

The Raconteur

## The Raconteur The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter February 2005

Thursday, January 20th

The New Year had begun in earnest. All our resolutions were broken and long-forgotten, and we were better people for it - far less guilt-ridden and snappy, far more tolerant of our own peccadilloes and those of others. We smiled benignly at each other, fellow sinners, brothers and sisters in weakness. Yes, those few hours of torment before we'd cravenly succumbed to temptation had certainly been worth it in the long run.

At the bar, all the talk was of the long-running media furore over Prince Harry wearing a Nazi armband to a party. The war in Iraq, the Asian tsunami, all were swept from newspaper front covers as they pilloried the silly little fool, demanding that he be gated for life, that he spend his next summer holidays imprisoned in Auschwitz and even that he send a personal note of apology to anyone who's ever seen Schindler's List. Many at the bar considered it to be a farce, a clear case of victimisation. That's the second most popular fancy dress costume in the country, why's Hazza taking all the flak, they asked. Hasn't he got it hard enough being a carrot-top, a gingernob, a damned Duracell? Besides, the kid's German anyway - it's his national costume! It was noted that Harry's dad blustered his disapproval rather quietly. He was probably glad his son hadn't togged himself up as a lady of the night, as most British men do, given half a chance.

The evening was opened (as is usual in the absence of the mighty **Colin Hillier**) by stage manager and club stalwart **Greg Aylmer**, who treated us to a pacy reel then a mournful ditty on his trusty mandolin. Second up was **Gordon Campbell**, surely Canada's finest export to this country since Greg Rusedski, with three pointed narratives. One concerned a dead way of life in the Canadian outback, another a con-man ruined by bad luck then saved by Jesus, while the third, where a WW1 soldier sought solace with a French whore, was a Colonel Blimp-like study of the passing of the gallant Old World. It was impressively evocative stuff, as were **Steve Brown's** instrumental covers of Close To You and Eleanor Rigby.

After the riotous success of the chat-breaks at the Christmas party, it had been decided to split sessions into three sets, so we now had our first intermission. Conversation naturally turned to TRISH LILES and CAROLINE BOYCE who, after their culinary triumph at Yuletide, were organising a festival of fruit pies, cakes, gateaux, profiteroles and sorbets from around the world, to be titled Pudstock. This, it was thought, was far more tasteful than the original title, Operation Dessert Storm.

Starting the second set were **Roy Cramer** and **Eileen Hardachre** with a version of Carole King's Will You Love Me Tomorrow then, amazingly, a storming take on Jefferson Airplane's Somebody To Love, complete with psychedelic guitar freak-out. It's a brilliant song, that one, but such a terrible tease. "Don't you WANT somebody to love?" it shamelessly demands to know. "Well, now that you mention it, it HAS been a while" you reply, hopefully. "Don't you NEED somebody to love?" it continues, seeming to offer a world of promiscuous fun. "Er, actually there IS a bit of a commotion going on in the old nether regions", you answer, bashfully, "I was hoping no one had noticed". "You better FIND somebody to love" it ends in a maliciously mocking finale, to which you can only retort "Well, thanks for the advice. I don't know WHAT I would've done

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without you".

So refreshing was Roy and Eileen's performance that they were asked to stay up for two more, one of their own pastoral folk numbers and, with Greg up on mandolin, an entertaining stab at Miss Dynamite's Dy-Na-Mi-Tee. Then would come **Pete Beach** with Marty Robbins' horsebreaking saga The Strawberry Roan and, complete with harmonica, Bob Dylan's Don't Think Twice It's All Right. Next up would be **Tim Bromfield** with a passionate take on Poison's Every Rose Has Its Thorn and then his own Now You're Gone, the second as metallic, melodic and maudlin as the first. Closing the second set would be **Nigel Snook** with some scintillating Spanishness and some polished blues. Nigel would compliment Gordon Campbell on his delivery (the delivery of his songs, that is, not of Nigel's milk in the morning) and request Gram Parsons' Hickory Wind, a request Gordon granted as the third set opened. He continued on with a faster Mexican-style number and then David Olney's Illegal Cargo, about a cross-border drug-runner on his final mission.

