

The Raconteur

The Slackonteur The Newsletter That Just Can't Be Arsed July 2005

Thursday, June 9th

Oh, happy day - all was alright in dear old England. The summer sun gently coaxed the runner beans towards curly fruition, hazy rain sent mothers scurrying to pull the washing from the line and angry residents began a new campaign to have the church-bells silenced forever. The cheery reverberations cut straight through their double glazing, apparently, and, according to the Residents Association's disturbingly direct manifesto - titled Kill Those C*****ing Campanologists - anyone sitting in the bath feels like they're rounding the Cape of Good Hope in a plastic dinghy. Really, their detailed plans for the vicar of St Andrews make Torquemada look like some benign osteopath. They're going to get mediaeval on his holy ass, and no mistake.

Down at the club, relief swept the room as news reached us that Chesney's dog Schmeichel was in fact not dead, despite having been run over by a large publicly-owned vehicle. The announcement briefly interrupted a heated debate at the bar concerning the club's efforts to bring new members onboard, young members in particular. Glyndebourne was raised as an example, the classical festival having recently attempted to attract youngsters with a mixture of flashing lights, funky bunting and a softening of their strict dress code, only to discover that - shock! horror! - kids with an attention span of approximately 45 seconds still failed to appreciate the intricacies of Wagner's Ring Cycle. Clearly, getting PETE BEACH to play The Nibelungen on his banjo was not going to help us. We needed to employ different tactics.

Treasurer **Doug Liles'** suggestion that we form a press gang and rampage through Shakers and Chaplins, bludgeoning the little devils into submission, was met with little enthusiasm by the musicians present. They were keen for a more youthful audience, they explained, but not necessarily one that was bleeding, or unconscious. Perhaps, it was mentioned, we could arrange a promotion of some alcoholic beverage, as sickly-sweet as possible to draw in the teenagers like ants. To make it more exciting and exclusive we could invent our own, maybe a strawberry bubblegum drink with a large shot of Bacardi and added caramel, honey, saccharin, glucose, fructose and sucrose, with a couple of sherbet-filled flying saucers floating on top. We'd need a groovy name for it, of course, like The Ritz Blitz, or The Happy Slapper (for authenticity's sake, **Doreen** and **Samantha** could video young drinkers getting slaughtered on their mobiles). Oh, and that reminds us - we'd have to confiscate kids' mobiles on entry as we all know that teenagers these days like to go out with big groups of acquaintances then spend the entire evening in silence, texting people they'd rather be with. The club's musicians would surely not appreciate this total lack of attention, though the silence might make a nice change.

Up onstage, this week's session was opened by **Greg Aylmer**, that dark horse and inter-county man of mystery, who laid some classic mandolin bluegrass on us, beginning with Turkey In The Straw then, after heroically botching Cripple Creek and Natchez Under The Hill, moving on to Mississippi Sawyer. He'd be followed by **Gary Day** with a new instrumental he'd temporarily titled 'You Are The First Generation Born Without Religion'. A dark, chiming number, it was reminiscent of The Doors' finest moments, and its title raised some interesting debate at the bar. Today's youngsters, it was noted, are also the first generation to be born without any hope of getting a state pension when they retire. From the look of Pop Idol and Big Brother, they're

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the first generation without taste or shame and, judging by the steadily decreasing age of single mothers, they're the first who haven't been able to work out how to use a condom. But they *can* text like billy-o, so they're not completely rubbish.

Gary would continue into his increasingly soulful take on Anne Briggs' Blackwaterside, then **Pete Stearn** would step up with The Amazing Rhythm Aces' seedy but touching Third Rate Romance and Steve Earle's regret-laced Goodbye. He'd be followed by **Steve Brown** with a Catalan folk instrumental called El Noi De La Mer (which roughly translates as "I'm the only gay in the ocean") and a Rush medley combining The Trees and A Farewell To Kings. Steve would actually sing The Trees, a strong political allegory that, if memory serves, graphically illustrates English people's genetic superiority over Canadians.

After the first interval, **Liz May** would perform a fine rendition of her latest cascading piano number, then a desolate piece inspired by the Asian tsunami. Next would come the welcome return of the incomparable **Don 'Tasty' Chedder** with two classics from south of the Rio Grande, the second being Waylon Jennings' Drinking And Dreaming, the first seeing a cowboy fall head over heels for a lusty senorita serving tequila in his local cantina. It's actually very common for men to fall in love with barmaids. They are, after all, the only women who give you what you ask for without grumbling, sniping or plotting painful remuneration. Why, Doreen receives upwards of 15 proposals a week, some of them pertaining to marriage. Samantha, meanwhile, is forever beating blokes off. *Ahem . . . with a stick*, that is.

