

The Raconteur

The Ruckonteur

Oi!! Did you spill this newsletter's pint?

January, 2006

Thursday, December 22nd, 2005

*Yaaaay*, Christmas was nearly upon us and, though the next day would bring the annual club party, complete with free food, free band and a spectacular 45-prize raffle, still an impressive crowd had braved the cold to support the world's best-loved acoustic club. However, despite the onrushing festivities the mood was relatively sombre, members having just learned that an adolescent sperm whale had become detached from its family - very, *very* detached - and had somehow found its way up the River Brue to Highbridge. An ambitious rescue attempt had been rapidly planned for poor Blubby, as the creature had become popularly known, with Burnham's lifeboat crew having dressed their hovercraft as a lady whale and armed it with underwater speakers emitting sexy whale come-ons. It was risky, but they hoped against hope that they could lead an aroused Blubby back out into the safety of open water before he tired of their foreplay and, with one lustful thrust, sent them all spinning down to Davy Jones's locker. Sadly, before they'd even launched their craft, unscrupulous property developers had knocked up three bijou 2-bedroom maisonettes and a 24-hour Tesco's Extra store on Blubby's back, bringing the matter to an initially profitable but eventually disastrous conclusion.

In a separate incident, a school of dolphins was spotted in the River Parrett. Thousands flocked to the bridge in Bridgwater town centre to watch the merry mammals as they flipped and leapt and sang their happy, rattling songs. But this heart-warming tale would reach a wretched end when the school was condemned by Ofsted for not reaching the academic standards required by the Government, and the head dolphin was replaced by a former headmaster of Millfield. At first, his strict disciplinary approach bore rich fruit with one dolphin even managing to utter a fairly discernible word in English (they think he said "*Exterminate!*") but the experiment collapsed when, taking his new pupils on a geography field trip, the headmaster was caught in Japanese tuna nets and wound up being served as an expensive hors d'oeuvre at Yo! Sushi.

Onstage, **Greg Aylmer** would kick off the session with some impressive fiddle-wringing then, on mandolin, a sweet rendition of Apple Blossom. He'd be followed by **Terry Williams**, on fine form with Eric Bogle's moving anti-war anthem The Band Played Waltzing Matilda and Graeme Connors' even sadder The Metho Man, concerning the sorry demise of an Australian meths drinker. The excellent **Henry Rawl**, after a smooth and easy take on Tom Paxton's The Last Thing On My Mind, would add some wintery spirit with his own prettily bucolic Clear Cold Night In December.

Next up would be the club's Vice El Presidente **Bryan Counsell**, increasingly confident on his violin and even indulging in some snake-hipped Elvis moves. Bryan would toy with our emotions, beginning with The Londonderry Air, nowadays better known as Danny Boy, which is, as everyone knows, the most maudlin of all tunes, even more lachrymose than Eden McKenzie's heartbreaking 1961 Christmas hit Oh Lord, I've Tarmacked Over The Puppies (What Do I Tell The Kids?). Indeed, so melancholy is the song that it's able to make ten of millions of Americans weep over their exile from a country that they, their parents and their grandparents have never seen and couldn't point out on a map. A major plus for the Irish tourist board, then. Having so ruthlessly reduced the crowd to tears, Bryan would then raise us to the heights of

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elation with a cheery medley of carols, including The First Noel and O, Little Town Of Bethlehem. We knew Bryan was flirting with illegality here, as British citizens are no longer allowed to mention Christmas for fear of offending anyone who doesn't believe that Jesus was born on December 25th, got crucified and stabbed to death, rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven. But, we thought, what the heck, it's Christmas.

After Bryan would come those Milverton missies **Sally Pritchard** and **Kathy MacMillan**, with the monstrously talented **Alan King** on guitar. They'd deliver an impossibly delicate rendition of Sarah McLachlan's Angel then, with Alan switching to violin, The Saw Doctors' Share The Darkness. Their harmonies were lovely as ever, but the song did have us wondering why anyone would want to be playing crappy falsetto glam rock when they could be having sex.

