

The Raconteur

## The Raconteur The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter August, 2004

Thursday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>

Summer at last! On the beach the sand was baking and the grockles were turning an angry shade of puce. In the Ritz, all the talk was of the committee's ambitious plan to snap up the soon-to-made-redundant Sven-Goran Eriksson as our new chairman. Treasurer **Doug Liles** felt that the inevitable hike in weekly entrance fees to £2,000 per person (OAPs and children: £1,500) might test the allegiance of even our most loyal members. **Steve Brown**, meanwhile, voiced grave suspicions as to what his new duties as secretary might entail. He wasn't having any Swedish funny business, he said - though he was later spotted sporting a rather fetching pair of shorts.

Onstage, first up was **Sean Sutton** who displayed a fine vocal range with covers of REM's Losing My Religion and Coldplay's Yellow. Stooped but confident, he recalled an acoustic Richard Ashcroft. Next were **Sunday Driver**, featuring two guitars and a bass, who added some much-needed urgency to that ubiquitous karaoke staple Stuck In The Middle With You and lent impressive harmonies to Supergrass's Prophet 15 - the only song in history to namecheck both Joan of Arc and the Incredible Hulk (apart, that is, from Strawberry-Flavoured Cul-De-Sac's psychedelic classic The Green Queen Of Orleans). Following this came **Greg Aylmer**, storming through a couple of ancient Irish reels, with **Jack Cobbe** accompanying on his trusty bodhran, and loud applause was deservedly received. Actually, Jack is applauded wherever he goes - but mostly because people think his bodhran-case contains extra-large pizzas. Incidentally, Greg would like to make it clear to members that, though he sets up the stage, does the sound, performs, comperes and loads out, rumours that he aims to purchase the Ritz and rename it Aylmer's End are entirely unfounded.

After Greg and Jack came a real treat, **Joe Williams** and **Anthony Lane** arriving from Taunton to deliver some literate and moving folk recalling the likes of Jeff Buckley and Devendra Banhart. Both solo performers, they met after hearing each other playing guitar through the wall of their adjoining flats and occasionally team up. Tonight, Joe sang two of Anthony's brave and stirring songs, the second having its words taken from The Song Of Solomon. Lucky that. Had he turned to Revelations instead, he'd have found himself wading through the lyrics of several thousand heavy metal albums. Unfortunately, so busy was the night that the pair's plan to have Anthony sing two of Joe's compositions did not come to fruition.

The evening continued with **Nick Maddocks** who cheered us with a version of Van Morrison's Cypress Avenue and then his own Too Many Ghosts. Then, Gawdblessya, up leapt **Gary French** with his brilliantly traumatised take on Dr Hook's Sylvia's Mother. How Gary has suffered at the hands of that cold-hearted cow Mrs Avery. It's a wonder he returns to the track - but we're glad he does. We're also glad he continues with his Eagles covers. This week he gave us a laidback Take It Easy, with its West Coast warning "Don't let the sound of your own wheels drive you crazy". Wise words, indeed, as this can cause absolute chaos on the Tesco's roundabout.

Next came the double-barrelled duo of **Leo St Mark** and **Frank Stewart-Brown** with lovely revivals of Fleetwood Mac's Don't Stop and Peter Sarstedt's Where Do You Go To My Lovely? Sadly, in Burnham the answer to Sarstedt's immortal question is usually "Down the Fun Pub,

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then Shakers, then the Kebab Kitchen", but this did not detract from Leo's superb delivery. His soft, dreamy Englishness always conjures visions of steeples quivering in the hazy August heat. Really, really nice.

Far more spiky was **Tim Salter**, the second of his two self-penned songs following the tragic life of a war hero who suffers the death of his wife, then terrible social neglect before being killed by a junkie. In the wrong hands it could have been comically depressing, but Tim's deft writing and controlled bitterness somehow made it work. **Gasoline** would now step up to raise the tempo with a gruff, countrified Catch The Wind and the rollicking rock of Little Feat's Old Folks Boogie.

