

The Raconteur

## The Craiconteur

### The Newsletter That's *Well* Up For Festive Frolics

December, 2005

Thursday, November 24th

What a month. The rain had wellied down ceaselessly for weeks. The country was flooded, people's gardens were underwater, their cars were floating away. Indeed, the only places you could go to keep dry, it seemed, were the reservoirs which, the water companies assured us, still resembled the Kalahari, despite a deluge unequalled since the time of Noah.

Down at the Ritz, though, our spirits remained undampened. In fact, they were greatly lifted by the news that Treasurer **Doug Liles** had been busily attempting to twin the RAC with a series of acoustic clubs overseas, the aim being to enjoy mutual visitations, the sharing of cultures, hands across the water etc etc. Never one to start small (or so **Trish** tells us), Doug had begun by targeting the Katmandu Acoustic Club, the highest acoustic club in the world. Unfortunately, negotiations quickly broke down over the curious Nepalese custom demanding that visiting musicians abandon their instruments at the door and play only on the club's own nose-flute. Secretary **Steve Brown**, for one, said that, while he's always up for a musical challenge, there was *no way* he was touching anything that'd been stuffed up some Himalayan hooter, especially as the Katmandu club's sessions are traditionally opened by Abdul al Kazzam, once dubbed by mountaineer Chris Bonnington as "the snotty sherpa".

More promising was the chance of co-joining in musical buddyhood with the acoustic club of Sulzbach-Rosenberg, a town just to the west of Nuremberg. All was looking good as a compromise was reached, the German members agreeing that on visiting the Ritz they would refrain from their usual habit of sneaking into the club on the morning of a session and placing towels on the best seats to reserve them. To match their sacrifice, the Ritz committee agreed to restrict our buffet to a simple selection of sausages, with all vegetables strictly *verboten*. However, just as all was going well, the deal had to be hastily cancelled when an e-mail from the Germans' secretary to their Obergruppenfuhrer was intercepted, wherein the secretary crowed that he had "fooled ze Britisher dolts yet again!" Apparently, while onstage in Sulzbach-Rosenberg, **The Jockstrap Ensemble** were to be forced at the point of a Luger to play Deutschland Deutschland Uber Alles over and over again till they swore allegiance to the German flag, or died of boredom. That they would be allowed to play no other song was made very plain by the underlined sentence "Ze digging of ze potatoes vill *not be tolerated!*" Then, in a final humiliation, Chairman **Graham Cook** was to be physically coerced into donning absurdly tight brown shorts and singing Tomorrow Belongs To Me from Cabaret. Those dastardly *swine!* Beyond this, there was a wider, more sinister plan. "Ze Ritz Acoustic Club," continued the e-mail "is vell placed, strategically, for us to strike out, decisively unt vizzout mercy, at ze clubs of Milverton, Veston Zoyland unt even Vookey. Vizzin six months every Tommy teenager in ze south-vest vill be visting Lili Marlene on zer vay to school. Ze Folk Rock vill be crushed beneath ze jackboot of ze Folk *Reich* unt ze music of ze Fazzerland vill rule ze airvaves for a *sousand years.*"

Vell, sorry, well, we weren't having that, despite **Doreen's** protestations that it might make economic sense to sell beer in 8-pint mugs, and Steve Brown's appeasing argument that he would at least be allowed to play Bohemian Rhapsody whenever he liked. The committee was absolutely adamant. Millions of British soldiers did not play football in No Man's Land for us to bend over for Fritz now, no matter how appealing his sausage might be. If anything at all, the Ritz Acoustic Club stands for freedom, dammit, freedom and we shall not be moved.

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After all this confusion and disappointment, the indefatigable Doug did come up with another idea. He'd found an ideal twin for us, he said, in Bangkok. Other committee members protested that the Temple Of Sin didn't sound much like an acoustic club to them but Doug, reddening only slightly, assured us that it was a very upmarket establishment, so classy that, for a very reasonable price, members were provided with a relaxing Roman-style bath to put them in the mood for the evening's entertainment. He knew this for a fact, he insisted, because the heavily-accented young lady who'd answered the phone had herself offered him the club's special deal - "Soaky folky, ten dollah". So excited was he by the potential of this twinning, he'd organised an all-expenses-paid fact-finding mission to the Temple Of Sin and would be leaving, he later told Graham Cook via his mobile, just as soon as Trish let him out of the airing cupboard.