During the interval, there were yet more arguments at the bar over the club's proposed carnival float for 2006. Treasurer **Doug Liles** insisted that we go for broke with a Great Wall Of China theme, his glorious idea being that we should shatter carnival records with a float that's three miles long. He was aware, he said, that such a beast would require a generator of inordinate size but, though his recent experiments at Hemel Hempstead had ended in fiery failure, he was pretty confident he could construct such a machine by November. More popular was **DOREEN's** proposal that we stage the historical drama The Rape Of The Sabine Women, an episode from the early days of Rome immortalised on canvas by Poussin and Rubens. Many members thought this would make an exciting and affecting tableau, the plight of the victims would surely draw tears of pity (and extras points) from the judges. Then we realised that Doreen was not planning an artistic still-life at all, rather an outrageous all-action blockbuster where she and her voluptuous handmaidens **Samantha** and **Lucy** would be ravaged by hunky surfer dudes dressed as Roman centurions to the pumping beat of Ravel's Bolero. Though she insisted she could have rehearsals up and running by next Friday night, God willing, members considered it best to scotch the plan in favour of something, *anything* that would be less offensive to the traditionally prudish judges. For a while, Doreen stuck to her guns, citing prize-winning floats that had also been deemed offensive by the small-minded. What about the East Huntspill Bingers' notorious Dance Of The Crack Babies? Or the Shipham Shitehawks' initially amusing then horrifyingly blood-spattered Predator Vs The Wurzels? Her arguments falling on deaf ears, Doreen would finally accept defeat but did ask if, as the hunky surfer centurions wouldn't be coming to the Ritz, she could please purchase three wet-suits out of club funds.

Many other concepts were proposed and rejected at what proved to be the club's stormiest committee meeting since Reg Puddy and his pitchfork-wielding acolytes staged their bloody coup back in 1976. The Raconteur's own effort, an exotic musical extravaganza that crossed South Pacific with Chicago and The Poseidon Adventure and was called Tsexy Tsunami, was binned without hesitation or any sympathy for the author's feelings. Eventually, members plumped for **Rob Carey's** crowd-pleasing rewrite of John Lennon's last hours, entitled Imagine: Gunfight At The Dakota Building, wherein Mark Chapman is caught in a withering blast from Yoko's cunningly concealed Kalashnikov while the ex-Beatle bursts into an impromptu chorus of Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da.

Back onstage, Rob himself would continue the festive fun with a Buddy Holly-style Santa Claus Is Coming To Town and the charming kids' carol Hey Little Bull Behind The Gate, then **John Dixon** would lay down The Christmas Song and, with **Steve Brown** on guitar, a sweet West Side Story medley of Maria and Somewhere. Next up would be **Tim** and **Rowan** with a churning, rocking take on Dispatch's Past The Falls, then the same band's Railway, featuring brilliant

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high-speed vocal swapping, and finally the stentorian comedy of Tenacious D's Tribute. They'd be followed by a returning Steve Brown who'd deliver an enchanting When You Wish Upon A Star and, with Alan King on violin, a strikingly fine take on Eleanor Rigby, a track he immediately vowed never to play again, not even to make captured spies spill the beans. The evening would then be brought to a classic Christmas close by Sally and Kathy who, with Alan on the old joanna, would rip joyously into a Yuletide medley featuring Silent Night, Santa Baby, White Christmas and I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus. They'd then, joined by their friend **Lesley**, raise the roof with their hilarious adaptation of The 12 Days Of Christmas, this year reduced to chortling chaos by Kathy's inadvertent lesbian innuendos. A nice touch, that. We loved it.

