

The Rackonteur

The newsletter that stretches the truth

February, 2006

Thursday, January 26th

Gosh, it was nippy. However, as we moved ever further from magical Christmas and ever closer to freezing February, our fake furs, fleeces and thermal body-stockings were doing their jobs to a tee. So, with all members snug and warm, talk at the bar inevitably turned to the upcoming Winter Olympics and Britain's chances of international glory. Our best hopes, the experts claimed, lay with those women who sweep the ice very quickly with brooms, or perhaps with that girl who slides down hills on a tea-tray. As for the other events, no one, it turned out, had ever really cared about them, though DOREEN did say she liked the sound of the four-man bob.

The thing is, all this snow business alienates us, we don't understand it and, let's face it, we're a little scared of it. When we think of snow, we don't think of fun or sport, we think of motorway pile-ups and people trapped and dying in their cars. It's been the same throughout history. Our only national hero who had anything to do with snow was Robert Falcon Scott, and look what happened to *him*. But hang on, you say, what about John Curry, or Robin Cousins, or Torvill and Dean? Well, for a start they were on ice, not snow. For two, that's dancing, not a proper sport. And for three, it's really easy, as the gazelle-like David Seaman has proven during TV's latest slab of sub-celebrity foolishness (apart from the bit where he carelessly swung his lady partner face-first into the ice, of course). Why, the Raconteur himself once achieved a perfect score for his figure-skating. Granted, it was a perfectly *round* score, but that's hardly the point. At least, like our most respected Winter Olympian Eddie the Eagle, he had a go. Unlike when he thought of trying out the Giant Slalom, got his thong caught on the ski-lift (don't ask) and was left hanging in humiliating Alpine rotation for the best part of six hours, the sub-zero temperatures reducing his ordinarily immense manhood to the size and colour of a blue M&M.

While (sort of) on the subject of thongs, long-time members will remember that hugely embarrassing event back in 1974, when former club secretary Reg Puddy attempted to get the club's newly formed Gospel choir on BBC1 on Sunday evening. Due to his terrible lisp, however, there was an awful mix-up resulting in them singing I Don't Know How To Love Him on Holland's infamous gay Christian porn programme Thongs Of Praise. Naturally, Reg was summarily sacked for his mistake but, on a more positive note, his impassioned introduction of the choir's choice from "Jethuth Chritht Thuperthtar" remains one of the most requested repeats on the Netherlands' most popular TV blooper show.

Onstage, the evening was kicked off by the incomparable GREG AYLMER, first on violin for Carrickfergus, then on mandolin for the Gaelic air Rosin A Bow. He'd be followed by MC-for-the-night ROWAN NODDINGS with his a cappella ode to a greedy cat, Jonah's Got A One-Track Mind, and a show-stopping version of Stubby Kaye's Barbra Streisand pastiche, Second Hand Nose. Then would come ROB CAREY with cultured renditions of Bobby Vee's More Than I Can Say and Billy Fury's I Will, and then GRAHAM McPHERSON with two of his own songs, both lyrical celebrations of the beauty of nature and both with an upbeat and melodic Crowded House style. Taking us into the first interval would be NIGEL SNOOK, at his virtuoso best with two storming flamenco pieces.

During the break, all the talk at the bar was of Gordon Brown's plan to lead the Labour Party into the next election (if he couldn't manage to stab Tony Blair in the back and usurp power beforehand). Having already suffered a bewildering array of stealth taxes, and with pricey ID cards on the horizon, members wondered how Brown could possibly squeeze us any harder. Surely there was no truth in the rumour that, in his first term as PM, he was plotting to charge us for the air that we breathe? Apparently, scientists have already invented a slimline device, known as an air-o-meter, which will fit neatly onto the throat of every citizen, measuring the length and

depth of every breath they take. Linked via satellite to a remote computer, this will allow tens of thousands of overpaid bureaucrats to calculate our air bills and invoice us on the first of the month. Failure to cough up will result in a hefty fine and, if payment is still not forthcoming, the air-o-meter will close off the perpetrator's windpipe, causing them to go blue, thrash about a bit, and die. In a further eco-friendly move, a second device, fitted to the ankle, will capture the energy they expend in their death throes and transfer it into the National Grid, for the benefit of everyone.