Back onstage, **Rob Carey** from Biddisham would now treat us to Paul Simon's Leaves That Are Green, a wistful contemplation of passing time, inspired by but very different to Leaves That Are Pink And Want You Dead by the long-forgotten underground psychedelic outfit "Crazy" Stan Warlock And The Crispy Wildebeest. Rob would then deliver an excellent take on The Moody Blues' Nights In White Satin, a classic number that, as usual, gave many in the audience pause for thought. The line that leapt out for the Raconteur was "letters I've written, never meaning to send" - how many of those have there been? There was the one to the Home Secretary demanding the immediate public disembowelling of Ronan Keating and the tactical landmining of the Big Brother house. Then there was the one to the local branch of Barclays, just to see if a computer can open an envelope. And there were several to Kate Bush. More than several, actually. And they were sent, too, at least they were until the Cease & Desist order came through.

After Rob would come another player most welcome to the club's roster of regulars, **Graham Rock**, who'd perform softly intense takes on Leonard Cohen's Lover Lover Lover and Suzanne, keeping it aptly subdued and thus letting the songs' beautiful imagery flow forth. This would lead into the second interval, where the bouncy mood was crushed by disappointment when **Paul Lawrence** failed by a whisker to win his 1000th consecutive raffle, thus missing out on a visit from Norris McWhirter and a congratulatory massage from the Queen (or was that "message"?). When **Trish Liles**, conducting her new posh raffle, read out the final ticket - 856 on the satin white with a hint of evening primrose - we all knew Paul's number was (not) up. Still, it had been an impressive run that had seen him take home 346 gallons of wine, 48 pounds of Lidl's finest confectionary and a staggering 3.48 tonnes of tasty cheddar cheese. Oh, and a cuddly toy.

Bringing us out of the break would be Steve Brown, accompanied by **Dave Wright** on sax, with a smooth rendition of Don McLean's And I Love You So and Steve's own I Just Want to Be Your Friend. An interesting title, that last one, perhaps lacking the sexual frisson of Willie Dixon's I

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Just Want To Make Love To You or The Stooges' I Wanna Be Your Dog, but nevertheless still more punchy than, say, I Just Want to Be Your Landscape Gardener or I Just Want To Be Your Bridge Partner.

Following Steve and Dave would come **John Matthias**, with high confidence and low-slung guitar, executing an infectiously energetic take on Dougie MacLean's Turning Away and his own laidback love song. Then it was **Jason Grey** and **Jenny** with a rapid, passionate rendition of Cat Stevens' The First Cut Is The Deepest, Pete Stearn with a gruff, catchy Dead Flowers and a sparse, atmospheric Little Red Rooster, and then **Nigel Snook**, performing a highly dramatic southern Spanish instrumental with a distinct North African flavour (Moorish in more ways than one).

At this point a rumour suddenly abounded that **Rob Ellis** would now make an appearance. Rob, as regular readers will know, was formerly a club stalwart, a brilliant guitarist with a style so relaxed he made Robert Fripp look like Joe Strummer. Indeed, on several occasions members sitting towards the front complained that they could only see the soles of his boots. Rob has long since scarpered to Scotland, so a visit is always something special. Unfortunately, the rumour was just a rumour, though Rob had apparently sent word that he is presently composing an album's worth of new numbers he'll be bringing to the club soon. In a sneak preview he revealed that one song wonders how Janis Joplin managed to have such a magnificent voice and such a butt-ugly face (this will be titled Pearl's A Minger) while another sees Rob hopelessly lusting after an infamous 15th Century poisoner (Borgia On My Mind). Also, we'll at last be able to hear the track he'd hoped would be used to front the Conservative Party's campaign at the 1997 General Election, the heavily Yes-influenced Wondrous Tories. Unhappily for Rob (though far more appropriately, as it turned out), they instead chose Jelly Roll Morton's Blue Blood Blues.

Now bringing the evening to a crescendo would be **Gordon Campbell** with his friend **Ron Nielson** on lap steel. First they'd delve into some funky roots, then there'd be a sweet song of encouragement called When You Come Back Down, a countrified romp of an instrumental titled Too Much Money, and finally Gram Parsons' Hickory Wind and David Olney's Illegal Cargo. It was classy stuff, but the mood was quickly altered by **Dave Ilseley** who, with a bemused Pete Stearn on guitar, piled into a shambolic version of The Wild Rover that was as off-key as you can get without being in-key again. Exhibiting a tolerance verging on saintliness, Pete kept the song from catastrophic implosion until finally it was over. But we knew Dave had been singing for his daughter and that was OK with us. It had been an anarchic end to another storming session.

