

The Raconteur

## The Sprachonteur The Newsletter That Likes To Say Ja August, 2005

Thursday, July 7th

Lawdy, how the sun was shining, baking the lawns of our land as if hired by the Australian Cricket Board to create perfect pitches for the recently arrived Shane Warne. In our gardens the fuchsias were dropping their pendulous blooms and the Madonna lilies were open-mouthed at the beauty of the English summer. Madonna, meanwhile, was posing with a tight bun, long boots and jodhpurs, desperate to convince us that she was truly a Lady of the Manor. Now, Madonna has successfully reinvented herself many times, but this was a step too far. Ladies and Gentlemen of the Manor, you see, are supposed to behave with dignity and decorum, keeping their private lives private and using their wealth and expensive education to maintain their estates, their nation and the little people who work for them. They're *not* supposed to wave their pointy baps at baying crowds of 60,000 or simulate ecstatic masturbation on national TV. Indeed, to borrow the accent of Madonna's faux-Cockney husband Guy Ritchie: "Daahn ah manor that ain't no lay-dy, that's a *slappah*".

Down at the Ritz there was a strange mood. This was the evening of a bad day, the day when suicide bombing came to London. All day we had watched, furious and horrified, as the extent of the destruction was gradually unveiled, as the body-count rose. And all the while the people were saying the same thing, that they would still go to work, that they would carry on with their lives, that nothing would change. If the bombers had sacrificed themselves in the hope of panicking us into argument and division, they had failed miserably. They had chosen the wrong city in the wrong country and they had taken their own lives and those of others for nothing.

What was needed under these circumstances was some fun to kick-start the process of living. And who better to provide it than **Greg Aylmer** who, with **Jack Cobbe** accompanying on bodhran, piled into a couple of Irish instrumentals, getting jiggy widdit in a Celtic stylee, keeping it reel, and all that. They'd be followed by **Roy Cramer**, first with an apt number called Whitsun Dance, concerning women who'd lost their loved ones in WW1, then some light blues. Next up would be **Rob Carey** with a sweet, clean take on The Beatles' Do You Want To Know A Secret and then, as if deliberately attempting to offend the Raconteur's aesthetic sensibilities, Ronan Keating's When You Say Nothing At All. Like all other songs, this is not something Keating should be singing to other people. Its chorus, though, should be shouted loudly at him every morning when he wakes, until the day when he stops clogging up our eardrums with his horrid saccharin gloop. It's said that Keating's followers are mostly grannies who love him for his tidy looks and irrepressible niceness. So, what we really need is for some scummy hack from The News Of The World to frame him for something beastly, maybe doctor a photo so it looks like he's in bed with Abi Titmuss, Graham Norton and a kilo of cocaine, or claim that when a wheelchair-bound 10-year-old asked for his autograph he flew into a psychotic rage and stabbed the youngster repeatedly in the face with his own Bic biro. Then the grannies will turn against him and, if we're lucky, will gather in croaking hordes to chase him through the streets, swinging their tatty handbags about their heads, ready to pound him into pulp for his betrayal. It'll be great, like A Hard Day's Night, but with ultraviolence and lashings of Milk of Magnesia.

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After Rob would come Club Secretary **Steve Brown**, with **Juliette Blackburn** on vocals for a fine, controlled, Eva Cassidy-inspired take on Over The Rainbow and Lady Madonna's Crazy For You. A brief interval would end with **Jason Grey** performing powerful renditions of Lone Star's Amazed and John Cougar's Hurts So Good, before **Debbie** and **Phil Bennett** would make a welcome debut, Debbie singing a joyous version of Joni Mitchell's Big Yellow Taxi and Phil delivering a more sombre cover of Pink Floyd's Wish You Were Here. Coincidentally, Pink Floyd had recently reformed to play this song at the Live8 show in Hyde Park. And, watching the extravaganza on TV, how we had all wished we *were* there - lounging backstage, scoffing salmon and quaffing Cristal with the Floyd and all the other superstars who failed to recognise the eye-popping hypocrisy of their feasting. But, hey, they'd all given up several hours of their incredibly valuable time and, as appearing before an audience of billions was guaranteed to boost their CD sales by several thousand percent, they had every reason to celebrate. And, when you think about it, when compared to Africa isn't our entire country like a giant VIP lounge - though obviously without the strict door policy exercised at most venues. To their credit, the Floyd did dedicate Wish You Were Here to Syd Barrett, the man whose looks, style and songs had brought about their initial breakthrough and who they'd sacked at the earliest opportunity. Their very public exhibition of a 37-year-old guilt was an example to us all - mostly an example of how crazily self-obsessed rock stars can be.