Onstage, the action began on a high with the debut performance of Vice Chairman **Bryan Counsell**, laying down a couple of mournful Irish airs on his violin. It was very impressive for a first go and we hope to see Bryan back up there very soon. He'd be followed by another newcomer, **Alex Ensoll**, his version of Incubus's Drive revealing a soft but strong voice with an appealing vibrato. He'd then deliver a desolate take on the Goo Goo Dolls' Iris. Great stuff. Up next would be **Terry Williams** with the Aussie comedy number The Barbecue Song and then James Taylor's road-bound classic Sweet Baby James. Taking us into the first interval would be the ever-dependable **Rob Carey** with two Roy Orbison numbers, 1989's You Got It and Running Scared.

At the bar, all the talk was of the latest series of I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here, where a motley band of impossibly obscure non-entities swallow insects, get covered in mud and race to tell the tabloids seedy tales of sex in cheap hotels (example headline: I Gave Jenny Bond A Right Royal Seeing-To). Much of the conversation concerned Doreen who, still simmering after being beaten in previous auditions by Jordan and thus missing out on a chance to bear Peter Andre's love-child, had this year been desperate to win a place in the jungle. Arriving at the television centre on London's South Bank, she'd dressed to impress in a red silk teddy, 6-inch stilettos and a wide-brimmed Aussie bush-hat with tiny cans of Blackthorn swinging on the strings instead of corks. Having thus seized the producers' attention, she proceeded to exhibit her willingness to engage in the show's infamous Bushtucker Trials by munching on a beetle she'd found down the APEX the day before. Disastrously, though, one of the TV execs, a keen armchair entomologist, noticed that the insect she was munching on was in fact an ultra-rare Saharan Sand Scarab, last seen in Britain in 1836. So, far from winning stardom as this year's Abi Titmuss, poor Doreen found herself whisked off to the Old Bailey to face charges of violating the Endangered Species Act.

After the break, **Rowan Noddings** would deliver his own song, Why Does Everyone Dislike Me?, the lyrics featuring his cursed alter ego Zachariah. Then, slipping on a big green cap, he'd perform a superb rendition of The Leaving Of Liverpool. He'd be followed by **Liz May** with her strongest set in ages, including a romantic piano ballad and Terry Seabrook's Waltz For Autumn. Up next would be Steve Brown with an instrumental Take 5, a lovely take on Stanley Myers' Cavatina (a beautiful track that sadly now has us all thinking of Christopher Walken blowing his own brains out) and then, with **Steve Holford** on vocals, an increasingly passionate cover of Memories from Cats. It's a little-known fact that this musical was an unmitigated disaster on its initial release, forcing Andrew Lloyd Webber into a radical rewrite. No longer would the show be set in the sewers of London. No longer would the main protagonists be pursued remorselessly by angry and frightened mobs of people who, in a grotesque climax that had preview audiences literally vomiting in the aisles, beat our furry heroes to death with pokers. And, of course, no longer would it be called Rats.

Back onstage, **Henry Rawl**, once of Exmoor, now of Cheddar, would deliver two excellent rootsy

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numbers, one concerning a growing daughter, the other a historical overview of Cheddar's history. Then, after the second interval, Liz May would return with two more of her sweetly sad piano romances. Next up would be **Alex and Dave** with some fun-time blues and Metallica's grimly beautiful Nothing Else Matters, then Terry Williams would treat us to the a cappella folk of Nottingham Jack Of All Trades and a bright medley of three songs by Stephen Foster, America's first professional songwriter. Finally, after Rob Carey had warmed the crowd's cockles with Carole King's Will You Love Me Tomorrow, **Jason Grey** would end the session with Take That's Back For Good (with raucous back-of-the-room backing vocals courtesy of Graham Cook and **Paul Austin**), then stirring versions of Damien Rice's Cannonball and **Tim Bromfield's**, sorry, Whitesnake's Here I Go Again.

Though Jason had left the stage to loud applause, the evening was not quite over as arguments still raged at the bar as to the merits of I'm A Celebrity, with members variously describing it as "naff", "exploitative", "a sickening snapshot of a degraded society" and "quite good fun, actually". One member, though, did suggest that a little minor tinkering might make the show far more entertaining for the public, as well as helpfully ridding our nation of the burgeoning masses of pseudo-personalities rampaging uselessly across our screens. For a start, we could change the title to the infinitely more eye-catching Celebrity Colosseum, or perhaps the more descriptive Those Celebrities About to Die Salute You. Are you getting the idea? Yes, if these vile people are really so desperate for money and attention, let them take up their swords and scrap for them. We could extend the programme by seeing them spend several weeks in gladiator school, being insulted, thrashed and generally toughened up in preparation for the big day. Come to think of it, that's not unlike the set-up of The X-Factor. Let's take the opportunity to get rid of that crock of poop, too. Let's combine I'm A Celebrity and The X-Factor into a murderous Celebrity X-Factor where contestants must prove themselves in the arena.

