

The Raconteur

The Raconteur The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter April 2005

Thursday, March 17th

Yes, the daffodils were dancing, the bushes were budding and winter was finally banished. Spring was upon us and the Ritz Acoustic Club was in good St Patrick's Day cheer, despite the news that **Doreen** had raised the price of Stella to £18.75 a pint. Her claims that this made it even more reassuringly expensive fell on deaf ears. Why, you can buy a gallon of petrol for that, in some places.

At the bar, talk had turned to the world of fashion, in particular the death of Janet Reger, the Sixties lingerie queen whose inventions included mink-lined bras, and a push-up variety for traditionally small-breasted Japanese ladies. Much of the discussion concerned Reger's lesser-known brother, Ronald, also an underwear pioneer. Ronald, we heard, was briefly notorious for his 1971 men's collection which included a male micro-thong (suitable only if you had dangly bits with the girth of a Bic biro) and push-up boxer shorts, which brought several obscenity cases as horrified wearers bubbled out over their belts. There was also the short-lived horsehair jockstrap, heralded as a new peak in genital comfort, but quickly scratched. Ronald, of course, would go on to become the 40th President of the United States.

Perhaps even more controversial was the recent return of fur to high society. With Jennifer Lopez clearly considering it a bit parky on her air-conditioned private jet, no mink or chinchilla was safe. Consequently, as other great ladies joined in, all fuzzy creatures now found themselves endangered. Indeed, it's possible that the next time we see John McCririck's face at Royal Ascot it'll be lining Camilla Parker-Bowles' jacket.

Onstage, the evening quite naturally took on an Irish theme as **Greg Aylmer**, ably assisted by **Jack Cobbe** with his trusty bodhran, lent his mandolin to a pacy jig and then the atmospheric *Over The Moor To Maggie*. Following them came **Rick Topham**, delivering a smooth and heartfelt version of Don McLean's *Vincent*. We all assumed that, in keeping with the Celtic tone, Rick was actually cleverly making reference to the ill-fated Irish artist, Vincent O'Gough who, like his renowned Dutch near-namesake, also cut off his own ear. No one has been inspired to write a song about O'Gough, though, as, rather than being tormented into self-mutilation by a fit of artistic frustration, he was trying to adjust the little screw in the arm of his spectacles with the tip of a Stanley blade when his hand slipped.

Rick would go on to execute a delicate take on David Gates' *If Before* before **Roy Cramer** took to the stage. Accompanied by Greg, Jack and **Pete Beach**, he'd accidentally reformed **The Jockstrap Ensemble**, and this seemed to inspire Roy to new heights. His takes on *Star Of The County Down* and *Cliffs Of Dooneen*, packed with high romance and glorious imagery of perilous cliffs and pretty colleens, were presented with real soul, making this one of the finest performances the RAC had seen in a long while. Keeping the quality high would be **Linda Bond** who, apparently, hasn't been seen down the allotments recently (maybe she's lost the plot). On melodeon, she'd give us the comedy folk of *The Crockery-Ware* and then, on guitar, a trad-style

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tale of escape she'd penned herself.

Next up was **Tim Bromfield** with his own broken-hearted metal love-song and then U2's *With Or Without You*, both of them poignant and restrained renditions that showed why Tim is in such demand on the professional circuit. He'd be followed by **Steve Brown** with Dave Brubeck's *Take 5* (he said he'd downloaded it the night before and finally knew how it went) and Randy Newman's theme to *Toy Story*, *You've Got A Friend In Me*, which of course had us all thinking of Jane Fonda's shocking recent admission that her former husband, Roger Vadim, had "forced" her to engage in pervy threesomes. The saucy mare...

Regular readers will be aware that last month's Raconteur featured the first in an ongoing series where musicians get to review their own performances. This is intended to introduce some much-needed critical balance as the Raconteur is, or so the musicians claimed in their official statement, "biased, ill-informed and a bit of a prat, really". Steve Brown's entry last month was, on the whole, well-received, but we have had some letters from piqued lady members objecting to his describing them as "panting like rabid bitches on heat" as he played. Ladies do not pant, they were at pains to point out. Dogs pant, horses sweat, men perspire, ladies glow. So, Steve, they were glowing like rabid bitches on heat. Let's try to get a little more PC around here, shall we? Oh, and the Raconteur would like to make it clear that the mention of "roasting" Steve Brown made in the last issue referred to our taking the rise out of him, as in Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr giving after-dinner speeches "roasting" Frank Sinatra. At no point have the Committee ever taken Steve to a hotel room and . . . well, you've read the stories.