Next Steve Brown would make a return, this time accompanying **Jenny Phillips** as she delivered a strong take on Alanis Morissette's Ironic. It was a fine performance but something was bothering us. Why wasn't Steve Brown playing solo? Could it possibly be that, aware that the Raconteur would never be so ungallant as to hurl brickbats at a lady, he was attempting to avoid critique by hiding behind girls? That would be *unthinkably* craven. By the way, if you were wondering what a brickbat is, the Chambers Dictionary has two separate definitions: a) barbed criticism, and b) small winged mammal found on banks of Bosphorus, red in colour, cuboid in shape, often used as cornerstone of Turkish hotels.

After **Tim Bromfield** had kicked our asses with Whitesnake's Here I Go Again and his own Living On A Knife Edge, we moved into the second interval. All the talk at the bar was of Pete Doherty, ex of The Libertines, now of Babyshambles who apparently had been caught drinking and taking drugs again. Who does the man think he is - the singer in a rock band, or something? Incidentally, readers might be interested to know that the Raconteur once stepped out for several months with Doherty's current girlfriend, the socialite and supermodel Kate Moss. Of course, this was back in the days when she was a 23-stone Austrian called Brunhilda, a police dog-handler with B.O like over-boiled parsnips and a smile like a vandalised graveyard. Worse still, she had hair like mouldy hay and the temper and right hook of Mike Tyson. GSOH, though. How she's changed. And her Croydon accent is very convincing.

Back onstage, Roy Cramer would return with a folk pop romance from his own CD, then a driving, funky take on Stevie Wonder's I Wish that really got the crowd going. Audience participation would then reach a peak as everyone joined in with Phil Bennett's truncated American Pie, before Debbie stepped up with a rousing, gravelly a cappella cover of Mercedes Benz. They'd be followed by the admirable **Pete Beach** who, accompanied by Greg, Jack and the redoubtable **Nigel Snook**, would belt out roustabout takes on How Long Blues and Maggie May.

Now would come a real treat - the long-anticipated return of **Nas Adal**, the man with the world's most infectious smile (there are actually plans to test this theory by sending him to Guantanamo Bay). Joining up with his old buddy Jason Grey, he'd co-deliver an impassioned

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romance the pair wrote many years ago and also a take on Cutting Crew's (I Just) Died In Your Arms that had the lady members whimpering with unrequited desire. It's an interesting notion, that one. If, after a rampant bout of lovemaking, your partner *did* pass away in your arms, what would your first reaction be? Horror? Disgust? Fear? Be honest, wouldn't a small part of you be ever-so-slightly self-satisfied? Wouldn't you look pityingly down on the ravaged corpse and think "Poor little moth, you flew too close to the searing flame of my love". Wouldn't you only call the police after you'd gyrated round the room performing an obscenely libidinous rendition of James Brown's Sex Machine? HOO-AGH!!! You wouldn't? Oh, don't be so squeamish. Sex is inextricably linked to death. The French call the male orgasm "le petit mort" - the little death - and this is just la grande version. As Oscar Wilde said: "All men kill the thing they love", and isn't it better this way than with a gun or a knife or, as most people do it, with sheer boredom? Surely death should be our ultimate aim during sex as we strive to give and receive a mind- and body-blowing overload of ecstasy. Isn't the very pinnacle of sex, of life itself, to come and go at the same time? Of course the Conservative party has taught us that the effect is achieved more easily with a rope, a black bin-liner and a tangerine but this, as is the case with most Tory policy, is just cheating.

Finishing the show would be Steve Brown, raising further suspicions by once again backing Juliette Blackburn as she executed excellent takes on Sixpence None The Richer's sweet Kiss Me and James Taylor's You've Got A Friend. The crowd roared their appreciation. It was a fittingly classy climax to another storming session.