Can you imagine what brilliant telly that would make? Think of Carole Vorderman and Julie Goodyear slashing at each other with scimitars, the fear on their faces partly due to imminent death but mostly the suspicion that their hair is not looking good for the cameras. What about the insufferable Colin and Justin being hunted around a sandy ring by SAS gladiators with tridents and nets? How about deadly celebrity tag-teams? What a buzz you'd get from watching Cannon and Ball hacking Baddiel and Skinner to bloody pieces. Unlike I'm A Celebrity, though, there must be no bottling it, no way of escape. Anyone refusing to continue would be dragged away and locked in solitary confinement until the next week's show when they'd be summarily executed by the King of Crap Celebrities himself. How they'd quake as they heard the stern pronouncement "My name is Biggins - prepare to die". Tens of millions would tune in every week. The show could start with Julian Clary, complete with toga and laurel wreath, archly announcing "Let the games begin!" Commentators could include John Motson ("That's a fabulous shot by Sian Lloyd, it's gone straight into David Dickinson's neck like an arrow. Actually, it is an arrow, ha ha!") and, of course, Bill McClaren ("And with a perfectly timed feint and thrust, Smylie jabs the spear into Winton's eye in a glorious coup de grace. They'll be dancing and singing in the Borders tonight"). Perhaps the mayhem could be brought to a close with Chris Eubank shouting "Shtop thith thenthleth thlaughter!" Magic. Well, you'd watch it, wouldn't you?

### Thursday, December 1st

December was here at last and thoughts were turning to the immensely satisfying orgy of gluttony and drunkenness that is the festive season. Celebrations had started early down at the RAC as news filtered through that the club had again fared well at the National Acoustic Club Awards, this year held at the Royal Albert Hall. The biggest cheer was reserved for Secretary Steve Brown who'd been honoured for his minutes from the committee meeting in April, the Grand Jury having lauded him for "collating relevant data and presenting it with a wit and humanity to rival that of Dostoevsky's Crime And Punishment". Steve will now move on to the

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World Acoustic Club Awards, to be held in Bahrain in February, where his minutes stand to win him a top prize of \$200,000, plus automatic entry into the Minute Writers' Hall Of Fame. Here he'd join the esteemed likes of Billy-Bob Boone, the man who, at the infamous November, 1978 meeting of the Jonestown, Guyana Acoustic Club, noted that the punch tasted funny: Ricardo Ayala, who, at the April, 1993 meeting of the Branch Davidian Acoustic Club of Waco, Texas, recorded that the club's dodgy woofer sounded rather like a tank bursting through the walls: and the unfortunate Salim Ul-Haq, chopped into a thousand pieces for reporting how the entire membership of the Kabul Acoustic Club had been beheaded by the Taliban for politely clapping a rendition of American Pie. Mindful of the proud and often violent history of acoustic club minute-taking, Steve had paid homage to his predecessors with a heartfelt rendition of Monty Python's Always Look On The Bright Side Of Life. Rumours that **Pete Beach** had won an ASBO for his boisterous renditions of Maggie May proved to be entirely false.

With the Christmas decorations glittering under the lights, **Greg Aylmer** would open the evening with a hypnotic mandolin piece, then a lovely cover of The Wind That Shakes The Barley (a track recently re-written in praise of genetically modified crops and called The Barley That Shakes The Wind). Greg would be followed by **Gary Day** with a new, bucolic and Zeppelinesque instrumental called Erin's Dance and, with **Alan King** joining him on fiddle, the slow, chiming, wonderfully mournful Movie Song. Alan would stay up to accompany Steve Brown in a delightful take on White Christmas, then Steve would display masterful musicianship while running through Bert Jansch's Angie. Incidentally, have you heard the new rap re-write of White Christmas, concerning the conspicuous flaunting of tacky and ridiculously expensive jewellery? It's by Bling Crosby.

After the first interval, Rowan Noddings would blast us with an aggressive and wildly animated rendition of Rolf Harris's I've Lost My Mummy, then the slyly humorous The 'Arvest Of Love. Terry Williams would then deliver Woody Guthrie's dust-bowl disaster song Do Re Mi and the Napoleonic tune Two Recruiting Sergeants. After Terry would come Henry Rawl with a hilarious take on Fred Wedlock's Robin Hood, then a lovely performance of Simon and Garfunkel's Kathy's Song. He'd be followed by **The Willbees**, harmonising wonderfully on Kay Keyser's The Umbrella Man.