A further advantage will be that the police can breathalyse suspects from vast distances away. Of course, those wishing to go private and carry their own oxygen tanks will be permitted to do so, as long as they wear their masks at all times (and pay for a replacement ID card with an appropriate new photo). Once the success of the scheme has been calculated (ie. total revenues have been counted), Mr Brown's second term may well bring a bill charging us for the amount of ozone-layer-destroying carbon dioxide we breathe out.

Back onstage, GARY DAY would deliver his two most dramatic folk adaptations, *She Moves Through The Fair* and *Blackwaterside*, then TIM and ROWAN would give us a rough, rocking take on Nickelback's *Feelin' Way Too Damn Good* and a truly energised cover of Dispatch's *Railway*. Next, with Greg Aylmer accompanying on mandolin, the irrepressible PETE BEACH would perform powerful renditions of *The Rare Old Times* and *Freeborn Man Of The Travelling People*, before the ever more confident JOHN DIXON took us into the second interval with *Stormy Weather* and *Summertime*, Rowan Noddings adding some deliberately dated and finely judged vocals.

During the interval, attention turned to the case of the Croatian lumberjack, Stjepan Lizacic, 56, who was suing his local health authority because they'd given him a woman's kidney in a transplant operation, and now he preferred housework and knitting to watching football on the telly and getting legless with the lads. Was it possible, we wondered, that a woman does the housework because her kidneys genetically demand it? Or was it more likely she only does it because her husband is watching football on the telly and getting legless with the lads? Nature or nurture - you decide.

Just as controversial was the case brought up in *The Sun* of a young man racked by uncontrollable jealousy. It wasn't that he couldn't stand his girlfriend talking to other men, or that he couldn't bear to see others better-off than himself. No, his problem was down below. Every time he visited a public urinal he couldn't help but peer over at the guys beside him and check out the length and girth of their prime assets. If they were bigger than him he'd be seized by an envious rage and attack them, often beating them senseless, his point presumably being that size isn't everything. Deeply ashamed of his actions, what was he to do? Well, RAC members, as ever, had plenty of ideas. A penis pump was mooted, as was a catheter, so he wouldn't have to go to the loo at all. Therapy was another possibility, so too was a long spell in Broadmoor. Ultimately, though, the best answer put forward was mirrors. Cunningly placed around the fly area, they give the startling impression that you have a *beast* down there, an angry, purple-faced monster so proud and potent it makes other men's rods look like cocktail sticks. Or so they say. *Ahem.*

Onstage, the evening would continue with the mighty STEVE HOLFORD delivering a Paul Robeson classic from *Sanders Of The River*. It was another amazing effort, with Steve's extraordinary bass rumble continuing long after he'd closed his mouth. He'd be followed by Tim (Rowan having departed) with another excellent take on Nirvana's emotional but repressed *Something In The Way* and a strong version of Paul Weller's *You Do Something To Me*. Next up would be Graham McPherson with two more of his innocent, ecstatic and mystical numbers, Rob Carey with Joe Brown's *A Picture Of You*, and DAVE HARRIS with an instrumental accordion version of Warren Zevon's *Werewolves Of London*, sadly featuring just a single crowd-pleasing *A-oooooh*. TIM BROMFIELD would then seize the musical baton, charging into impassioned renditions of Whitesnake's *Here I Go Again* and his own desperate *Living On A Knife Edge*. After this, the session would be brought to a shuddering close by THE JOCKSTRAP ENSEMBLE, this week featuring Pete, Nigel, Greg and JACK COBBE, who piled through *Digging My Potatoes*, John Prine's *Blow Up The TV* and, with Dave Harris on harmonica and Steve Holford and DOUG LILES providing backing vocals from the back, a stirring *Goodnight Irene*. It had been another tremendous night.

Thursday, February 16th

At last, at last. After years of people saying "You know, we *really* ought to have a folk festival" and then doing bugger all about it, we *are* actually going to have a folk festival. Yes, on Saturday, September 2nd, 2006, Burnham-On-Sea is holding its first annual FolkFest where pubs throughout the town will resound all day to the sound of gigs, jams and open mikes, featuring our own local talent, musicians from clubs around the south-west and top-notch dudes like Ron Trueman Border. At the Community Centre there'll be arts, crafts and music and dance workshops, there'll be a children's ceilidh courtesy of ROY CRAMER and his group, an adult ceilidh hosted by the renowned band Gypsy's Kiss and a host of family-style entertainment, all for the princely sum of . . . nothing. That's right, it's all free (apart from the ceilidh which will be ticket-only in order to pay for hiring the Princess Hall). And the next day it's *still* free as we have our annual Folk In The Park do in Manor Gardens. For regular updates go to www.folkfest.co.uk and, if you'd like to join in or help out in any way, simply announce your intentions to Jack Cobbe or GRAHAM COOK.

