

The Raconteur

The Raconteur The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter January, 2005

Thursday, December 2nd, 2004

Christmas was fast approaching, shopping days were running out and everyone was suffering massive sleep deprivation as the extreme winter sport of Griswolding reached unprecedented heights of popularity. Named after Chevy Chase's character in National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation, this had begun in early October and saw households battling tooth and nail to see who could smother their house and garden with the most lightbulbs. Thousands were being raised for charity, which served to soften the news that, due to a huge new hole in the ozone layer overhead, a brace of dachshunds had spontaneously combusted in Trinity Rise.

In the Ritz, meanwhile, all the talk at the bar was of a new funeral process invented by Life Gem Memorials of Chicago. Apparently, by exerting pressure of one million pounds per square inch and heating to a temperature of 3 thousand degrees, their funeral parlours can turn a corpse into carbon, then turn the carbon into diamonds, for the bereaved to wear on their finger or in their nose forevermore. A snip at \$2,500 to become a quarter-carat diamond, or \$14,000 for the full carat, many of the lads felt it could represent their only chance of becoming a girl's best friend.

The evening opened with **Gary French** and an emotive, cracking rendition of A Couple More Years by Shel Silverstein (also the author of Gary's perennial favourite, Sylvia's Mother). He'd follow this with a mournful yet life-affirming take on Townes Van Zandt's If I Needed You. Next up would be former club chairman **Jim Topping** with two of his own tracks - the first examining the minutiae of a shattered relationship, and the second, Solar Radiation, being prefaced with the information that it had been dark and raining when he'd left his Spanish home that morning. He was fooling no one. Now he lives in sun-drenched luxury, the song has become a blatant hypocrisy, like Britney Spears singing Radiohead's Creep or Heather Mills McCartney doing Jake The Peg. The crowd, naturally, was provoked to the point of near-riot. Well, no one sang along, anyway, which qualifies as a near-riot at the Ritz.

After the ex-El Presidente came the ever-extraordinary **Greg Aylmer** with two mandolin instrumentals from his new songbook, one Irish, one from the southern states of America. Then there'd be more lyric-free magic from **Dave** and **Geoff Wright**, their harmonica and guitar interweaving wonderfully through Autumn Leaves and Misty. And so the stage was set for Jim Topping's hot Scot belle **Fiona** to wow us with a dramatic take on Leonard Cohen's First We Take Manhattan (being joined mid-song by **Ian Ryan**) then the bitter-sweet romance of Eleanor McEvoy's Only A Woman's Heart. It was truly heartening fare - she comes back all too rarely.

Now came **Steve Brown** with an impressive performance of Henry Mancini's Pink Panther theme that was marred only by its own length. If it had been that long in the cartoon, back on Saturday evenings in the Seventies, the Raconteur for one would've been sent screaming and weeping to bed long before Inspector Clouseau came on. Steve did, though, immediately make up for it with a snappy, smile-inducing version of The Bare Necessities from The Jungle Book. A fantastic creation, that bear, and one that could bring added humour and pizzazz to any number of hoary old standards. Baloo Suede Shoes is one rockin' possibility. Then there's Baloo Bayou, with its surreal vision of marshy creeks full of dancing carnivores. How wild would be a

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Baloo Moon Of Kentucky, and how could anyone be depressed by a Baloo Christmas? Imagine Elton John singing "Baby's got Baloo eyes" . . . Lends a totally different mood to all of them, doesn't he, the big, beautiful galoot.

Up onstage next was **Gary Day** who claimed that he'd not yet started on the club's new website because, due to his job, he'd begun dreaming in binary. He then proceeded to deliver a vulnerable yet strong take on Neil Young's Hurricane (introducing it as "the Valium mix"), then another slice of his own powerful American gothic. Gary's "Stamp Out Reality" teeshirt then seemed to bear strange fruit, indeed, when **Tim Bromfield** arrived to sing backing vocals for **Jason Grey**, the pair piling into Bon Jovi's renegade anthem Wanted: Dead Or Alive. With Tim most definitely on one, his were surely the most histrionic backing vocals ever sung, making Merry Clayton's efforts on the Stones' Gimme Shelter sound like Father Abraham. With Jason sensibly running for cover, Tim continued with his own Whitesnake number, an absurdly impassioned performance so painfully extended it brought a horrible new sense to the song's title - Here I Go Again. Still, it was different, and human advancement demands that we should always embrace novelty. He who is tired of the Ritz Acoustic Club, as the man said, is tired of life.

