

The Raconteur

The Raconteur The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter July, 2004

Thursday, June 10th

O, happy day. A Union Jack hung proudly from the ceiling and England were still unbeaten at Euro 2004 (mind you, we hadn't actually played yet). Hope was in the air and the only serious discussion at the bar concerned how lucky the Corrs are that their parents did not have the same taste in names as Gwyneth Paltrow. The evening opened, as all the best evenings do, with a sudden burst of punky folk from **Colin Hillier**, as ever hypnotic in its punchy repetition, affecting in its sheer brio. But it was the man who followed him who really set the evening's tone. **Arthur**, on holiday from Teeside and an evident semi-pro, gave us two fascinating historical narratives, one about the age-old search for the North-West Passage, the other about failed gold prospectors on New Zealand's Shotover River. Informative, entertaining stuff, and the first part of a quite dizzying world tour. **NICK MADDOCKS** continued the globetrotting theme, visiting both Ireland and the States with one of Bap Kennedy's minor anthems and then an infinitely darker tale of addiction from Steve Earle.

Where the others criss-crossed the planet, **Jerry Cahill** shifted instead through time and other dimensions. His echoing prog rock instrumentals - recalling Jeff Wayne, Tangerine Dream and Steve Hackett - were truly transporting. His opener, *The Enchanter*, was wholly mercurial, true to its magical subject matter. Jerry would remain on stage with his friend **Gordon Campbell**, a Nova Scotian (or is that Nova Scottie?) who strummed on our heart-strings with tales of drowning fishermen and cowboys made redundant by automated ranching. It was good to hear political debate stretch further than bitter complaints about Chancellor Prudence Brown putting another 10p on a pint of Blackthorn. Next up was **Simon Wood** with his intense and alienated brand of folk punk, fast but intelligent music managing to recall both Jonathan Richman and Green Day. He was followed by **Liz May**, delivering soft, dreamy, desolate pop, accompanied by **Steve Brown** on guitar and **Jez Plumley** on piano. The pace would quicken with **Gasoline**, their raucous country blues adding warmth to a bleak story of famine and man's eternal inhumanity to man - the kind of inhumanity, while we're on the subject, that that sod Prudence exhibits when he puts another 10p on a pint of Blackthorn.

The temperature would be raised still further by **No Shame**, formed in the early days of the RITZ ACOUSTIC CLUB and back to entertain us with wonderfully harmonious versions of Wishbone Ash's *Throw Down The Sword* and George Harrison's *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* (Note to GREG and fellow soundmen: weeping guitars may lead to short-outs and electrocution!). Club mainstay **Nigel Snook** then cut loose into one of his quicksilver Iberian odysseys before Steve Brown and Liz returned with delicate covers of *Moon River* and *Summertime*. Very pretty, but it did remind us of the unfortunate work-related absence of **Steve Holford** who sometimes sings that Gershwin number. It also once again brought up the controversy surrounding Steve's impossibly deep-voiced rendition of *Old Man River*. **Doreen**, fearing for the building's foundations, wants it banned outright, while **DOUG**, club treasurer, hopes it will attract conventions of curious and well-heeled seismologists. The club membership, as yet, is undecided on the matter, but it's worth noting that no one will sit under the smoke extractor while Steve performs. Going back to Steve Brown, this evening's missed opportunity of course meant that the record for playing Eleanor Rigby more times than anyone else remains in the hands of Sir Paul McCartney. For now. . . (cue fiendish laughter from

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Steve).

After the return of Arthur (that's the stout bloke from Teeside, not the Once And Future King), the night ended with a final flit across the Atlantic when Gasoline, aided by No Shame's impish Malcolm, kicked acoustic ass with a rocking take on Robert Johnson's Dust My Broom.

Thursday, June 18th

This session was also impressive but very different, more a celebration of the songwriter's art. After **Mystery Train**, aided by a happily returned **Ian Ryan**, had blasted out some beefy R&B and performed Georgia in tribute to the recently deceased Ray Charles, **Ross Keniston**, up from Taunton, delivered a particularly pained version of REM's Losing My Religion, solo on piano. He was followed by **Nick Maddocks** who, taking up Greg's mandolin, gave probably his best performance at the club with a storming take on Steve Earle's Copperhead Road. **Gary French** kept the quality high with emotionally charged covers of Creedence Clearwater Revival's Who'll Stop The Rain and Tim Hardin's If I Were A Carpenter, as did Bridgwater's **Gary Bingham** whose hushed but barbed tales of troubled romance recalled the softer moments of the excellent Mark Lanegan. Next up was **Jason Grey**, a performer of head-spinning ambition. Jason clearly finds the likes of Paul Simon and James Taylor too puny and unchallenging, preferring to pit himself against rock's most extravagant productions. Tonight, Queen's Save Me and, amazingly, Boston's monolithic More Than A Feeling got the treatment, Jason as usual striking upon the human truth within the studio overkill. Where he goes next, though, is another question. After Queen and Boston it's just a short step up to the pomp pinnacle of ELP and from there it can only be . . . Tchaikovsky! He could be in trouble then as Doreen surely won't allow cannons on the stage. And would the club's budget cover the cost of the ammunition anyway? We certainly have some interesting nights ahead.

The evening continued with **Jon Austin** who gave us instrumental takes on Your Song and Bridge Over Troubled Water, tickling the ivories with such indecent panache the ivories might have sued him for sexual harassment (had they any rights under our evil capitalist tyranny). Following John came **Nick Elswood**, a veteran of such bands as The Loan Sharks but here making his solo debut. He was evidently nervous but had no need to be as his renditions of works by Ray Davies and Arlo Guthrie were very fine indeed.

After Mystery Train had steamed through their theme song, Gary French returned with The Box Tops' decisively romantic The Letter and Del Shannon's anguished Runaway, before Jon Austin's slipped back onto the piano stool, accompanying Jason Grey. Perhaps John didn't fancy attempting the 1812 Overture, perhaps there just wasn't enough time. Whatever, they ended the evening with an impressively soulful version of The Eagles' Desperado. Really, like Gordon Campbell, they do not visit the RAC enough.