Moving on, this month's guest reviewer is perennial favourite **Jon Austin**.

"As I pulled up in the Ashton-Martin, I shushpected shomething shpecial was about to take plashe. It was - I took to the shtage. While playing in shkins at Shunningdale sheveral days before, I'd deshided to have a bash at *You Are Always On My Mind*, a masshive shmash for Elvish Presley back in the Shixties. Few could hope to match the King's shtyle and shinsherity, then shushtain the shtandard throughout the shong. But I did. I was shuperb, even if I do shay sho myshelf. I followed it up with *I'm Not In Love* by 10 She She. Again, it was shtupendoush shtuff. The ladies, of courshe, shwarmed into the backshtage area but, jusht as I was about to unzzip the back of their dresshes with my shuper-magnetic shigarette-lighter, Nigel Shnook shtopped to ashk for more advishe on his guitar-playing. The mood shpoiled, I shlipped back out to the bar to bashk in the adulation of the audienshe. They'd sheen a shintillating reshital and they knew it. Sho there".

Coming up after Jon, and making a welcome return, was **Gary Day** with Jackson Frank's *My Name Is Carnival*, a profoundly maudlin song of wrist-slitting bleakness (so, quite cheery by Gary's standards) then, with Steve Brown joining him on guitar, Bob Dylan's *One More Cup Of Coffee*. They'd be followed by LIZ MAY with two of her own songs, the first a slow, piano-led romance, the second brightly poppy. Then Rick Topham would return with an impressively sincere cover of Jackson Browne's *The Naked Drive Home* and aThursday, March 17th genuinely lovely version of The Eagles' *My Man*. Now came Roy Cramer with an old song, called *Stop the Bloody War*, that he'd written at the time of the Irish peace accord, a song still thoroughly relevant as the family of the murdered Robert McCartney were presently requesting that George Bush make a clear stand against the IRA. Very different would be a spirited and comical take on The Kinks' transvestite anthem *Lola*.

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As if inspired by Roy's continuing excellence, NIGEL SNOOK next delivered a classical Iberian medley marked by high drama and amazing dexterity. He then took up a banjo for Jerry Fuller's short tragi-comedy *Some Fool Made A Soldier Of Me*, before Steve Brown returned to get everyone whistling along to *Always Look On The Bright Side Of Life*. Oddly, and very successfully, Steve would be joined on vocals by

Maureen Bromfield, sitting at the back with the club's portable mike, and this would not be the last of Maureen's contributions. As **THE JOCKSTRAP ENSEMBLE** flooded the stage (tonight comprising Pete Beach, Greg, Nigel, Roy, Gary, Linda, Jon Austin and **Dave Chave**) up stepped **Dave Ilsley** for one of his raucous, foot-stamping renditions of *The Wild Rover*. As Dave forgot half the words, Maureen would keep it all together and, joined by Treasurer **Doug Liles**, would provide lead vocals as the Ensemble moved into *Puttin' On The Style*. It was brilliantly ramshackle stuff as the band kept going, pounding out *Goodnight Irene*, then a rough-house *Rock Island Line* and finally a mournful *Sweet Sixteen*. It had been a fabulous set, engendering a strong community feel. It was actually a privilege to witness it.

Thursday, April 7th

April had arrived and we'd found ourselves showered by bad news. The Pope had died, and Hunter Thompson, and Saul Bellow, and James Callaghan. Another earthquake had hit Asia, and the papers were filled with the appalling revelation that a drug-addled couple had tried to sell their baby to undercover reporters. This latter story certainly brought bitter tears to the eyes of the Raconteur, as his own parents had once tried to flog him to *News Of the World* journalists. Mind you, he was 35 at the time.