It was getting very American, most unlike the previous weekend when several club members had attended the annual wassailing (pronounced Wossling, fact fans) out at Westcroft Farm. What a night. It was a rush of pork pies and apple cake, roasting pigs and foaming cider, colourful mummers and rocking blues. Despite being held in a farmyard, there was far more fun than dung - we even got to scream abuse at evil spirits in the trees. And still, though we were drunker than the sailor the band was singing about, though we qualified as Binge Drinkers with marks of 100%, still there was no trouble. What are Binge Drinkers, anyway - what IS all the fuss about 24-hour opening? When you go to a pub, how often are you attacked, abused or vomited upon by the feared legions of Binge Drinkers you read about? Surely far more offensive and intrusive are those people who endlessly moan on about how their wife/girlfriend/husband (delete as applicable) doesn't understand them, how they're overworked and underpaid, how those Kazakhstani immigrants are nicking all our jobs, how petrol prices, speed cameras, Council taxes and global temperatures are all on the up, and it's all that bloody Blair's fault. That's right, let's sort out the Whinge Drinkers first. Then, if you really CAN'T forgive Prince Harry for his thoughtless misdemeanours, we'll go after the Ginge Drinkers. Let's get our priorities right, eh?

The evening continued with the incomparable **Jockstrap Ensemble**, this week featuring Pete Beach, Greg, Roy Cramer and **Jack Cobbe**. With their usual infectious gusto, they piled into Maggie May, The Wurzels' Pill, Pill I Love Thee Still, and Woody Guthrie's Grand Coolie Dam, the last song being one Guthrie was commissioned to write in 1941 to celebrate hydro-electric projects in the Pacific North-West. Then Roy and Eileen nailed House Of The Rising Sun and Crispian St Peter's You Were On My Mind. Next up, would be Steve Brown with Henry Mancini's Pink Panther theme, and an impish comment questioning the Raconteur's factual accuracy in the last issue. In turn, the Raconteur muttered darkly into his Blackthorn that he was gonna GET that Brown next month. The pen is mightier than the sword, and all that. But he quickly reconsidered. The pen can be mightier than the sword, it's true, but only if you happen to be fighting a duel in a very narrow wardrobe.

Following the impudent and annoyingly talented Brown, the session was closed by Tim Bromfield with another of his own numbers, a pained tale of rejection possibly called I Guess It's Over. It proved an inappropriate title as, with Tim on one again, every time we guessed it was over it wasn't. Eventually it would make even cheeky-boy Brown's Pink Panther seem as punchy and succinct as the Ramones. Still, it was an impassioned end to another fine session.

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Another glorious session, marked by birthday celebrations for Trish Liles, and the grand opening of the new club toilets. As up till now there had been no proper access for people with no arms and no legs who couldn't afford a wheelchair, EC regulations had demanded refurbishment, and so a complicated ramp-and-pulley system had duly been installed, so these poor folk would no longer have to slither through everyone else's messy sprayings.

Onstage, the evening began with Greg Aylmer's now-traditional mandolin salvo, followed by **Ken Jackson** with two atmospheric, ramshackle Woody Guthrie numbers, Grand Coolie Dam and I Ain't Got No Home. Then there'd be the excellent **Gary French** with a melodic and heavily emotional take on Shel Silverstein's Sing Me A Rainbow and the exciting crime epic Wild Colonial Boy. Next up would be **The Willbees** - two guys, two guitars and some truly beautiful vocal harmonies - who'd give us Gerry Rafferty's Rick Rack and the Ink Spots' classic Java Jive. Then came the welcome return of **Liz May** and **Jeز Plumley** with an as-yet untitled new song brimful of pretty rustic imagery, and a rendition of their breathy Blue Day, something of a club classic. The first set would be brought to a close by **Nick Maddocks** with two new tracks of his own, the first regretting not having time to delve into the American literary pantheon as often as he'd like, the second being a jauntier bluegrass effort.

The interval saw rumours sweep the club that **Jon Austin** would soon be moving permanently to Leicester, leaving us grieving in a cloud of Aston Martin exhaust fumes. This awful news was tempered somewhat by the shock reappearance of **Tony Harvey**, taking a brief panto-break. Unfortunately, he didn't play for us, but he did leak some info on a near-album's worth of material he's been writing for future performance. Apparently, he's penned a glorious heavy metal epic, inspired by the sight of a lone windsurfer battling giant waves while silhouetted against a magenta sunset, to be titled Bloke On The Water. Then there's the Kate Bush-like tale of a man struggling to raise a family in the shadow of ever-escalating debt (Running Up That Bill), a cheery singalong celebrating the liberating aspects of fast food culture (2-4-6-8 Takeaway) and the paranoid, Kafka-esque nightmare of a man who wakes one morning to the horrible realisation that he's been transformed into a small, yellow bear (A Boy Named Pooh). More controversially, there's also a song courageously exploring Tony's instinctive dread of dieting (If I Were A Carpenter).