During the second break, excitement was high as the winner of the competition to provide the club's new Christmas anthem was announced. Throughout the year, all our musicians have been battling to pen the perfect festive track, with the winner set to receive a hamper jam-packed with handy household items and cleaning fluids from Teddy's Parlour. The song itself would be used to launch the club's Christmas do on December 16th, with **Jack Cobbe** playing it as a bodhran instrumental. In third place came Gary Day, his blood-spattered murder ballad Cruel Yule not quite hitting the required cheery mark. Second would be Rowan Noddings with his insane singalong Kris Kringle Nicked My Pringles. But the eventual winner would be Rob Carey with his infectious seasonal update of a Beatles classic that's chorus now went:

Elf! I need somebody.  
Elf! Not just anybody.  
Elf! I need someone.  
E-e-elf!

Well done, Rob. Unhappily, the hamper from Teddy's Parlour has gone missing, but Doreen has generously provided an alternative prize. A yard of Taboo is waiting for you at the bar.

Remaining on the Christmas tip, if any members are stuck for interesting presents to lavish upon their loved ones, the Raconteur would like to recommend Bushey's, a new emporium in the covered market in Bridgwater where, at ridiculously cheap prices, you can find gadgets and

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inventions deemed too way-out for ordinary establishments. Last week's special offers, for instance, included the Trim Reaper, a minute battery-operated combine harvester that, when pushed up your nose, slices off all that unwanted hair and sends it shooting out in neatly packed bales. Then there was the Chernodule, a device that gets rid of warts and unsightly moles with a tiny nuclear explosion, and the Chunderbuss, a diminutive shotgun you place on your tongue at bedtime that will automatically blast an airhole for you, should you vomit in the night, thus saving you from an embarrassing Jimi Hendrix-style death. Also, you can purchase a handy guide to alternative uses for household products you probably already own. Vanish, for example, may miraculously make stains disappear but, incredibly, it works just as well on party guests who outstay their welcome. Just squirt it directly into their eyes.

Back onstage, the delectable duo **Kathy Macmillan** and **Sally Pritchard** gave us a superb rendition of Dido's Hunter and, with Alan King back on the fiddle, Kate Rusby's Underneath The Stars. Then Gary Day took over with his powerful adaptation of Reynardine and, joined by Alan and Jack Cobbe, a take on Pretty Polly that was without doubt one of the strongest performances the RAC has seen. They'd be followed by **Keith** with the harsh nostalgia of Dropping Bombs On Britain Today and Titan Plays A Restless Game, both sounding a tad like the post-Syd Pink Floyd. Next Rowan Noddings, accompanied by John from The Willbees, laid down a cheerful When I'm Cleaning Windows, which did indeed turn out nice again, then Steve Brown would join Sally Pritchard for an unrehearsed but nevertheless shining version of KT Tunstall's The Other Side Of The World. Finally, the Jockstrap Ensemble, this week featuring Pete Beach, Alan, Jack, Rowan, Gary and Greg, charged madly into John Prine's Blow Up The TV and Woody Guthrie's Grand Coolie Dam, a set so invigorating that **The Vicar** was seen dancing with Kathy Macmillan. A rare sight, and a very welcome one. A merry Christmas to you all.

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

Members! It is vital that the absurd workload placed on Chairman Graham Cook be lightened immediately. If you happen to see him doing absolutely everything on his own, please offer to help. In fact, please offer to help anyway. The RAC is for everyone and, really, everyone should lend a hand.

Once again musicians are reminded that if they want to advertise any of their gigs in the Raconteur they only have to ask. Also, the Raconteur still has a boxful of jiffy bags if anyone would like them.

Please remember, if you aren't a member of the Ritz Social Club you can only attend the Ritz Acoustic Club once a month. Join up now - it costs sod all.

The Committee would like to know which member entered the very large parcel into the Surprise Christmas Raffle. While two hundredweight of manure may have its uses, it would be very difficult for our older and more arthritic members to carry home. Please remember, the RACs is an equal opportunities raffle and we must not discriminate against the weak, not matter how hilarious it might seem at the time. Fair play, though, the package was beautifully wrapped.

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Still on the subject of the Surprise Christmas Raffle, shame on the member who entered the envelope full of anthrax. Seeing all that white powder, our volunteer tester Greg Aylmer snorted up a major noseful and has been very drunk ever since. Well, every time we ask if he wants to go to Musgrove he keeps saying "Baaaar".