There have actually already been several savage arguments as to the entertainment we should put on. One school of opinion believed that we should keep it all simple, musical and to the point. A dissident school of uber-folkies, though, thought we should dig back into the town's past and re-enact some of the public entertainments of yesteryear. Cudgelling was one idea put forward, where contestants stand nose-to-nose and, on the count of three, attempt to beat each other unconscious with heavy sticks (the mixed league was very popular, apparently). Then there was the ducking stool, a practice we could perhaps modify so that it would have nothing to do with scolds or witches and simply be about who could hold their breath for the longest (without dying, of course - death would lead to instant disqualification as there's nothing brave or clever about staying underwater when you're dead). A third possibility was moonraking, though with the proviso that anyone actually managing to catch the moon in their net would have to cede mineral rights to Sedgemoor District Council. Beyond these, we could perhaps have the stocks, where some minor personality - maybe Neville Jones, *he* obviously likes to be the centre of attention - would be pelted with rotten veg and small stones (we could sell these by the bag to raise funds). And we could cap the event off with live witch trials. Judges could circulate throughout the day, arresting anyone behaving suspiciously, like bearing a wart, or feeding their seagull familiar, or playing the Devil's music (hmm, *that* could make it tricky). Then people could pay a nominal fee to search for the Devil's mark on the suspects' bodies, seeking with needles the spot that feels no pain. In fact, we could even combine this process with a welcome-all-comers game of Pin The Tail On The Donkey. There, it's *really* coming together now.

Onstage, our perennial opener Greg Aylmer took up his violin to deliver the rootsy Arkansas Traveller and A Lark In The Morning. He'd be replaced by the admirable SAM BAKER with two more of her passionate, literate numbers. Next would be CRAIG from Weston with Radiohead's Lucky, then Nigel Snook with a Spanish hill dance instrumental that was both mournful and hugely celebratory. He'd move on into the impressive blues of the comedy murder ballad Delia's Gone, then make way for newcomer BEN HAZEL, first on guitar with Marc Cohn's Walking In Memphis, then on keyboards for an appropriately forlorn take on Tears For Fears' Mad World.

The first interval would see much wailing and gnashing of teeth as the government had today decided on a total ban on smoking in pubs, clubs, restaurants, sporting venues, shopping malls and anywhere else those dirty smoking bastards might think they were safe. They even said you couldn't smoke in your own house if you had workmen in, cos then it would be a workplace, wouldn't it, you nicotine-stained *idiot*. Fortunately for RAC regulars, Doreen had come up with a sly plan to circumvent the new rulings. Thanks to a new time-machine Greg had inadvertently invented in his lab under the stage while trying to create the world's first hands-free plectrum, members fancying a quick puff will be able to step into the club's smart unisex lavatories, pull three times on the flush and be instantly transported to the Year 2047, a time when smoking will be compulsory for everyone over the age of 8. Yes, it seems that in the not-too-distant future people will have finally recognised that smokers are far calmer and better-rounded citizens, as well as being much more fun and sexier in general.

After the first break, Graham McPherson would step up with two of his lovely, wondering songs (a kind of sonic equivalent to Edward G Robinson's death scene in Soylent Green). Then Roy Cramer and EILEEN HARDACRE would confirm their catholic tastes with rousing renditions of The Kinks' Days and Coldplay's Fix You. They'd be followed by those Milverton missies SALLY PRITCHARD and KATHY MACMILLAN, for the first time accompanied by Sally's son JOE on drums (it appears she's attempting to breed herself a band). He'd engage in some smart brush-work while the ladies lent their wonderful harmonies to Dido's Hunter and the Indigo Girls' Least

Complicated. Next up would be the sick-makingly talented STEVE BROWN who, in honour of Valentine's week, first gave us Francesco Molino's luscious Romanza, then a medley of works by Arcangelo Corelli and Francisco Tarrega. Members might be interested to know that, so keen was Tarrega to replicate the soft, sweet guitar sounds he heard in his head, he cut his fingernails down bit by bit until they disappeared under his skin. Now *that's* dedication, eh?