### Friday, December 29th, 2005

It has been brought to the Raconteur's attention that many visitors to the RAC have expressed an interest in the club's past, how and when it was formed, the different musicians who have played here etc etc. Members will be aware that our story is fascinating but too long to tell in a single newsletter so, just as a bare-bones guide, we've extracted a brief timeline from the book generally regarded to be the most accurate account of the club's goings-on - Brigadier-General Ernest Warmley-Pocock's *The Bloody Ritz: The Heinous History Of The Devil's Own Acoustic Club*

**800 AD:** The club is set up by order of Charlemagne, newly crowned ruler of the Holy Roman Empire, and is called, with typical Holy Roman humour, The Charlemagne Event. By official decree, all songs performed must concern the glory of the Empire and the imminent and painful death of the Moslem Infidel.

**801:** The club is briefly closed down when a Holy Roman inspector catches Cnut the Cnutter singing about Pictish poontang.

**866:** The club's first recorded buffet night ends in bitterness and recrimination when Alfred, later to be crowned King of All England, burns the cakes.

**991:** The club's first musical Dark Age begins when it's invaded by Vikings. Traditional Saxon tunes are now banned and the permissible repertoire is cut to a solitary song, the lyrics of which run "Viking boys/ We are 'ere/ We shag your women/ And we drink your beer/ La la la la la la la la la/ Viking boys are big and strong".

**1067:** The club is taken over and re-named by Sir Gilles d'Acoustique, stepbrother of William the Conqueror, who, having quelled British resistance by fire and the sword, is stuck for something to do on a Thursday night.

**1189:** Club members take up arms en masse for Richard the Lionheart's Third Crusade. Their sacred musical quest is to rid Jerusalem of wailing mullahs and have residents greet each morning with a raucous chorus of "Saladin's wife's got a brand new chastity belt/ But I got a brand new key". Tragically, a severe outbreak of alcohol poisoning sees most of them die before they reach North Petherton.

**1283:** Club members prove pivotal in Edward I's subjugation of Wales. Taunting the enemy with rude songs about Offa's Dyke, they cause them to attack the English forces in a blind rage.

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Slaughter ensues.

**1349:** Membership is decimated by the Black Death, brought to the club not by rats but a visiting Northumbrian folk quartet, ominously named Percy and the Pestilence. Nevertheless, Simon a Puddy enjoys a minor local hit with his feel-good singalong tune Don't Bring Out Your Dead (Let's Have a Party Instead).

**1485:** Club favourite Edward Fairthroat inspires Tudor troops to victory at Bosworth Field with his inflammatory anthem Old King Richard's Mean And Humpy (Dirty Sod Done Stole Me Scrumpy).

**1581:** The Elizabethan music world is turned on its head by club regular Robert de Puddy who outrages audiences with hip-thrusting performances of his self-penned number Nonny B. Goode, each of his recitals ending with him trashing his lute. Sadly, his sexually explicit song Veni Vidi Veni, with its infamous chorus "I'd not met Good Queen Bess before/ But she in't no Virgin Queen no more" sees him sent to the Tower, where he's deep-fried in goose fat and served in fritter form to the starving denizens of the East End. What would Jamie Oliver have said about *that*, eh?

**1642:** The club backs Oliver Cromwell in the English Civil War, but changes sides when they realise the Puritans intend to ban cider.

**1685:** Seeking prestigious international guest artists to boost attendances, the club invites the Duke of Monmouth over from Holland to play. Trouble ensues.

**1739:** As the War of Jenkins' Ear breaks out between Britain and Spain, the club begins a bloody feud with its Bridgwater counterpart, the 40-year conflict being dubbed the War of Puddy's Scrotum. Many members on both sides are killed, all of them during high-spirited party games after the signing of the Peace Treaty.

**1776:** A piano appears onstage at the Ritz for the very first time. Described by the club's fundamentalist chairman as "the gaping maw of Satan", it's dragged off to Brent Knoll where it's hanged in effigy. Trickier than it sounds.

**1801, January 1st:** After a particularly raucous New Year's party, the entire membership of the RAC is arrested and transported to Australia. Several escape the prison-ship during a toilet-stop in Borneo and flee into the trees. Jungle music is born.