Also suffering was Club Secretary Steve Brown, who'd had his hopes of a lucrative sponsorship by HP Sauce dashed by the snooker player formerly known as Jimmy White, now James Brown. Even more galling for Steve was the fact that nearly every other member of the RAC has now inked a deal with some commercial enterprise or other. **Gordon Campbell** (soup), **Laura Smith** (crisps), **Jon Austin** (cars) and **Tony Harvey** (sherry) are all bearing sponsors logos, while Jack Cobbe is in negotiations to advertise a new round loaf by Hovis. Why, even **Bryan** and **Don Counsell** have something going with Sedgemoor. In fact, apart from Steve, the only artists without some money-making side-scheme are The Jockstrap Ensemble, whose initial meeting with the executive board of Ann Summers ended in a riot of laughter and recrimination.

Really, since those Pepsi ads by Madonna in the Eighties, all this music sponsorship has got out of hand. Will Young and Usher being paid to promote breweries is fairly harmless, as is the mooted co-headlining tour by Mary Black and Desmond Dekker. But the corporately backed comeback of the newly renamed Kit Kat Stevens is a monstrous abuse of the arts, second only to Stevie Wonder changing his first name to Golden. The news that Sir Cliff Richard is on the payroll of a well-known Kent-based lemonade manufacturer, and will henceforth be known as Cliff Whites of Dover, should come as no surprise.

Ah, yes, there was a lot of complaining going on, but RAC members did have the good grace to admit that their problems were small compared to those that had rained down on the 100 passengers of the *Little Lady*, a sightseeing boat on Chicago's Illinois river. There they were, enjoying the sunshine and beautiful views on a lazy afternoon when - oh, dear God, no - on the Kinzie Street Bridge above them, Stefan Wohl, bus-driver for the Dave Matthews Band, decided to empty his coach's septic tank into the water below. Unfortunately, he missed the water and instead poured 800 lbs of human waste down onto the decks and passengers of the *Little Lady*. 800 pounds! That's 8 pounds of poop a person! What could you say to that, other than "Filthy weather we're having today, my dear", "Yes, it's a stinker, isn't it?"

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Onstage, things were quiet. Very quiet. Indeed, people were so late in arriving that Chairman **Graham Cook**, who'd already loaded in, done the sound-check (with **Caroline Boyce**) and was about to double as MC and sound-man, also had to open the evening, which he did with confident and vigorous versions of JJ Cale's *Magnolia*, The Band's *The Weight*, and *Before You Accuse Me*, a blues number filtered through Eric Clapton. He was good, but made to sound even better by the digital precision of the keen-eared and good-looking young fellow filling in on the desk. That's right, it was the Raconteur himself, making an unexpected techie debut. Graham would be followed by **Pete Baxter**, delivering soft, bluesy folk so English it was almost psychedelic, reminiscent of Syd Barrett's more reflective moments.

Tony Harvey had sent his apologies, saying he was in the middle of writing a new song, a tale of lust, debauchery and false accusation set in the American mid-west and titled *I Shagged The Sheriff (But I Did Not Shag The Deputy)*. So, with few other musicians present, we went straight to the first interval, talk turning inevitably to the news that Tesco's had at last won permission to expand their store. In Manor Gardens, meanwhile, all plants had been razed to a maximum height of 3 inches so those thieving, murdering vandals otherwise known as teenagers would have nowhere to hide from the arm of the law (long, strong and anti-bong), not even lying down. A question immediately arose - why do we bother discussing these things? Judging by their destruction of the playing fields down St Christopher's Way and their cunning development plans for the area encompassing the Community Centre, swimming pool and (former) putting green opposite, the council is clearly intent upon erasing all green spaces and turning Burnham into a grockle-friendly paragon of urban living, like Birmingham with fresh sea breezes. So why don't we all just join in? Why are we wasting money re-arranging Manor Gardens when we could just concrete them over completely and rid ourselves of this monstrous green carbuncle forever?

Before you start on the self-righteous eco-spiel, think of the social benefits to be gained from such a reclamation. For a start, we could have a small but well-stocked 24-hour Tesco's Extra store (unless, that is, they felt like expanding Tesco's all the way down Love Lane . . . which would be nice). This would mean we could buy an after-club pasty without having to beat on the garage security window shouting "I SAID I WANT A STEAK AND ONION SLICE, NOT TEN MARLBORO AND A BOX OF FIRELIGHTERS, YOU DEAF TOSSER!!!!" Beyond this, we could have an additional parking area for the many thousands of pilgrims who visit the St Andrews Nativity Shed each Christmas. We could perhaps construct a helipad, in case Jon Austin fancies popping back from Leicester sometime. We could even have a library - with some books in it!