After the interval, Gordon Campbell took to the stage to give us his own Dorothy's Song, about revisiting a girlfriend of 20 years before. Then Steve Brown, noting that it was the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, played Joe Satriani's Tears In The Rain, the saddest song he knows, and Dave Brubeck's infinitely more cheerful Take Five. This fine performance turned our thoughts immediately to the **The Milverston Crew**. Regular readers will be aware of last year's wicked attempt to wrest Pete Beach away from us by threats and menaces. Well, rumour has it that, with typical skulduggery, they have recently and covertly tapped up Steve Brown! Now, we may have roasted him a few times, but poaching him is utterly unacceptable. At the bar, cunning counter-plots were being hatched to kidnap **Kathy Macmillan**, **Sally Pritchard** and **Their Scottish Friend**. One suggestion was to have **Steve Holford** infiltrate their club and sing Old Man River, so we could steal the girls away in all the confusion when the foundations start to crumble. Another was to have Steve Brown give them the full-length version of the Pink Panther theme, which would give us at least an hour and a half to get them back up the A38 before anyone noticed they were gone. Treasurer **Doug Liles'** recommendation that we just drive a JCB straight through the wall and nab them only served to revive suspicions that *he* was indeed the mastermind behind the failed Millennium Dome robbery.

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Following Steve, **Dave Ilsley** would leap up with Pete Beach for a raucous and uplifting rendition of The Wild Rover. Then **Gary Day** would lead us into the interval with the fraught American gothic of his own Sins, then Pearl Jam's Indifference. Back at the bar, conversation had turned to the burning question of why the blind use labradors as guide dogs. The answer was as weird as it was frightening. Labradors, as it turns out, are the only sizeable breed who do not wish us harm, who would not deliberately and cunningly lead us to disaster. Other breeds are different. First they befriend you, then they study you, then, when they're good and ready, they finish you - lead you towards an open manhole, nudge you gently into the traffic or, more likely, arrange themselves at a perfect distance from a sharp-edged coffee-table as you approach and BANG it's all over. Ever tripped over your dog? It wasn't an accident, you know. They may look dopey but these creatures are, in reality, killing machines, fuzzy assassins.

But how can this be, you ask. Death rates among dog owners would be sky-high - surely we'd have noticed. And that's the clever part. These hounds may spend several years pretending to learn obedience, but this is not their real area of expertise. Once ensconced, usually alone, with their victim, they study YOU. They learn your habits and mannerisms, your likes and dislikes, until they know you inside-out. It's famously been said that owners come to resemble their pets but, actually, FATALLY, it's the other way round. And, once they've done away with you, they BECOME you. Yes, a quick shave and a pair of shades and they have ASSUMED YOUR IDENTITY. Now the police aren't looking for a dead body, just a runaway dog, and how long's THAT search going to last? The deadly simplicity of their murderous scheme beggars belief.

You still don't believe it? Well, consider this. It's a little-known fact that Patricia Highsmith's renowned novel The Talented Mr Ripley was actually inspired by a lurcher called Mr Doodles. Her publishers demanded she change the species of her demonic hero as no one would take it seriously. They still don't. And so dog owners (Owners? You poor, doomed FOOLS!) continue to be slaughtered in their thousands as Earth gradually, secretly, becomes a canine version of the Planet of the Apes. We will see the results soon enough. Schmacko dispensing machines on railway stations. A change in restaurant etiquette as cutlery is banned. No people allowed on Burnham beach between April and November. It's all coming. You've probably said it yourself, but didn't know how right you were - this country is going to the dogs. Oh, the horror . . . the horror . . .

After the break, Gary French, with Nick Maddocks on mandolin, would deliver a superb take on Townes Van Zandt's If I Needed You, then Tim O'Brien's Forty-Nine Keep On Talkin'. Then The Willbees would return with Haven Gillespie's soft and gentle Louisiana Fairytale, and a super-romantic number of their own. Nigel Snook would then impress once more with a light and delightful run through Gordon Lightfoot's Early Morning Rain, before laying down a thoroughly groovy Duster Bennett-style Bright Lights, Big City. Stepping back up, Gordon would now deliver a quiet and heartfelt I Shall Be Released, with Gary French on backing vocals, then a reprise of Illegal Cargo. The session would then be brought to a climax (ooer) by the JOCKSTRAP ENSEMBLE, this time featuring Pete Beach, Greg and Nigel. They were at their very best, giving us a four-track set culminating in a genuinely moving Sweet Sixteen. A tremendous finale to yet another corking session.

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

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Please note that the club's next gig will be by HOOVER THE DOG, on Thursday, February 24th (a club night!). These are a Welsh borders trio and festival favourites, playing fiddle, guitar, accordion and bazouki, and mixing Celtic tunes with English trad. Inventive and good fun. Tickets are £5 only and available from GC Music (01278-794-434).

Musicians! Please note that the club night on March 3rd will be a tribute to the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. This means that AT LEAST HALF of the material you play must have been performed by those bands. On a personal note, anyone playing Wild Horses, Sister Morphine or Memory Motel by the Stones will earn the Raconteur's eternal gratitude. Well, four minutes of gratitude, maybe.