**1879:** Three club members find instant fame when they take part in the siege of Rorke's Drift. None receive the Victoria Cross, however, as they fight for the Zulus who, they explain, aren't Welsh.

**1912:** Former club secretary Captain Oates is heroically unimpressed by Robert Falcon Scott's frosty rendition of Baby, It's Cold Outside.

**1941, July 18th:** The club is hit by a stray doodlebug unloaded by German bombers on their way back from the factories of South Wales. However, as the device explodes during a robust rendition of Sally by Elsie Buncombe (known as the Caruso of Watchfield due to her booming tones and luxuriant sideboards), no one notices.

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**1966, April 19th:** Several weeks before Bob Dylan suffers his famous fan backlash at Manchester's Free Trade Hall, club regular Keith Spaxton outrages the RAC membership with an electric version of Blackbird (I'll 'Ave 'Ee). Unlike Dylan, though, who's only called Judas, Spaxton is dragged off to Brent Knoll where he's hanged in effigy. Then in reality.

**1976, August 2nd:** Reg Puddy's bloody coup with pitchforks.

**1976, August 3rd:** Counter-coup with more pitchforks. Order is restored.

**1993, September 21st:** We don't talk about that.

**1994, June 14th:** Or that.

Onstage, our final session of 2005 was opened by that serial thriller Steve Brown, treating us to a work in progress, an instrumental take on The Beatles' Here, There And Everywhere. He'd be followed by Greg Aylmer, on violin for an aching Carrickfergus then switching to mandolin for one of his insistent American folk thingummies. Next, Rob Carey would step up with wonderfully mellifluous takes on Billy Fury's I'd Never Find Another You and The Platters' The Great Pretender, before Terry Williams took the roots route with Woody Guthrie's Do-Re-Mi and a stomping version of The Wild Rover. He'd be quickly and sternly reprimanded by MC Steve Brown for breaking with club tradition and singing the latter song in tune. Taking us into the first interval would be **Gary Day** who'd become a father for the second time only two days before. The child had been named Alice - very appropriate as she was going to spend the next 20-odd years in Gary's weird wonderland. As if artistically boosted by the birth, Gary would treat us to a brilliantly rhythmic She Moves Through The Fair then his own Zeppelinesque instrumental.

During the break, all the talk at the bar was of Treasurer Doug Liles extraordinary pre-Christmas jaunt to Torremolinos. Hoping to spend a week bobbing happily on an ocean of beer and exercising his eyes with some serious ogling, he'd gone for an 18-30 package and, to his delight, actually got one. Sun, sea, sand and sangria - wayhey. Imagine, then, his disappointment when he arrived at his hotel to find all the other guests dressed in stiff black frock coats and reading aloud from the Book of Common Prayer. Children stood in silence until spoken to and any sign of insubordination was met with a merciless whipping. Evenings were spent not in rampant roister-doistering but in earnest discussion of the Chartist riots, the Tolpuddle Martyrs and the Anti-Corn Law League. That's right, he'd accidentally booked an *1830s* holiday. *Nightmare.*

Back onstage, Henry Rawl would impress once again with Simon and Garfunkel's Kathy's Song and his own evocative Clear Cold Night In December. Bryan Counsell would then strum violently on our heart-strings with another rendition of The Londonderry Air and A Shogun Farewell, before Tim and Rowan stepped up with Nirvana's Beatlesy About A Girl, Dispatch's Two Coins with an excellent a cappella section, and then an unrehearsed but still tremendous Something In The Way, also written by Kurt Cobain. Next, John Dixon would slip into duet mode, with Rob Carey playing the Everly Brothers 1960 hit So Sad then, with Steve Brown, Julie London's Cry Me A River. Steve would then remain onstage to accompany the incomparable ROWAN NODDINGS through Smile, written by Charlie Chaplin for his movie Modern Times.

