

If folk musicians were violent types, they might, as Jackie Oates says, "kill to be in my position." Fortunately for her, aside from their sometimes raucous behaviour and love of murderous ballads, they usually tend to be terribly mild-mannered and unassuming.

But the point Jackie is making, is how lucky she feels to be involved with folk royalty's The Imagined Village, a collaboration which has featured Billy Bragg, Benjamin Zephaniah and Paul Weller.

The latest tour boasts a line-up of singers, Martin Carthy and his daughter, Eliza, Chris Wood and a seven-strong backing band which will also be involved in a new album.

Jackie describes flamboyant fiddler Eliza Carthy as "the Britney Spears of the folk world" when she was growing up.

Eliza's dad Martin was also an inspiration, but it was English folk musician and composer Chris Wood who had a profound influence on Jackie's

music.

Jackie, 27, who learned classical violin from the age of seven, says: "I went to a fiddle workshop with Chris Wood when I was 10 at Sidmouth Folk Festival.

"It changed the way I played the violin and interpreted music. I am really in awe of Chris and he is a very wise man to be around."

Last year Jackie was asked to contribute her song The Lark in the Morning to some Imagined Village gigs and this led to a permanent place in the band for 2011.

She says: "I started off doing guest spots with The Imagined Village and it grew from there. I feel very lucky to be doing this and I'm having a ball."

The man behind The Imagined Village, Grammy Award-winning composer Simon Emmerson, is currently producing Jackie's fourth album. Described as "night-time music", it's inspired by the Cornish music she has en-

countered since living in Exeter.

"It's quite a project and very different to what I have done before, Jackie says. "I'm experimenting with Cornish music and I'm so inspired that I have ended up using a lot of Cornish musicians on the record.

"It's quite dreamy and calm. There is an earthiness about Cornish music which is unlike English music. It is Celtic in a dark, unaffected way. It has its unique style and I'm going to spread the word around the country."

In fitting with the melancholy nature of Jackie's traditional songs, the album's title is set to be Saturnine.

She says: "I'm a bit obsessed with the idea of Saturn Return. I wasn't into astrology until last year and a friend got me really interested. And Saturn keeps cropping up for me in all sorts of

things."

It takes 28-30 years for the planet Saturn to make one orbit of the sun or 'return', so is connected by astrologers to the end of youth.

Jackie says: "I think this will be a significant year when changes will happen. I feel a lot more worldly than I did when I started out making music. And I wanted to capture that feeling of change."

Jackie was brought up on a diet of folk music by her parents who were morris dancers and fans of English folk music. Her brother Jim Moray is also a folk musician.

She says: "My brother and I were brought up going to folk festivals. I think folk music is in our blood. We were always passionate about it and I wouldn't want to do anything else. I feel so happy when I am singing and I can't imagine living

without making music.

She adds: "As a folkie child, you have your school life where you don't tell anyone that you like folk music and the holidays where you can wear all your tie-dye. In my day folk didn't have credibility."

Jackie moved to Devon to study English literature at university. She says: "I studied folklore as part of my degree and got obsessed with traditional songs. At this time I realised that folk music meant more to me than classical playing and spent a lot of time at singarounds."

Jackie's professional career began in 2003 when she was a finalist in the Radio 2 Young Folk Awards and joined Northumbrian band Rachel Unthank and the Winterset. She was a member of the band (now The Unthanks, starring sisters Rachel and Becky Unthank) for four years.

Jackie says: "I had grown up going to festivals with Rachel and Becky and I spent the summer after graduating recording the band's first album, Cruel Sister.

"Touring with them was my first experience of gigging on big stages and it taught me so much.

"But by 2007 the band had a lot of mainstream attention and needed a level of commitment that I knew might prevent me from promoting my solo work, so I made the decision to see where it would take me."

She adds: "I'm proud of how well they have done and I do have moments when I think, 'I wonder what would have happened had I stayed?'"

Leaving the band brought its rewards and following the release of her debut album in 2008 she won two BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards, including the Horizon Award for best newcomer.

\*North Tyneside Council presents The Imagined Village on February 19 at 7.30pm at Whitley Bay Playhouse. Ticket hotline: 0844 277 2771. A new Jackie Oates album is due out in September. See [www.jackieoates.co.uk](http://www.jackieoates.co.uk)

# Heavenly bodies

It is as though the career of musician Jackie Oates was written in the stars. The award-winning singer and fiddle player tells **Tamzin Lewis** how an astrological upheaval heralds an alliance with folk supergroup The Imagined Village.