### Thursday, July 14th

Summer days were upon us, drifting away as John and Livvie predicted all those years ago. Hosepipe bans were being threatened just as figures were released showing exactly how many millions of gallons of water were being wasted by the companies' not fixing their pipes. Still on the public service tip, much of the talk at the bar concerned one Stephen Byers, the former government minister now being taken to court by Railtrack shareholders who claimed he deliberately ruined the company so it could be taken over on the cheap. No one was showing them much sympathy. Railtrack had taken a shed-load of government money (ie *our* money) and still proved to be incompetent. Therefore the shareholders, as *owners* of the company, ought to feel grateful we didn't take their houses and sell their families into slavery to get our cash back. Cheeky monkeys.

While on the subject of business, it was also mentioned that Treasurer **Doug Liles** had been doing some research into taking the RAC public. As soon as this information slipped out there had been a flurry of interest on the Stock Exchange, with several multinational corporations vying to take control of the club. The first bid, rumoured to be from Nestle, fell apart when it was revealed that the heartless sods intended to finance their takeover by selling Pete Beach to **The Milverton Crew**, forcing us to rent him back on a weekly basis. But what really blew every deal on offer were the corporate predators' plans for the Committee's secret pension fund, set to come to maturity in late 2008. This is intended to give each Committee member a small pay-out in recognition of their efforts on behalf of the club and, as it stands, this should amount to approximately £1.2 million per member. Doug was having none of it. Under no circumstances, he stated, would he compromise the integrity of the club and, besides, golf's not a cheap pastime, you know?

Onstage, Greg Aylmer started the evening off once again, with Jack Cobbe by his side as he

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piled into another Irish ditty. Greg would then demonstrate his vocal abilities with The Knoxville Girl (originally The Oxford Girl), a thoroughly visceral description of the killing of a curly-haired girl so intense that **Doreen** and **Samantha** began to question why they let Greg walk home with them. The curly-haired girl, of course, met her end down by the river, once again causing members to debate the anomaly at the heart of so many murder ballads. In the States recent figures have shown that 73% of homicides are committed in the home, 12% in the street, 8% in the workplace and most of the rest on the freeway, in sports stadiums or in prisons. In murder ballads, though, a staggering 97% of victims are butchered down by the river. Now, the Americans have some big-ass rivers but that still doesn't explain this violent discrepancy. Why are songwriters so obsessed with whacked women and waterways? Is it simply because "down by the river" fits into lyrics more easily than "in the kitchen-diner" or "in the frozen food department at Somerfields"?

Following Greg would come **Pete Stearn**, adding depth to Christie Moore's Ride On with some superb enunciation, then doing something similar with The Who's caustic Substitute. Next up would be **Rowan Noddings** with a striking a cappella version of Rolf Harris's I've Lost My Mummy, then a ghostly, trembling take on the folk classic She Moves Through The Fair. Then would come **Don "Tasty" Cheddar** with the exquisite silliness of Doug Supernaw's Honky Tonkin' Fool and the bouncy trucker anthem Don't Go To Sleep On The Road. As a useful aside, it's also advisable not to go to sleep on the phone, especially when connected to naughty premium-rate lines. And don't drop off during lovemaking as your partner will either get really annoyed or, worse, start lewdly body-popping round the room singing Sex Machine. Oh, and just for the ladies, don't *ever* nod off near an American river. It's fatal, apparently.

After a brief interval, **Sally Pritchard** and **Kathy Macmillian** would step up with Janis Ian's immortal At Seventeen and a gorgeous cover of The Corrs' Runaway (isn't it odd how perfect The Corrs are? Not only are they all unspeakably beautiful and excellent musicians, they were even born with an appropriate name. Really, only being named The Phwoaarrs might have made it any better). Sally and Kathy would be followed by **Gordon Campbell** with Ian Tyson's MC Horses (at first the Raconteur thought he said "Empty Horses". We have loads of those round here - you can see the former contents of their stomachs all over the roads), then a rearrangement of Blind Lemon Jefferson's See That My Grave's Kept Clean and Dave Olney's Women Across The River.