After a brief interval, Gary French reappeared to give an ecstatic execution of Marv Johnson's You Got What It Takes, before **Jon Austin** took to the piano, with Dave Wright on sax, for a smooth, emotive take on Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye. After the mention made in last month's Raconteur, Jon would like to make it clear that he's only driving a Jaguar because his Aston Martin, customised with ejector seat and missile-firing headlights, is in the garage, having suffered a severe malfunction of its automatic Martini machine (apparently it's stirring when it should be shaking). It's also having a Sky satellite-dish fitted, Jon's experiment with Cable having proved fairly disastrous.

Jon would now remain at the piano as Jason Grey took over the mike for a plaintive Desperado. Then Jason stayed up for a solo rendition of Spandau Ballet's Through The Barricades, before Jim Topping returned with a quiet positivist anthem of his own. Jim was then joined by Ian Ryan, Gary Day on tom-toms and, on vocals, Fiona, for Jimi Hendrix's Little Wing, and Black Is The Colour. Genuinely beautiful stuff, though unfortunately the highly romantic line "I love the ground whereon he goes" did have us thinking of Frank Zappa's Don't Eat The Yellow Snow.

Now Geoff Wright would retake the stage, with **Steve Holford**, to deliver a sweet take on Rodgers and Hart's moody Where Or When. Steve, being joined by Dave Wright on harmonica and Steve Brown on guitar, would then stay up to complete the evening with the classic White Christmas. It was a fittingly festive finale (alliterate to accumulate, dear reader) to another great session.

Friday, December 17th, 2004

With free entry, free raffle and free food (courtesy of the indefatigable **Trish Liles** and **Caroline Boyce**), the club's Christmas extravaganza could only go with a bang. With the acts spread evenly between the 9 o'clock start and the extended 1am closure, plenty of time was available for festive chatter and copious imbibing and, it must be admitted, the Raconteur's notes became even sketchier than usual. Memorable highlights included excellent sets from **Nick Maddocks** and Tim Bromfield, a humorous maths lecture from Treasurer **Doug Liles**, a raucous burst of blues and trad from **Pete Beach** (more than ably assisted by **Nigel Snook**, **Jack**

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Cobbe and Greg Aylmer) and a hilarious and quite brilliant re-write of The 12 Days Of Christmas by **Kathy Macmillan**, **Sally Pritchard** and two of their Milverton buddies. There was feasting, there was dancing, there was talent and endeavour, there was overt friendliness in all quarters - it was everything the club has long struggled to become, and for which it is now justly renowned.

Thursday, January 6th, 2005

Yes, it was January 6th and those New Year resolutions were still unbroken . . . just. Many had given up smoking. Or rather, they'd given up buying cigarettes, choosing instead to ponce them off the Raconteur. Many had cut down on alcohol, having heard their livers grumbling something about making a break for freedom into their underpants. Many more had taken up regular exercise - and not just jogging to the fridge for more pies. This was all-out war on obesity, an uphill struggle when you consider the power of the food conglomerates and their evil, big-eared stooge Gary Lineker, a man who professes to promote a healthy lifestyle yet constantly encourages the nation's children to fill their chubby little faces with the fattiest crisps on Earth. On the plus side, there was good news for burger-eaters in that scientists may have discovered a cure for the human variant of mad cow disease. Ordinarily, sufferers have about 14 months to live, now it seems you could survive - but only if you have untested drugs injected directly into your brain every day. Ouch.

Of course, this being the RAC and packed to the rafters with the certifiably insane, there were other New Year commitments made. One member had resolved to train a giant laser beam from outer space onto St Paul's Cathedral and hold the country to ransom for one *trillion* pounds - *ahahahaha!* Another had decided to steal all the traffic cones in the Burnham and Highbridge area and build a gigantic cone-tower, so high he could climb up to a fluffy white cloud and sit there strumming his guitar forever. As for the Raconteur, well, he has decided not to pay his Council Tax till they fill in the pot-hole his car's been sat at the bottom of for the last 6 weeks.

At the bar, matters were even more political. All the talk was of Victor Yushenko, opposition leader (now president) of Ukraine. After the Ukrainian election results had been declared void due to outrageous skulduggery, the poor man had found himself poisoned by the KGB, who'd slipped into his soup the active ingredient of Agent Orange (memorably used by the USA to defoliate Korea). Overnight, Yushenko looked puffy and haggard, red-eyed and drawn - he looked 30 years older, mere inches from death. Drawing the obvious conclusions, everyone was wondering the same thing - what could the KGB *possibly* have against Treasurer Doug Liles?