Members are hereby asked if they'd like to resurrect the club's old Boxing Day tradition of hill-sailing. For those not aware of the RAC's more ancient customs, in times of yore members used to race down the side of Brent Knoll in Norse-style longboats raised on wooden wheels, in hot pursuit of a round of cheddar cheese. One fellow would hang out the front, attempting to snare the cheese in a net on the end of a stick, while three more would sit at the back, ready to toss out a giant iron anchor as soon as they heard the front-man shout out the victory call "Cheeeese!" In the middle of the boat, up to 20 members dressed in bearskin underwear and pointy helmets would pretend to row. Honour disallowed them from wearing safety belts (though some would sneakily stick the soles of their feet to the deck with rancid lard). Consequently, when the anchor caught the turf and the boat came to a brain-rattling halt, the crew would fly off down the hill, occasionally to their deaths. The practice was actually banned in 1843 when, in a race involving three overcrowded longboats, there were no fewer than 167 fatalities (and one severely scraped shin) and the entire population of South Brent was wiped out. The village, after all the usual looting and pillaging, fell into total disrepair and is now a rather ordinary field. No cenotaph stands to immortalize the fallen, though it's said there is an aged widow-woman, clad in black rags, who, each year, on the anniversary of the disaster, lovingly places a triangle of Dairylea on the bloody spot. Shall we start it up again, or what?

### Malcolm's Fiendish Christmas Teaser

Ordinarily, as you know, members quake in their boots at the thought of the RAC's famous prize-less quiz. This month, though, by way of celebrating the birth of baby Jesus, you're being asked to battle against the greatest evil under the sun - Malcolm's horribly twisted brain. Yes, for one month only, the mighty Malcolm has taken a break from sexy dancing to devise a quiz of such infernal viciousness the Raconteur can only gape with admiration. Give it a go, yule hate it . . .

- 1) Which Bristol born artiste has penned hits for The Hollies and Chesney Hawkes as well as for himself?
- 2) Judge Dread had a string of hits inspired by Prince Buster's Big Five but what else links them?
- 3) Who are the top 3 UK artistes based upon sales of singles?
- 4) What 1960's group links Alisha's Attic and Chesney Hawkes?
- 5) Joe Brown's generally regarded as Cockney but he wasn't born in London. In which county was he born?
- 6) James Brown and Jocelyn Brown were both born in the Carolinas, but which was born in N. Carolina and which in S. Carolina?

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- 7) Brian Johnson replaced Bon Scott as vocalist for AC/DC but with which band did he first come to prominence?
- 8) Freddy Mercury was born in Zanzibar but in which African country was Holly Johnson (Frankie Goes to Hollywood) born?
- 9) James Michael Aloysius Bradford, better known as Jimmy Nail, has had one No. 1 hit. Name it.
- 10) Which was the 2nd Liverpool band to reach No.1 and the first to reach No. 1 with their first three singles?
- 11) Chris de Burgh is generally regarded as an Irish singer but in which country was he born?
- 12) For which country did Celine Dion win the 1988 Eurovision Song Contest?
- 13) Which British female singer had 2 No.1's before her 16th birthday?
- 14) Which member of The Small Faces did not join The Faces, and which band did he form instead?
- 15) What feat does Leo Sayer share with his one-time manager Adam Faith?
- 16) Which world superstar was once a member of Five Dimensions, Hoochie Coochie Men, Steampacket and The Jeff Beck Group?
- 17) Who are these better known as?
  - a) Derek Dick
  - b) Marie Lawrie
  - c) Richard Penniman
  - d) Richard Sarstedt
  - e) Alex Hughes
  - f) Marvin Lee Aday
- 18) Who are these Smiths better known as?
  - a) Reginald Smith
  - b) Kim Smith
  - c) James Todd Smith
  - d) James Marcus Smith
- 19) Which actress did Paul Simon marry in 1983?
- 20) Carly Simon first charted in 1964 as half of the folk duo The Simon Sisters. But what is her sister's name?

### Answers to last month's quiz were as follows:

1) David Daniel Kominski 2) 5 to 7 hours 3) Lulu 4) Voltaire 5) Charlie Drake 6) Torquemada 7) The Great Society 8) Edward the Confessor 9) Girls Together Outrageously 10) 6 feet 11) Judi Dench 12) Anne of Cleves 13) Eric Clapton, Ginger Baker, Rick Grech 14) Dog 15) Buffy Sainte-Marie 16) John Lennon 17) The Journeymen 18) Undecagon 19) Tom Jones 20) German