The evening was going well, but was now raised to new heights by the arrival of newcomer **Dr Joel Almeida**, a musician from Trowbridge who sat at the keyboard and surprised everyone with the quality of his self-penned songs. Including snippets of well-executed scatting, they were big and showtune-like, with sharp lyrics and much humour, rather like Randy Newman's. Better still, by buying one of Dr Joel's CDs we were paying to feed an Indian family of 4 for a week.

Pete Stearn would now make a return with the pacy blues of JJ Cale's Louisiana Women, then **Dave Ilsley**, with Jack Cobbe on bodhran and Pete Beach on guitar, would deliver a much-improved performance of his perennial favourite The Wild Rover. Following a second interval, **Maureen Bromfield** (who the next day would put on a corking anniversary party with her hubbie Tim) would get everyone singing along to John Denver's Leaving On A Jet Plane, with Nigel Snook gallantly joining her on guitar and **Val Setchal** dancing rather provocatively with **Malcolm** back by the door. **Mark Porter** would then step up with fine renditions of John Cougar's Pink Houses and Your Life Is Now, while "Don" Tasty Cheddar would give us the comedy classic Put Another Log On The Fire.

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And it just kept getting better. Next **Mike Batt** stepped up with his own delicate, folky guitar instrumental and a fine take on Turin Brakes' Underdog (Save Me). Then Jenny Phillips would join Debbie Bennett for a souped-up comic version of Mercedes Benz, the former adding hilariously disrespectful verses about Honda Accords and silicon implants. Jenny would remain onstage, now accompanied by Steve Brown (he's done it again!!!) for James Taylor's You've Got A Friend. With time fast running out, Rowan Noddings would get people laughing once again with Lychee Fair, a 1953 pastiche of Strawberry Fair, and the evening would be closed in great style by Dr Joel with two more of his own numbers, this time adding a touch of Bon Jovi to the theatrical fare. Fantastic.

### Thursday, July 21st

Last week having seen such an extraordinary session, it was little wonder that the atmosphere was a tad subdued. A disagreeable tension was then added to the mix when it was announced that Treasurer Doug Liles had just returned from his summit with former Club Chairman **Jim Topping**. As regular readers will know, it was recently discovered that the club's constitution contains several clauses giving Mr Topping the eternal right to treat his fellow members as sexual playthings, a situation that cannot be allowed to continue. Consequently, Doug had been sent over to Spain to carry out negotiations on our behalf, armed with a cyanide pill and an ampoule of amyl nitrate. If the going got tough, *really* tough, and it looked like there was no escape, he was to bite on whichever seemed most appropriate at the time. When he returned, very much alive but with what looked like a rubber ring shoved down the back of his trousers, we did not need him to tell us what evil had befallen him. But he was, thank God, the bearer of good tidings. Topping, once his rage had died away, had finally agreed to give up his unspeakable feudal rights to the bodies of innocent club members. Unfortunately, there was a price to be paid for this generosity. Each quarter a draw must be held with the names of all members going into a hat. And the member whose name was last to be drawn must be sent forthwith to Spain to slake Topping's abominable lust. Naturally, the crowd gasped in horror as this disgraceful rewriting of the Andromeda myth was narrated to them, but there was nothing they could do. The first draw will be made on August 25th with all members included - except Doug who says he's had quite enough of *that*, thank you very much.

Onstage, as this was a theme night featuring Acoustic Songs of the Sixties, Greg Aylmer broke out his brother's 12-string for a laissez-faire run through Me And Bobby McGhee then turned to his trusty mandolin for the timeless jig The Maid Behind The Bar. Then Steve Brown (amazingly with no female in sight) gave us We Have All The Time In The World, his delicate guitar-work more than making up for his lack of Satchmo gruffness. Rowan Noddings would then take over with an energised version of Tommy Steele's Little White Bull (LITTLE WHITE BULL!!!) and a cover of West Side Story's Somewhere filtered through PJ Proby, being followed by Mark Porter with another run through John Cougar's Your Life Is Now and Chuck Berry's My Ding-A-Ling. With the latter Mark had missed the Sixties by some three years, but his confident, not to say cheeky performance redeemed him.