After Gasoline came **David Emeny** who, as his wife **Issy** couldn't make it, decided to take a folk-break and gave us renditions of Elvis Costello's fraught Alison and Steve Gibbons' hilarious drug number Mr Jones, the latter revealing David's exquisite comic timing. He was followed by **Fay** and **Damien Donnellan** and their engagingly enthusiastic covers of Your Cheatin' Heart and The Bellamy Brothers' If I Said You Had A Beautiful Body Would You Hold It Against Me? Sadly, whenever The Raconteur has employed the Bellamys' question the answer has always been a resounding No - even after the expense of the Fun Pub, Shakers and the Kebab Kitchen. Love, as the man said, is Hell.

As with David Emeny, it was great to now see the return of **Gordon Campbell** who gave a fine performance of Loudon Wainright III's Hotel Room. Then, down from Reading, came **Phil Garvey**, his haircut a killer combination of those of Jonathan King and the MC5's Rob Tyner. With a crazy quaver in his voice, he entertained us with a homely song of day-lit imaginings and an energised California Dreamin'. Replacing him onstage would be **John Dixon**, his warm sax versions of Summertime and Fever being backed by percussion from the multi-talented Nick Maddocks.

Though he was just back from London and not expecting to play, **Mark Porter** stepped up with Alistair Griffin's You And Me (Tonight) and, visibly gaining confidence by the second, an impressive take on The Calling's Wherever You Will Go. Finally, **Jon Austin** brought the night to a close with a shortened guitar version of Simon & Garfunkel's The Boxer (a shortened version of the song, that is, not the full song played on a shortened guitar - that would be silly) and his speciality, a thrilling Bridge Over Troubled Water on piano. It had been another superb and varied session.

### Thursday, July 29<sup>th</sup>

Tonight's gig nearly began with a bang when Greg Aylmer, having whipped through one of his silver-fingered mandolin-things, threatened to sing, only to pull out at the last second. And this after the furore when the members discovered treasurer Doug Liles' plan to hold the next committee meeting at Rick Stein's restaurant in Padstow, all expenses (including return helicopter journey) to be paid from club funds. Luckily, tempers were calmed by **Cathy Lane**, up from Taunton with Joe Williams, who soothed us with Cat Stevens' Trouble and one of her own compositions, a sweet song about finding and losing yourself in love.

Following Cathy came Joe himself, delivering a deep, dramatic and very English number recalling the mighty Peter Hammill. He then called up Gary French to provide masterful harmonies in a mournful but pretty version of The Eagles' Peaceful Easy Feeling. Gary would remain onstage to laid down Dr Hook's enduring Number 1 single A Little Bit More and a Buddy

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Holly mega-mix featuring Rave On and It Doesn't Matter Anymore.

The pace now slowed a little as John Dixon once again demonstrated his massive technical improvement with smooth takes on Moonlight In Vermont and West Side Story's Maria. Then Mark Porter rose once more with Bon Jovi's Always and another successful stab at last week's Calling track. Next came the irrepressible **Pete Beach**, first infectiously raucous, then oddly subdued as he sang a moving plea for the environmental cause.

After Pete would come Fay and Damien Donnellan with an outstanding version of Don Williams' Some Broken Hearts Never Mend (a tough tale of eternal unrequited love) and Blue Bayou, a track that certainly makes the most of Fay's prodigious voice. Then there was SOLAR BLUE, Liz and Jez ever-improving with their ethereal, heartbroken romances. Also improving - though it's really rather vain of him to do so - is **Dave Chave** who gave us startlingly good covers of two of Sting's finest, All This Time and Moon Over Bourbon Street.

The second set opened with Cathy Lane who began with her own composition, Best Friend (dedicated to her husband) then moved onto Crowded House's typically delicate and naturalistic Fingers Of Love. Following her once again was Joe Williams who first delivered a songful of oceanic analogies that recalled none other than Percy Bysshe Shelley (can you IMAGINE the gyp you'd get at school with a name like Bysshe? Percy would be hard enough) and then a great number called Poppies, reminiscent of Roy Harper - sombre, beautiful and grand, like a love-poem scrawled on the walls of a necropolis (woah!).