Onstage, after an announcement had been made that the proceeds of the raffle would be donated to the victims of the Asian tsunami (£85), Greg Aylmer kicked things off with two chirpy Celtic mandolin reels. Then Gary French, with delicate backing from Nick Maddocks, gave us a pair of his own compositions. The second, the Eagles-flavoured Song For Nelly, was dedicated to his mum and had never been played live before. Both were outstanding and drew many to snap up Gary's new CD, on sale at a mere £5.

Following Gary came **Leo St Mark**, who performed an exquisite cover of Queen's Too Much Love Will Kill You, then a subdued but moving Unchained Melody. Then came **Roy Cramer** with the energetic folk of Rosemary Lane, and a bluesy narrative he wrote with his usual partner **Eileen Hardacre**. Next there was **Morgan Jones**, accompanied by his friend **Colin**, with Nick Maddocks

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providing additional mandolin. Together, they contributed the bluegrassy Lonesome Road Blues then the rocking country of Jesse James.

Once Dave Wright had laid down a couple of old school harmonica medleys, up stepped **Gasoline**, accompanied by **Rob Cowen**, with Little Willie John's immortal Need Your Love So Bad and Chuck Berry's Sweet Little Sixteen. Then would come Jon Austin, first on guitar for Robbie Williams' melancholy If It's Hurting You, then piano as **Ricky Topham** sang Bridge Over Troubled Water. The duo would remain onstage to perform the Eagles' Desperado (a song, the Raconteur can confirm, that does not refer to Jon's working practices), then Ricky would be left solo to perform his own song about the glorious potential of long-term relationships. It's a fine track that clearly gets stronger with repeated plays.

During the brief interval, people were yet again bemoaning the absence of panto-god **Tony Harvey**, only to be soothed by news that he will indeed be back with us soon. Better still, he's apparently been working on a whole clutch of new songs. One, an aggressive response to Joni Mitchell's The Hissing Of Summer Lawns, is to be titled Rake It To The Limit. Another, a sci-fi epic concerning a riotous 24-hour party on planet Vulcan, will be called Spock Around The Clock. It's gonna be *ripsnortin'!*

Back onstage, Steve Brown, aided by Dave Wright's sax, gave us a delicate Memory from that feline fiesta Cats, then grooved into a very slinky version of Dave Brubeck's Take Five. It's a great word, slinky, and describes a most beneficial *modus operandi*. Go on, try it. Slink a little. That's it - raise your shoulders, spread your arms a tad, let a sneaky expression slide across your features. Mmmm, now take off sideways, with quick, short steps, like a really dodgy Egyptian. Isn't that liberating? Aren't you now the kind of guy who'd pretend to have badly burned hands and force pretty young shop assistants to delve into your trouser-pockets for change? Aren't *you* the kind of girl who'd pinch a hunk's bum in a crowded pub then befuddle him with the innocence in those big baby-blues. Yes, you are slinky beyond belief. Now, slink out there and get 'em, tiger!

Actually, slinking can be a hugely effective seduction tactic. Unlike making your intended lover laugh. Laughter is ridiculously over-rated in the game of love. For a start, it can make them treat you like a buddy rather than a tasty chunk of sex on legs. It can also lead to cheek-frying embarrassment and violent manhandling. Take this example from the Raconteur's own personal library of gaffes. Once, utterly desperate as usual, he set out to win a lady over by reducing her to a giggling wreck, unable to resist his other, more physical charms. Trouble was, he lacked any confidence in his comedic ability (regular readers of the Raconteur will understand why) and so attempted to ease his way by spiking his beloved's Bacardi Breezer. A beastly idea, yes, but needs must. And you can be sure that avoiding suspicion wasn't easy. It's hard to look suave with a 3-foot canister of nitrous oxide shoved down the back of your jeans, particularly going up the stairs to the Carousel. But even then, even as she stared at him, a sweating Quasimodo, with a crushing mixture of bemusement and loathing, even *then*, there was hope. The drugs *do* work, he thought, the drugs *will* work. So, as soon as she glided off to the ladies' room - an ethereal Venus, the living definition of female pulchritude - the Raconteur jammed the canister's nozzle into the top of her bottle and fired. In flooded the laughing gas, soon to have her roaring at his every word, as if he were Eddie Murphy, Ricky Gervais and the Monty Python team all rolled into one. Yes, in it went, and out rushed the rum punch, splattering all over the front of his jeans. And off shot the bottle, screaming across the dancefloor like an alcoholic Exocet, ricocheting off the forehead of one bouncer and striking another full on the nose. They reached the Raconteur's table just as his paramour returned from the loo. Needless

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to say, she made no attempt to support him in his hour of need. The fickle cow . . .