Getting us back on track would be Pete Beach with Dylan's Don't Think Twice It's All Right and a raucous rendition of Paddy McGinty's Goat. Then would come Roy Cramer and **Eileen Hardacre**, Eileen singing a lovely take on Marianne Faithfull's This Little Bird and Roy The Seekers' punishingly sad The Carnival Is Over. Up next would be Pete Stearn with a tremendous This Wheel's On Fire and Donovan's Why Do You Treat Me Like You Do and then came Nigel Snook

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with snatches from The Rooftop Singers, The Stones' Paint It Black (a bizarre twist on Seasonal Affective Disorder, that one) and Mr Tambourine Man leading into a delightful version of Gordon Lightfoot's Early Morning Rain.

With the session now heated up somewhat, Phil and Debbie Bennett kicked out Proud Mary, with Phil taking the Ike Turner part (fortunately for Debbie he only got deep enough into character to sing and play guitar). They then made an ambitious (and successful) stab at A Whiter Shade Of Pale, a song that famously alludes to Chaucer's The Miller's Tale but sadly doesn't make best use of a story featuring trickery, adultery, inadvertent arse-kissing and a comedy branding with a red-hot poker - very rock'n'roll, as it happens.

During the final interval, talk at the bar turned to absent friends. Beyond the shocking Topping saga, there was news of horizontal guitar supremo **Rob Ellis** who will be returning to guest at the club very soon. Apparently, Rob is struggling to complete his next album, but has just mastered a new cut concerning a kinky sexual experience with a fat girl with jaundice (it's called Big Yellow Jacksie). There were also conflicting rumours about suave crooner **Jon Austin** with one member claiming that, far from building kitchens in Leicester, he was actually busily destabilising the government of Panama. Shurely shome mishtake . .

After the break, Rowan Noddings would give us Gary Puckett's supremely dodgy Young Girl, then Rob Carey would step up with Adge Cutler's Virtute Et Industrial and, with Nigel adding flamboyance on guitar, a take on Jose Feliciano's version of Light My Fire. They'd be followed by Steve Brown with Led Zeppelin's Thank You, according to

Steve the most romantic song ever written - even more romantic than The Monks' 1979 classic Nice Legs Shame About The Face - and Babe, I'm Gonna Leave You recorded by Led Zep and Joan Baez and here marked by some excellent guitar-work from Steve. And there'd be yet more superlative fretwork when Nigel Snook now flipped between Classical Jazz and MacArthur Park before being joined by Pete Beach and Greg for a happy take on Tom Paxton's Show Me A Pretty Little Number, a mournful rendition of the same writer's I Can't Help But Wonder Where I'm Bound, then Adge Cutler's Pill, Pill, I Love Thee Still and Woody Guthrie's Grand Coolie Dam. By popular request, Pete Stearn would close the show with The Beatles' I Should Have Known Better and a Let It Bleed-style assault on Honk Tonk Women. Then we all buggered off . . .

### **BREAKING NEWS . . . BREAKING NEWS . . . BREAKING NEWS . .**

Members are reminded that the club's next concert will be by top bluesman **Eddie Martin** on Thursday, September 22nd. Tickets are £6 and available from GC Music (01278-794-434). We're hoping the mighty **Tim Dean** and **Paul Stradling** will be providing support. Please note also that this will be the buffet night for the month of September. It should be on the 15th, but it isn't. So, Eddie Martin plus support plus buffet, all for £6. You don't get that kind of value down Tesco's. Come to think of it, their Bluesman and Buffet section is very poorly stocked . . .

Other gigs now booked are **Steve Tilston** on October 13th and **Steve Ashley** on November 3rd.

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Musicians!! Please note that the next club theme night will be on Thursday, September 29th. You will be required to play songs from the canons of Bob Dylan and Donovan. Bob Dylan and Donovan. Bob Dylan and Donovan. Special mention in the Raconteur will be received by anyone performing Masters Of War.