Gary French would immediately lighten the mood with Del Shannon's Runaway and another mutating medley featuring Frankie Valli's Stay. Then Steve Brown, fresh back from holiday, still in those shorts and exhibiting the kind of slim, tanned calves that might well appeal to Mr Eriksson, treated us to his gossamer-light instrumental take on Eleanor Rigby. Sadly, revealing a professional jealousy at odds with his chummy public persona, Sir Paul McCartney failed to send Steve a telegram congratulating him on at last taking the record for playing the song more times than any other musician - living, dead or touring Belgium.

After Steve came the return of Dave Chave, this time providing guitar backing for TONY HARVEY as he sang a heartfelt and touching version of Fleetwood Mac's Songbird, from their masterpiece, Rumours. Ah, Rumours, doesn't it take you back? Back to when a "gay person" was the life and soul of the party, when "going all the way" meant staying on a double-decker bus to the terminus, when "coke" was a potent narcotic to be blown up rock stars' bums through a straw. . . hang on, is that last one right? These are such confusing times. . .

Anyway, back to Tony and Dave who followed Songbird by renovating Spandau Ballet's Through The Barricades, introducing taste where there had been bombast, grace where there had been sentimentalism and, perhaps more importantly, trousers where there had been kilts. Next up was John Dixon, once again lending his sultry sax to Summertime, then the evening was topped off in good-time ramshackle fashion by the **Jockstrap Ensemble**, featuring Pete Beach, Greg Aylmer, Dave Chave and Jack Cobbe. With extra time granted by the extraordinarily munificent **Doreen**, they kicked into Maggie May, Ragtime Millionaire, Blue Suede Shoes, Oh Boy and Sweet Sixteen, sending the crowd home sated and happy. Yes, it had been ANOTHER superb and varied session. **BREAKING NEWS . . . BREAKING NEWS . . . BREAKING NEWS . . .**

Please note that the club has booked **Bob Brozman** to play on Friday, October 15th. Bob is an American master of slide and Hawaiian guitar and anyone who saw the **Angelo Debarre**

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**Quartet** will know what a pleasure it is to witness such a master in action. Tickets are £10 and available in advance from GC Music (01278-794-434).

Remember, food will no longer be provided on the first Thursday of the month. This is due to circumstances beyond the club's control and NOT, as some cruel rumours would have it, a cunning plan by **Trish Liles** to make husband Doug lose weight. He's the Acting Chairman, dammit, he can eat what he likes!

The club's AGM is scheduled for Monday, September 27th, in the Ritz's posh Gatsby Bar. All members are welcome to attend, but anyone wishing to stand for a place on the committee must declare their lunatic megalomania to Doug a couple of weeks beforehand.

The club's Christmas party is set for Friday, December 17th, at the Ritz. This year, **BRAD PITT** has been booked to appear as Santa and will be doling out expensive baubles from the boutiques of Beverly Hills. Well, nothing's signed as yet, but Steve Brown HAS pencilled him in. Should be a great laugh anyway, so do come along, even if Brad blows us out.

Priddy was a great success. The 50-minute Ritz Acoustic Club slot on the Sunday was ably filled by Gary French, Solar Blue (with Steve Brown) and Pete Beach. Steve also acted as MC (that's MC as in Master of Ceremonies and not, thankfully, MC Hammer. In those shorts that would have been thoroughly inappropriate for a Sunday morning and probably illegal). Coincidentally, the RAC crew were followed onstage by club regulars David and Issy Emeney. A big thank you to all who played or attended.

In answer to all those requests over the last month - no, the RAC cannot come over and fix your car. We can, however, with the aid of effects pedals and a few strategically placed microphones, make it sound quite good if you hit it with a mallet.

Finally, the club is always in need of extra help in setting-up and loading away the instruments, MC-ing and working the door and sound-desk. We're a bit concerned what will happen if Greg wins the Lotto and buggers off to Barbados. He'd do that, you know - he just doesn't care. So, any volunteers should make themselves known to a committee member. All are welcome.