



'Talent's a great aphrodisiac'

FIRST ENCOUNTERS

In conversation with Frances O'Rourke
I had heard of Jacqui Dankworth: a mutual friend, a drummer called Chris Wells, told me she had recorded a song of mine quite a few years before I came to live in the UK. I was impressed with her singing, the sound of her albums. I felt we were kindred spirits.

I was living in Memphis and then moved to London. In Europe there are lots of different kinds of venues to play in.

After I moved to London, I got in touch with people I'd worked with, rang Jacqui and said I would love to do some work with her.

The first thing I remember having participated in was the Christmas show in The Stables in 2009 – that's the place that Cleo Laine and Johnny Dankworth started in the village of Wavendon, near Milton Keynes. It's a three-day show with skits, insanity and an awful lot of good music.

That may be the first time I worked with Jacqui; then I started working with her band.

We knew each other first as musical colleagues, got to know each other better after that. I had been married but divorced for a long time before I came over, had no children.

We worked together a lot before we became a couple – I can't remember specifically a point when that happened. I think I probably had a thing for Jacqui but was ignoring it, not acting on it. Then I realised she probably had a thing for me too.

We're kindred spirits in a lot of ways and she's a great-looking woman... I was very attracted to her. Jacqui is lovely, gentle – I'm not sure how she puts up with me. She has a beautiful voice and there's something about her, a poise that sets her apart from other people for me. Without being pretentious or pompous – because Jacqui couldn't be further from that – she has a bearing that seems to be very much above the fray. I found that really attractive. I had spent a lot of time in the fray. The music world can be absolute mayhem.

Jacqui and I got married in San Francisco. We were visiting Jacqui's half-brother Stuart and sister-in-law Sharon who live in a beautiful spot north of San Francisco. Cleo was out there visiting too. We snuck off and got married in the afternoon and met them all for dinner. We didn't tell them for several days, not until we got back to England. Cleo had just been telling us how she and John ran off and got married because they didn't want a big fuss. So we knew we couldn't

get into trouble for doing the same.

I was working in Ireland in 2002 with Linley Hamilton, my trumpet player. He put a CD on and said, have you heard this guy called Charlie Wood? I was knocked sideways by his voice, the songs, the arrangements. So I covered one of his songs on an album called *As The Sun Shines Down On Me* – the song was called *Lucky Charm*. I

thought my God, this guy is amazing, couldn't understand why he wasn't better known.

Around 2007, I was with some musician friends who said, Charlie Wood's playing in the Pizza Express club in Soho – it's one of the best jazz clubs in London. I took along the CD with his song that I'd covered; I knew the drummer in the band, he introduced us. And that's how we met.

I didn't hear anything from Charlie for a couple of years, then got an email saying, I've moved to London. I asked if he'd like to do some work together and we did quite a lot of duo gigs. I was in a relationship at the time with a much younger guy but the age difference was difficult. Gradually I started falling in love with Charlie. So I ended the other relationship – and here we are now.

A friend of mine said, my God, it's amazing how you and Charlie work together, I'd want to commit hara-kiri if I worked with my husband. But it seems to work really well; we've found the boundaries, how to make it work. I really enjoy working with him, he's a bit of a genius, I think. He does his own thing, I do my own thing, and we also tour a lot of the UK together.

Charlie did get to meet my father, but it was just before my dad got very ill [John Dankworth died in 2010]. Charlie and my mum get on very well. She's 86 now. I did a concert with her a few days ago. She's amazing, her voice is great.

Charlie and I knew how we felt about each other and married in 2010. Both of us had been married before so it was quite a scary thing. But we both fell madly in love with each other, and we seem to have made it work. We've been married three years now.

He's very funny, handsome, very kind: there's a gentleness about him. And his talent attracted me too – you can't really separate the talent from the person, and talent's a great aphrodisiac, for me anyway.

Jacqui Dankworth will sing songs of stage and screen, with new arrangements by Charlie Wood, in the RTÉ Concert Orchestra's New Year's Eve Gala, nchie. *Live to Love* is her most recent album.

is a jazz and blues singer/songwriter and keyboardist who grew up in Memphis, Tennessee. He moved to London four years ago and writes, records and tours. His wife, singer Jacqui Dankworth, produced his recent album, 'Lush Life, in Memphis'. They live in Bedfordshire

JACQUI DANKWORTH

is the daughter of jazz musicians John

CHARLIE WOOD

Dankworth and Cleo Laine. She started her career as an actor, performing with the Royal Shakespeare Company, at the National Theatre and in West End musicals. She then moved to singing and recording. Known primarily as a jazz singer, she has released five albums



■ Charlie Wood and Jacqui Dankworth: "We're kindred spirits in a lot of ways"