Everyone should note that the club AGM will be held at the Ritz on Thursday, September 15th. It will begin at 7.00pm, then we'll get on with the usual club night. Anyone wishing to run for a place on the committee should sign up on the big form at the door. This year the AGM will not be the tedious yawn-fest of yore, indeed it will rise like a very entertaining phoenix from the ashes of meetings past. We'll even have an awards ceremony, celebrating the best of the club over the last 12 months. Anyone wishing to bet on these is reminded that the book is now closed on Samantha winning Most Reluctant Gardener.

Please note that a new committee position has just been created to ensure the competent running of the club web site. **Gary Day** should henceforth be referred to as 'His Magnificence The Webmaster General' and tokens of your esteem (trinkets, baubles, 4-packs of Guinness) can be left in tribute outside his front door.

Remember that September brings a new year at the Ritz. That's when you must renew your membership of the Ritz Social Club. If you are not a member of the Ritz Social Club you cannot attend the Ritz Acoustic Club more than once a month. Any non-member attending more than this is cheating everyone else. They're also tight as a mallard's anus because it costs bugger all to join the Ritz and you make your money back many times over on the cheap drinks.

The Club Christmas Party is booked for Friday, December 16th. The band **Fastest To Canada** has been provisionally booked. Sadly, Secretary Steve Brown is still struggling to find a celebrity to play Santa, having been finally turned down by Sir Ian McKellen. More problems arrived when Steve actually succeeded in signing Melinda Messenger only to be swamped by applications from club members wanting to be her elves. Steve was so horrified by this gross exhibition of panting lust he cancelled the booking forthwith, and most feel he was right to do so. Let's face it, exactly how convincing an elf would **Steve Holford** be?

Though he never appears to get any older, our glorious Chairman **Graham Cook** is in fact aging by approximately 60 minutes every hour. Thus his birthday will soon be upon us and a party will be held at the Ritz on Saturday, August 13th. It will be a loud affair, with Graham performing as well as The Ginger Hitlaz. And you are all invited. Bring a pressie (red wine is good) and be on your worst behaviour . . .

### The Ritz Acoustic Club's Famous Prize-less Quiz

Welcome to the RAC's monthly quiz, where contestants battle to maintain their calm and dignity in the face of extreme provocation. Don't worry if you do badly, the only person to get all the questions correct immediately expired, the sheer exultation placing an unbearable burden on his heart. Just give it a go - that's what the RAC is all about . . .

1) Who discovered the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922?

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- 2) What is Carole King's real name?
- 3) What does the E stand for in General Robert E Lee?
- 4) Who wrote the classic Ain't Misbehavin'?
- 5) What nationality was painter Marc Chagall, the forerunner of surrealism?
- 6) How many albums must you sell to go platinum in the UK?
- 7) In which year was the Great Fire of London?
- 8) In which year did Paperback Writer and Yellow Submarine score UK Number Ones for the Beatles?
- 9) In the language of dating ads, what does DWM stand for?
- 10) What was the UK's Christmas Number One in 1971?
- 11) Which TV celebrity owned Miinnehoma, Grand National winner in 1994?
- 12) Who provided the music for Francis Ford Coppola's Godfather trilogy?
- 13) Name Snow White's seven dwarves?
- 14) Whose last million-selling single was Midnight Gambler in 1957?
- 15) Name the Three Wise Men who visited the baby Jesus.
- 16) Which mega-band formed from the group Mabel Greer's Toyshop?
- 17) In Greek mythology, who killed the Hydra?
- 18) Who was the Freddie in the title of Chubby Checker's Let's Do The Freddie?
- 19) Which movie won Halle Berry a Best Actress Oscar in 2001?
- 20) Who composed the soundtrack for the 1987 BBC series The Celts?

Answers to last month's quiz were as follows:

1) Cleo Laine 2) Dyspepsia 3) Paul Simon 4) Norman Mailer 5) Frank Zappa & The Mothers Of Invention 6) Ti amo 7) New Orleans 8) Elizabeth Fry 9) Cab Calloway 10) Anti-Social Behaviour Order 11) Glen Campbell 12) Pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, sloth 13) Rory Gallagher 14) Phnom Penh 15) Jimi Hendrix 16) Pol Pot 17) Barry Manilow 18) The National Anthem 19) Mia Farrow 20) Entrechtat

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