During the second interval, discussion at the bar turned to those outrageous stories in the News Of The World concerning as-yet-unnamed Premiership footballers who, amongst other things, like to set their mobiles to Vibrate, shove them up their burns and phone each other up. Thoughts flew back to the sorry tale of one of our local councillors (who shall also remain nameless), a straight and public-minded citizen but also a secret pleasure-seeker with a fatal streak of perversity. While indulging one day in a pervy bout of Premiership-style phone sex, he found himself suddenly and unavoidably called to an Emergency Council Meeting convened at an instant's notice by the Chief Constable of the Avon and Somerset Constabulary. *Nightmare!* With no time to prize out his handset, he rushed off to the council chambers and spent a nervous hour praying (well, *hoping* - God has a block put on prayers like that) that no one would call him, all efforts to turn off the infernal machine having proved fruitless, it not being easy to unlock a mobile with your intestines. But, if he was squirming to start with, it was as nothing compared to the mortification he felt when Vodaphone decided to offer him 10% off his next £15 Top-Up. Perhaps his agitation might've gone unnoticed had he set his phone correctly, perhaps he might've blamed hunger pangs or a stomach bug for the rumbling commotion. But when the rumbling stopped and a tune burst forth from between his buttocks, a tune usually accompanied by the words "I wish I was in the land of cotton", all was lost. It's impossible to maintain a stern air of officialdom when your bum's sounding off like General Lee in The Dukes Of Hazzard. The result was inevitable. Siemens says You're sacked. The poor fellow was forced to retire forthwith from public life, though he did later enjoy a massive financial windfall due to his invention of the Comm-dom, an ingenious cross between a Durex and a Motorola that, sold under the tag-line "Guaranteed a good reception", would revolutionize the adult toy industry.

These stories add a vile new dimension to our everyday lives. Next time you call someone's mobile and there's no answer, ask yourself this: have they been detained by business or family matters? Has their battery run out? Or are they rolling around on their living-room floor in paroxysms of anal delight? Surely a new generation of answer-machine messages is called for? "Sorry, I can't come to the phone, I'm too busy coming to the phone" might be one, or "I *am* here, but you'll have to speak up", or even "Agh! Urgh! Agh! Yes! Yes! Keep talking! *Keep talking!*"

Back onstage, PAUL BURN would treat us to a spirited cover of Where Do You Go To My Lovely and a smooth take on The Beatles' In My Life, before Sam Baker returned, accompanied by Nigel Snook, with her own powerful numbers Sentimental Heart and Indian Walking. Next MARK PORTER would deliver the down-home blues of Lynyrd Skynyrd's Ballad Of Curtis Loew and the Boomtown Rats' much-banned I Don't Like Mondays. Then JASON GREY would give us a heartfelt treatment of Del Amitri's The Last To Know, before giving way to Roy Cramer and Eileen Hardacre (with young Joe on drums) and Jefferson Airplane's White Rabbit. Joe would stay up to be joined by Kathy and Sally for Anna Ryder's Sailing Boat, then Nigel would execute a joyously shambolic take on Amazing Grass. As is usually the case, the session would then be brought to a thumping close by The Jockstrap Ensemble, this week featuring Pete Beach, Nigel, Joe, Greg, Roy and Jack Cobbe and kicking out Digging My Potatoes, Show Me A Pretty Little Number and beautifully fluttering Sweet Sixteen. It had been another winner.

But it wasn't over yet. At the bar preparations were being made to create a new all-girl super-group to quickly step in and clean up before the much-vaunted Spice Girls reunion. They'd take the best bits from the Spice Girls' original masterplan, they said, but add a few extras to widen their appeal, thus making world domination all the easier. SAMANTHA would appear in the Scary Spice role, personifying Girl Power with her steely gaze and also helping to kick punters out after gigs, often before they'd finished their

drinks. Doreen, of course, would be Festive Spice, garbed all year round in her Sexy Santa costume, TRISH would be Raffle Spice, making a fortune by raffling off the girls' used stage clothes, while LAURA SMITH would be Literary Spice, filling in the musical interludes usually reserved for dodgy rapping with recitals of the long-lost poetry of Sappho - perhaps mystifying for the general public but sure to send university post-graduates wild with lust. Auditions are still to

be held for the final place in the fivesome, but rest assured that Doug Spice has already been discounted. Till next time, *adios*.