More important than all of this, though, we could construct a complex of overnight holding tanks for any thieving, murdering vandals caught on the streets after, say, 6.30pm. For all our sakes, these feral creatures must be tamed and, after much consultation with the police, social workers and local priests, the Raconteur has come up with a near-infallible system of retribution, sorry, rehabilitation. By way of warning, first-time offenders will be forced to clean up the beach, daily, for a period of six weeks. That is, they must clean the beach of all impurities, by straining it through muslin. Second-time miscreants will be beaten, maybe even whisked, until they reach a socially acceptable consistency. Persistent villains, meanwhile, will be publicly tarred, feathered, racked, hung, drawn, quartered and burned, their ashes being rubbed on children's foreheads on a new annual feast day - to be named *Trash Wednesday* - where kids will hopefully learn to be in bed and sound asleep well before their parents settle down to watch *Emmerdale*.

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Back onstage, things were looking grim. Grim, that is, until Rick Topham stood up to save the day with a touching take on Don McLean's Empty Chairs, a properly unsentimental re-run of The Eagles' My Man, then his own One Woman Man, and Jackson Browne's The Naked Drive Home. He'd then call on a visiting **Tina Mann**, who'd stand at the piano while Rick sang a plaintive version of Air Supply's 1980 hit All Out Of Love. Tina would stay on for a slow, grooving solo rendition of Gershwin's Summertime, which for a while turned into Boney M's rousing Sunny, then moved on to Billy Joel's New York State Of Mind.

Noticing the low numbers of musicians present, **John Dixon** had selflessly raced home to collect his sax, and now returned to give us smooth takes on Summertime and the Everly Brothers' Let It Be Me. After the second interval, he'd be replaced by birthday boy Pete Beach who, with Jack Cobbe accompanying on bodhran, would kick into Digging My Potatoes, then mixed Blue Suede Shoes with Buddy Holly's Oh Boy.

As Pete left the stage, the club was suddenly over-run with late-arriving musicians. First of these was Jon Austin, taking to the piano for Dame Elton's Your Song, then being joined by **Jason Grey** for their well-practised version of The Eagles' Desperado. As mentioned in earlier Raconteurs, Jon will soon be leaving us and moving to Leicester, so members are advised to be careful when offering him a farewell drink. After all, how many times have we lavished hasta-la-vista beverages on departing friends, only to have them return a few weeks later when everything's gone pear-shaped? Do we get our generously proffered hasta-la-vista beverages back? Do we 'eck as like! So this time we'll not be coughing up for the goodbye shandies till Jon has proven beyond all reasonable doubt that he's not coming back. To this end, the Raconteur would like to suggest he wear an electronic tag that, via satellite, will set off a loud alarm behind the bar whenever he comes within, say, 100 miles of the Ritz. That should keep him honest, eh?

Anyway, with Jon stepping down, Jason now leapt back up, this time armed with a guitar, for a stirring cover of Queen's mammoth Hammer To Fall. Then Pete Beach re-entered the fray, accompanied by Dave Ilsley, with another take on The Wild Rover, Dave tearing the song up with such abandon he managed to make Pete sound like Nick Drake. The evening would be brought to a close by Tina Mann, back at the piano for The Rose, Bette Midler's melodramatic tribute to Janis Joplin. It had been a struggle but, thanks especially to the efforts of Graham Cook and Rick Topham, another great session.

BREAKING NEWS . . . BREAKING NEWS . . . BREAKING NEWS . . .

Members are reminded that the club's next concert will be staged on Thursday, May 12th. This will feature Russian gypsy trio Talisman (formerly Loyko), three virtuosos schooled in some of Russia's finest conservatoires. Tickets are £6 and available from GC Music (01278-794-434)

For those with nothing else to think about, it's time to start looking forward to the RAC Christmas party! Yes, this year's smorgasbord of fun and frolics is officially set for Friday, December 16th, so scribble it down in your diary and be sure to come along - even if you don't know what a smorgasbord is.