Smile is perhaps more relevant today than it was back in 1936. It doesn't ask us to deny our

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feelings or bottle up grief but, warming us with hope of better times to come, it *does* ask us to show a little decorum in our exhibition of pain. There are *other people* in this world, it intimates, each with their own troubles, and they don't need some tasteless exhibitionist putting on a show of their sorrow. By all means grieve, grieving helps us to heal. But public grieving is selfish, ego-based and offensive. And it's *everywhere*.

It all began with the death of Princess Diana. Yes, she campaigned against landmines. Yes, she visited kids in hospital. But she did a great deal less charitable work than (the usually unheralded) Princess Anne and she was, unarguably, manipulative, faithless and starstruck. There was no real justification for the public uproar, the millions of gallons of tears shed. It was the ultimate victory of our nation's drama queens, soap-opera-addicted wallies desperate to jump on the bandwagon now a taste of the real thing had come their way. The Raconteur must be honest, he too shed a few during the state funeral (no real justification for *that* either, by the way). But he wasn't weeping for Diana, or for himself, rather at the plight of Diana's two young sons, forced to follow their mother's coffin for miles past banks of blubbing imbeciles and not permitted to cry themselves when they were probably the only people in London who had a right or real reason to do so. Christ, as our culture collapses, as TV becomes a national confessional for the lost, the pathetic and the downright depraved, and "How do you *feel*?" becomes the first question news reporters ask witnesses at the scene, songs like Smile become all the more important. They really help. They teach us how to be. Smile should be pumped remorselessly into the Celebrity Big Brother household, naturally followed by a hefty dose of Zyklon B.

At the bar, arguments raged over the social acceptability of Celebrity Big Brother and all those other spirit-sucking reality shows, and their entertainment value. One suggestion for a more watchable version was Strictly Come Deep Space Exploring where a crack squad of minor soap actors, former pop stars and publicity-hungry MPs would be sent on a 20-year mission into the celestial darkness beyond Pluto. In nightly broadcasts we could see them engage in tests of skill and derring-do in the hope of winning the team some, er, well, *oxygen* might be fun. Their inevitable gripes would be aired for our amusement in the Confession Chamber and, once a year, perhaps at midnight on New Year's Eve, the public would vote to see which sub-celebrity would be asked to leave the spacecraft (ie. be jettisoned off into the ether), their final rendition of Auld Lang Syne becoming ever quieter as they disappeared into eternal nothingness. Hopefully, before all the inmates were dead, the craft would fortuitously collide with an inhabitable planet where the survivors could breed an entire race of f\*\*\*ing idiots whose moronic antics would entertain we Earthlings for millions of years to come.

After the second interval, Gary Day would return with an aggressive performance of Pearl Jam's Jeremy and a powerful Woodstock. Rowan Noddings and Rob Carey would then swap vocals throughout an impassioned Do They Know It's Christmas before Rowan delivered a solo a cappella Over The Rainbow. Tim and Rowan would next up the ante with an explosive Tribute, leaving **The Jockstrap Ensemble** - this week featuring **Pete Beach, Nigel Snook,**

Greg, Rowan Noddings and **Jim Fardon** - to end the year with knockabout takes on How Long Blues, Show Me A Pretty Little Number, How I Loves My Mother In Law and a beautiful, trembling Sweet Sixteen.

It had been a great year but it wasn't over yet as more arguments broke out at the bar as to

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whether the applause now being given to gear-humper, sound-man and all-round everything-doer **Graham Cook** was actually deserved. The nay-saying theory went like this: if you count the cells in the human body you'll find that the majority, by a factor of ten, are microbes. Yes, each one of us plays host to between 500 and 1,000 species of microbes, microbes that have evolved with us over millions of years, that help us digest food, produce vitamins and ward off disease. It's possible we may even be what we are today because these microbes have gradually been making us more efficient in finding food for *them*. So, went the argument, should we be applauding Graham when, in fact, the Graham we're applauding is only one-eleventh Graham and ten-elevenths microbe? Should we, therefore, only give Graham one-eleventh of the applause we usually afford him, or should we give him all the applause and hope he shares it with his microbes, some of which might actually be driving him to hump the gear, manage the sound and all? Maybe we should ban him from doing the sound altogether, in case he gets microbes all over the mixing-desk. Or should we simply accept that, as Chairman, he possesses the mightiest microbes in the club and thus deserves absolute fealty from all of us *and* our microbes? As is so often the case with these arguments, it only ended when Doreen threw everyone out onto the street. It had been another intriguing, invigorating and wholly absurd year.