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

Gigs news 1: **THE HOWDEN JONES TRIO** will be playing at the club on Thursday, March 2nd. Featuring the multi-instrumental talents of Kate Howden and Paul Jones, they've become one of the most sought-after acts on the folk/acoustic circuit. Don't miss out. Tickets £5 (£6 non-members).

Musicians! Remember that if you're playing a gig somewhere we'd be glad to mention it within these hallowed pages.

Gig news 2: On Saturday, April 8th, the RAC are putting on **SHOW OF HANDS** at the Princess Hall. Past winners of Best Act and Best Live Act at the Radio 2 Folk Awards this duo will sell out for sure, many tickets having already been sold to people from outside the area. So you'd better be quick. Tickets are £12 for RAC members (£14 non-members), available from GC Music (01278-794-434)

Will the person who keeps dressing up as a bat and yodelling Simon and Garfunkel songs outside Treasurer Doug Liles' house on Sunday nights please stop it.

Gig news 3: Also at the Princess Hall, on Thursday, May 4th, the RAC are presenting **JOHN RENBOURN** and **ROBIN WILLIAMSON**, respectively founder members of folk legends Pentangle and The Incredible String Band. Another one not to be missed. Tickets £12 for everyone, also available from GC Music.

Will the member who briefly parked illegally outside the club last Thursday please make yourself known to the bar staff. The police would like to beat you up, fine you and put you in prison.

Gig news 4: That bit in the Raconteur about Burnham-On-Sea FolkFest 2006 is actually true. Many members of the RAC are helping to get this off the ground, but we could do with more volunteers. Please hand yourself over, body and soul, to Jack Cobbe or Graham Cook.

Will the member who replaced Secretary Steve Brown's guitar with a giant guitar-shaped jelly please stop being such an arse.

Gig news 5: No, that's it, there's no more gigs.

The Ritz Acoustic Club's Famous Prize-less Quiz

Despite repeated and really rather pathetic requests, the quiz is *not* going to get any easier. You're just going to have to get cleverer, OK?

- 1) Whose last album was a double CD comprising Abattoir Blues and The Lyre Of Orpheus?
- 2) Which poor maiden was turned into a spider by angry Greek goddess Athena?
- 3) Which legendary early Seventies folk rock band was fronted by Dave and Carole Pegg?
- 4) Which world leader died in 1976, having led his country since 1949?
- 5) Which Scottish pop band had a hit in 1984 with Since Yesterday?
- 6) Who wrote Brideshead Revisited?
- 7) Which duo wrote Dion's Teenager In Love, The Searchers' Sweets For My Sweet and The Drifters' Save The Last Dance for Me?
- 8) Which political philosophy says "Every man should be his own government, his own law, his own church"?
- 9) Which former member of the Byrds released the classic album No Other?
- 10) Which gaseous element has the symbol N?
- 11) Who formed the band Skid Row with guitarist Gary Moore in 1969?
- 12) Which planet has moons called Miranda, Titania and Oberon?
- 13) What's the connection between Edward Scissorhands and Joe Le Taxi?
- 14) What's the official name for an assembly of Catholic Cardinals gathered to elect a pope?
- 15) Which band has members called Lux Interior and Poison Ivy?
- 16) Who led the Fascist forces in the Spanish Civil War?
- 17) What's Noddy Holder's real first name?
- 18) Name the anti-European terrorist group active in Kenya in the mid-1950s.
- 19) By which name is Bobby Lee Street better known?
- 20) Name the tribe led by Queen Boudicca.

Answers to last month's quiz were as follows:

- 1) EB White 2) Elephant 3) 1189 4) Alex Van Halen 5) Achilles 6) Dead Or Alive 7) Harry Truman
- 8) HP Lovecraft 9) Pancreas 10) Leonard Cohen 11) Pitcairn 12) Signe Toly Anderson 13) Sponges
- 14) Comus 15) Dylan Thomas 16) Jacques Brel 17) Sancho Panza 18) Johnny Hallyday
- 19) Philip Seymour Hoffman 20) Amy Lee