Message from the Committee 1: Will the members who keep sneaking into Treasurer Doug Liles' house and moving things so he can't find them please stop it.

Musicians! Yes, YOU again. We have more info on the Frome Festival thing. The gig you're invited to play is at the Griffin pub, on the afternoon of July 3rd. Please speak to Greg if you're interested in performing. In fact, speak to Greg even if you're not. He's very lonely.

Members are reminded that the club is now every Thursday and NEVER on a Friday. Don't you understand, you pretty little fool? It's every Thursday. EVERY THURSDAY.

Message from the Committee 2: Secretary Steve Brown would like to make it clear that he had nothing to do with the break-up of Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston. Though he did phone Mr Pitt on many occasions last year, to try to persuade him to play Santa at the club's Christmas do, he did not at any point leave messages that Ms Aniston might have thought came from a besotted girlie. So, not guilty.

Members are also reminded that Gary French, Gordon Campbell and Nick Maddocks all have CDs for sale at the door. Happily, all three are currently out-selling Keane and The Scissor Sisters. In this club, at least.

Message from the Committee 3: Anyone interested in Doug Liles' planned JCB trip to Milverton should sign the sheet on the noticeboard. Full details are unavailable right now, for obvious reasons.

### The Ritz Acoustic Club Prize-less Quiz

Last month's quiz was won by The Boyce Brigade with a healthy score of 16 out of 27. They should immediately pester Chairman Graham Cook who promised he'd stump up a prize from GC Music. This month, to take the pressure off you (because you so obviously collapsed under the strain - you chokers!) we've decided to offer no prize at all. Zilch. Nada. That's right, you get nowt for owt in this game. It's just for fun. So off you go. Answers next month. Good luck.

- 1) Marie Curie won the 1903 Nobel prize for Physics for discovering radium. In which country was she born?
- 2) Name the sultry German singer with The Velvet Underground?
- 3) In which king's labyrinth did the fearsome Minotaur dwell?

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- 4) Which band connects guitarists Jimmy Page, Jeff Beck and Eric Clapton?
- 5) What was the name of Tin-Tin's little white dog?
- 6) In which town was Deep Purple axe hero Ritchie Blackmore born?
- 7) Name the four members of the nuclear Addams Family. In which film did the actress playing the vampish mother star alongside Elvis Presley? Now, name the Addams Family's bald uncle, their hairy cousin, their butler and the disembodied hand that answered their phone.
- 8) Who was Oscar-nominated for his performance as the bloodsucker in 2000's Shadow Of The Vampire?
- 9) Name the central family in John Steinbeck's The Grapes Of Wrath.
- 10) What connects The Sun Ain't Gonna Shine Anymore, T-Bone Shuffle and Gary Lineker?
- 11) Name the original and sadly long-dead singer and songwriter of The Wurzels.
- 12) What name is given to the practice of clearing moorland by burning the heather and gorse?
- 13) Name Hamlet's lover, who suffers despair and madness, then drowns.
- 14) What's the connection between The Sweeney, King Lear and famed goth rock band All About Eve?
- 15) What caused the odd colour of Frank Zappa's notorious "yellow snow"?
- 16) What was Leadbelly's real name?
- 17) Who baked the famous cake on the cover of the Rolling Stones' 1969 masterpiece Let It Bleed?
- 18) What's the proper word for throwing someone out the window?
- 19) Who is the actress wife of comedian Mel Brooks? In which 1980 movie did she star with Anthony Hopkins and John Hurt? And what connects her to both Paul Simon and a former Irish president?
- 20) In which 1973 hit would you find the line "I had some dreams, they were clouds in my coffee"?
- 21) What was Mussolini's first name?
- 22) Who wrote Gary French fave Sylvia's Mother? (No asking Gary unless you've bought one of his CDs)
- 23) Which city lies at the northern end of the M1?

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24) Who narrated Jeff Wayne's 1978 sci-fi double-album War Of The Worlds? And who played the mad preacher?

25) Who killed Cock Robin?

Answers to last month's quiz were as follows:

1) Greg Lake 2) Mediterranean, Red Sea 3) Shaddap You Face, Ultravox's Vienna 4) Sir Robert Walpole 5) Harry Lillis Crosby 6) Weston-Super-Mare 7) Cleo Laine 8) Looby Loo 9) Muddy Waters 10) Nicolas Cage 11) Mickey Dolenz, Davy Jones, Mike Nesmith, Peter Tork, Jimi Hendrix 12) Silver 13) Aphrodite's Child 14) Argentinian 15) Fred Neil 16) His toes 17) Sandy Denny 18) Kevin Costner 19) Andrew Motion 20) Natasha Richardson, Vanessa Redgrave