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

Gig alert! Gig alert! Graham Cook's microbes have been busily arranging the best in entertainment for us all. The results are as follows. On Thursday, March 2nd, the **HOWDEN JONES TRIO**, amongst the finest singer-songwriters on the circuit, will be playing at the club. Tickets £5 for members, £6 for non-members. Then, on Saturday, April 8th, the club will present **SHOW OF HANDS** at the Princess Hall. Voted the best live acoustic act in the country, this will be a rare treat. Tickets £12 for members, £14 for non-members. And, as if this wasn't enough, on Thursday, May 4th, also at the Princess Hall, the club will play host to **JOHN RENBOURN** and **ROBIN WILLIAMSON**, founder members of Pentangle and the Incredible String Band respectively. Absolutely *not* to be missed. Tickets £12 for everyone. Tickets for all three shows are available from GC Music (01278-797-434)

Live action update . . . it now seems certain that the club will be prime movers behind a Burnham music festival this coming September. Those wishing to be involved, either playing or helping out, please contact Graham or **Jack Cobbe**.

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, before they run out of Blackthorn!

### **The Ritz Acoustic Club's Famous Prize-giving Quiz**

After Malcolm's Christmas Stinker, the quiz here returns to its usual levels of difficulty ie. still far too hard for the likes of *you*. Tell us, why do you bother? You're only fooling yourself . . .

1) Who wrote the children's book Charlotte's Web?

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- 2) Which large creature gave its name to a White Stripes album?
- 3) Been paying attention? In which year was the Third Crusade launched?
- 4) Who was the drummer in Van Halen?
- 5) Who killed Hector at the siege of Troy?
- 6) With which band did Mission/Sisters Of Mercy guitarist Wayne Hussey first find fame?
- 7) Which US President sanctioned the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima?
- 8) Which late Sixties US psychedelic blues band shared its name with a writer of supernatural fiction?
- 9) Which of your bodily glands produces insulin?
- 10) Who sang Songs From A Room?
- 11) On which island did the Bounty mutineers hide and settle?
- 12) Who was the original female vocalist in Jefferson Airplane?
- 13) What kind of creatures are Porifera?
- 14) Which band, named after a god of revelry, released a debut album called First Utterance?
- 15) Who wrote "Do not go gentle into that good night"?
- 16) Who wrote and performed the original version of Seasons In The Sun, a hit for Terry Jacks?
- 17) Who was the peasant companion of Don Quixote?
- 18) Which pop star recently became Belgian to avoid a monster tax bill?
- 19) Who recently won a Golden Globe for his portrayal of Truman Capote?
- 20) Who's the lead singer of hit gothsters Evanescence?

### **Answers to Malcolm's Christmas Stinker were as follows:**

1) Nik Kershaw 2) Judge Dread is a Prince Buster song 3) Elvis Presley, Cliff Richard, The Shadows 4) Brian Poole & the Tremeloes: Alisha's Attic are Brian Poole's daughters, Chesney is Len Hawkes' son 5) Lincolnshire 6) James is from S. Carolina, Jocelyn from N. Carolina 7) Geordie 8) Sudan 9) Ain't No Doubt 10) Gerry & The Pacemakers 11) Argentina 12) Switzerland 13) Helen Shapiro 14) Steve Marriott, Humble Pie 15) Their first 7 singles went Top 10 16) Rod Stewart 17) Fish, Lulu, Little Richard, Eden Kane, Judge Dread, Meat Loaf 18) Marty Wilde, Kim Wilde, LL Cool J, PJ Proby 19) Carrie Fisher 20) Lucy