the folk path in the late sixties. During the 2000's – from Devandra Banhart to Animal Collective, a new generation of musicians heard and championed her one Boyd produced Just Another Diamond Day 1970 release. It brought on a new lease of musical life in Vashti; a return to performing, a second release, Lookingaftering, and re-established Vashti's place in Witchseason's luminous folk tapestry. Jeanette Leech relates Vashti's story.



Vashti Bunyan recounts a time when she met Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger. It was 1967, and Bunyan was a struggling singer-songwriter. She had a few recordings under her belt but, then, no record deal and little idea of what to do next. MacColl and Seeger, on the other hand, seemed very cocksure in comparison; as the self-appointed guardians of folk tradition, the pair zealously advocated a performance approach that stressed the integrity of the song, rather than the singer.

"My brother's friend was their agent, I think", remembers Bunyan. "So I took my little guitar and my little songs and I went over there, to the house, and I sat there. And I sang my songs, and they were both very solemn. It became obvious that I was going to have to go, and as I got up, Peggy Seeger said 'all I can say is, beware of the ephemeral'. And I didn't have the faintest idea of what she meant. I looked it up when I got home. Oh. That's exactly what I want."

The meeting was emblematic of the struggles faced by Bunyan during the late 1960s. "There were networks, but they were very insular," she says. "What I was doing was neither folk nor pop, and I found it very difficult." Yet it was this very rareness in her music, its ability to evoke both her intensely personal voice and the fragility and wildness of the world around her, that brought it a dedicated following over thirty years later. In the 2000s, Bunyan was hailed as 'the godmother of freak-folk': an inspiration to a generation of younger artists who found, in her music, a unique approach and sound that influenced their own distorted takes on folk and pop music.