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Special thanks to Treasurer Doug Liles for taking on MC duties far more often than he should ever have to. Anyone willing to have a go at MC-ing would be very welcome. Please step forward.

Thanks too to Jon Austin for his entertaining contribution to this month's Raconteur.

Following a club-night referendum, it has been decided to re-introduce the club's traditional food nights. These will now take place on every third Thursday of the month, with a mere £1 being added to the entry fee to cover costs.

Musicians! Please remember to inform the Raconteur of any outside gigs you have upcoming, so we can tell everyone. Also, don't forget to tell Greg Aylmer if you want to play the Griffin Pub on July 3rd, as part of the Frome festival.

Members are hereby informed that, at the last meeting, Jon Austin resigned from the Committee, tendering his "mosht shinshere regretsh". Jon also mentioned that he'll soon be putting his car up for sale, in case anyone's interested. It's an Aston-Martin (obviously), with bullet-proof windows, missile-firing headlights and a roof that shoots out a parachute in case you get pushed off an Alp by a cat-stroking master-criminal with an army of ninja thugs. Licence plate JA007, three months' tax and MOT, one reckless owner. All reasonable offers considered.

The Ritz Acoustic Club's Famous Prize-less Quiz

Following the shocking revelation that the highest score in last month's quiz was a mortally depressing 3, the Raconteur has been begged to put professional pride to one side and ease up a little. Consequently, this month's quiz will be insultingly easy. As a test, who was the lead singer in Smokey Robinson & The Miracles? If you can't answer this, we're afraid there is no hope for you. To everyone else, good luck. Not that you need it .

- 1) In which James Bond film did Christopher Lee play arch-villain Scaramanga? What was odd about his physical appearance?
- 2) Who was the lead singer in funny-haired pop sensations Wizzard? Name two hit bands he was in before Wizzard.
- 3) Which soppy duo had a 1973 hit with Welcome Home? Which one of them was blind?
- 4) Name the married socialite and former good-time girl who was the mistress of Lord Nelson up until his death at Trafalgar.
- 5) Who played the vampire Lestat in the movie version of Anne Rice's Interview With The Vampire?
- 6) Who, duetting with Elaine Paige in 1985, had a hit with I Know Him So Well? From which musical was the song taken?
- 7) Name the original lead singer of The Doors. In which city is he buried? Name the notorious Irish author buried in the same cemetery.

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- 8) In which country is Casablanca?
- 9) Which band's original members were Terry Butler, Bill Ward, John Osbourne and Tony Iommi?
- 10) Who is fourth in line to the throne of England?
- 11) Which songwriting superstar made his film debut in 1980's *The Jazz Singer*?
- 12) By what name is Cherilyn Sarkasian LaPierre better known?
- 13) Who wrote *War And Peace*?
- 14) With which band did Iggy Pop make his name?
- 15) Which Shakespeare play sees the title character talking to a skull?
- 16) What was the name of Olivia Newton-John and John Travolta's 1983 film, their follow-up to *Grease*?
- 17) Who shouted "Infamy! Infamy! They've all got it in for me!"?
- 18) In the famous TV sketch with Peter Cook, for which role was Dudley Moore's one-legged man auditioning?
- 19) What was the name given to the wars between Rome and Carthage, the second of which saw Hannibal famously crossing the Alps by elephant?
- 20) Which band does Natalie Imbruglia's latest single, *Shiver*, shamelessly rip off?

Answers to last month's quiz were as follows:

1) Pat Benatar 2) Martin Carthy 3) Sudan 1 4) John, Andy and Roger 5) *Twelfth Night* 6) John Proctor, Marilyn Monroe, Joe DiMaggio, Mrs Robinson 7) *Tirana* 8) *Mynah Birds* 9) *Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark*, the plane that dropped the first atomic bomb on Japan 10) Parsley, Dill 11) Jayne Mansfield 12) Tracey Emin 13) Parker - the chauffeur in *Thunderbirds*, Ray Parker Jr sang the theme to *Ghostbusters*, Alan Parker directed *Bugsy Malone* 14) *Bering Straits* 15) the Mahdi 16) Emma Thompson, Kenneth Branagh, Imelda Staunton 17) *Herman - Melville and Munster*, the Pequod 18) Frankie Laine, Clint Eastwood 19) Benito 20) the sparrow, with his bow and arrow.