Anyway, getting back to business, up stepped **Ross Keniston** with a romantic number about the angelic object of his affection, then a Staind track called Epiphany. Ross thought it unlikely that any club members would ever have heard of Staind. Sadly, we have - they're a ludicrously morose, pathetically self-pitying mob of pseudo-metallers who could only hail from the richest, most self-absorbed nation on Earth. Luckily, Ross managed to strip away much of the band's emotional excesses and just about made it work. Nick Maddocks, with Gary French on backing vocals, then performed one of his own more fragile numbers, and a rockier Too Many Ghosts. He'd be followed by Morgan Jones, Colin and, on bass, Roy Cramer, who'd deliver a fine rendition of Fats Waller's Dinah and then, with Dave Wright arriving on sax, a gratifyingly bouncy Sweet Georgia Brown.

Finally, on came Gasoline, once more accompanied by Rob Cowan on harmonica, to end the evening with a righteously rocking set featuring cowboy anthem Six Days On The Road and Chuck Berry's C'Est La Vie, complete with Status Quo posing. People danced, people sang, it seemed Christmas was refusing to leave. Excellent.

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

Members are reminded that the club's next concert will be by **Hoover The Dog**, on Thursday, February 24th (a club night!), in conjunction with Take Art. The band are a Welsh borders trio and festival favourites, playing fiddle, guitar, accordion and bazouki, mixing Celtic tunes with English trad. They're intelligent, inventive and great fun. Tickets are priced at £5 and are available, as usual, from GC Music (01278-794-434).

The organisers of Frome Festival have asked the RAC to provide musicians for this year's show, in early July. Anyone who'd like to play please get in contact with Greg.

Also, musicians are again advised that the Raconteur is more than happy to plug any gigs they play outside the RAC. Just give us the details.

Membership Secretary **Laura Smith** has reported that membership has now risen to 120. That's right, as David Bowie screamed all those years ago, you're *not* alone.

Finally, members are reminded that next month's Raconteur will be including a Lonely Hearts Column. This is a free service, but please keep your entries brief. The usual abbreviations will apply (WLTM, GSOH etc), but you might also make use of the club's own suggestions - AOT (all own teeth), NOGADAAN (noodles on guitar all day and all night), IEAPF (is estate agent, please forgive) and DAMFOQ (drives Aston Martin, form orderly queue). Members are asked to ignore the suggestion that arrived yesterday on official Treasurer's notepaper - PRAT (produces Raconteur, absolute tosser). It's really not funny.

The Ritz Acoustic Club's Famous Prize-giving Quiz

As a new feature, this month the Raconteur is running a prize quiz. Yes, it's the third degree at the RAC. Not sure what the prize is yet, but chairman **Graham Cook** has promised something special (maybe even plunder from his shop). Questions will be split between music and general knowledge and, as demanded by Caroline Boyce, there will be NO SPORT. Contestants are

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trusted not to look up answers and not to form teams of more than three. Hand in your completed sheets at the door. Answers will be provided next month, and prizes awarded. Good luck.

- 1) Name the L in ELP.
- 2) Which two bodies of water are joined by the Suez Canal? (one point for each)
- 3) Name Joe Dolce's only UK hit, and the classic single it kept from the Number One spot? (one each)
- 4) Who was the first British Prime Minister?
- 5) What was Bing Crosby's real name?
- 6) In which town was John Cleese born?
- 7) Name the jazz-singing wife of Johnny Dankworth.
- 8) Who was Andy Pandy's girlfriend?
- 9) From whose song did The Rolling Stones take their name?
- 10) Who won the 1995 Best Actor Oscar for Leaving Las Vegas?
- 11) Name the four members of The Monkees (one point each), and name the thoroughly inappropriate support act on their 1967 tour of America.
- 12) Name the Lone Ranger's horse.
- 13) Which Sixties band featured both Demis Roussos and Vangelis?
- 14) What nationality was Che Guevara?
- 15) Who wrote Everybody's Talking, the theme from Midnight Cowboy?
- 16) What did the pobble lose in Edward Lear's nonsense poem?
- 17) Which female vocalist guested on Led Zeppelin's Battle Of Evermore?
- 18) In Madonna's In Bed With Madonna documentary, who annoyed the singer by describing one of her concerts as "neat".
- 19) Who is the present Poet Laureate?
- 20) Name the actress wife of Liam Neeson, and her even more famous mum (one point each).