Thursday, June 30th

As the world built up towards the enormous Live8 concerts around the globe, we at the RAC were doing what we always do - bringing music to the people, every week, not just every 20 years like that lazy arse Geldof. At the bar there was something of a feeding frenzy as a number of pirate DVDs were passed around. Remember those comedy porn films that were cheap rewrites of famous movies, with loads of gratuitous sex, like Flesh Gordon and The Sperminator? Well, these new ones - still illegal in this country - take family movies well-known for their decency and decorum and reshoot them with grotesque scenes of ultraviolence and spattering gore. Best of the bunch, in the Raconteur's humble opinion, is Get Poppins, though there is much fun to be found in Taste The Blood Of The Family Von Trapp.

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Aside from the illicit trading, the bar was buzzing with anger at the slights President Jacques Chirac had recently rained down upon our country. All British agriculture had ever given the world, he'd said, was Mad Cow Disease. And our food sucked, too. Well, the Raconteur was quick on the counter-attack, noting that, while learning French many years ago, he'd toiled through many copies of the magazine Paris Match, one of which had contained a feature on one particular department of the Parisian local government. It wasn't a big department, only receiving ten of millions of francs a year. But it was interesting in that it didn't actually exist. The money had mysteriously disappeared. And the Mayor who sanctioned its budget? Why Monsieur Jacques Chirac, naturellement. And as for the food question, Doreen was not slow to point out that her pork scratchings were famed the world over. In fact, she once sold a bag to the celebrated TV chef Gordon Ramsay, who said of them "What the f*** is *this* s***? Are you trying to f***ing *poison* me?". Coming from Mr Ramsay, that's really quite a compliment, and Doreen was understandably proud.

Onstage, with many of our regular musicians late as usual, Steve Brown took on responsibility for opening the session and gave us two instrumental snippets from Genesis, Blood On The Rooftops and Horizons. Riveting stuff, though it would surely have been more intriguing had Steve chosen to wear a big pointy hat, like Peter Gabriel. Arthur Brown proved long ago that an artist's headgear can be more compelling than their performance, and this is possibly why Bono from U2 has recently being suing a former stylist for the return of the Stetson he wore in the Eighties, which she had been trying to auction off.

Steve would continue into a pretty, chiming take on When You Wish Upon A Star then cede the stage to **Ben Rudge** and his trusty bugle. Next up would be Rob Carey with the chirpy, sing-a-long pop of the Beatles' You've Got To Hide Your Love Away then a soft, soulful, almost Californian take on Otis Redding's (Sittin' On) The Dock Of The Bay. Leading into the first interval would be Liz May with her own sweetly hazy love song, a brief stab at Moon River and then another of her own pieces, the highly romantic Wrap My World Around You.

During the break a dreadful silence fell over the room as it was revealed that former club chairman **Jim Topping** had officially replied to the shocking revelation in last month's Raconteur that the terms of his honorary life membership actually granted him sexual privileges akin to those of a Norman warlord. In a strongly worded missive from his Spanish solicitors Hasta, La Vista and Baby, he informed the club that he intended to violently oppose any change to the Constitution and would not hesitate to use his special privileges to give anyone who stood against him a right seeing to. There is little more menacing than a threat in Italian, and the very thought of being subjected to "a 12-inch Meat Feast with extra Topping" brought tears of fearful anticipation to the eyes of most - though it was noted that several of the lady members wore faraway expressions and inscrutable smiles.

With **Mark Porter** now taking over as MC from a thoroughly beleaguered **Graham Cook** (as ever doing pretty much everything), Greg Aylmer would now take to the stage, performing Poor Ellen Smith - which he sang, an all-too-rare occurrence - and the instrumental jig Banish Misfortune. Then Graham himself would rise with the funtime blues of Canned Heat's Goin' Up The Country and a rousing version of Del Amitri's Nothing Ever Happens, before giving way to newcomer **Rowan Noddings** who surprised the hell out of everyone with an a cappella take on a Stubby Kaye parody of Barbra Streisand, then his own comedy song, wittily describing the shenanigans of his voracious cat. Bringing us to the next interval would be Gary Day with a rumbling, rootsy instrumental and his ever-more atmospheric take on Blackwaterside. With Gary performing bare-headed for the first time in ages, Treasurer Doug Liles was immediately

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forced to counter accusations that, in order to fill that notorious black hole in the club's accounts, he'd taken a lead from Bono's stylist, slyly purloined Gary's trademark black bobble-less hat and auctioned it on E-bay. Not so, said Doug, in fact he'd seen Gary's hat only the night before, being worn by a very sinister-looking Identikit fellow on Crimewatch UK.

To be fair, *NO! Stop right there!* Nearly fell into a nasty linguistic trap there. Have you noticed the insane proliferation of the phrases "to be fair" and "to be honest"? People use them to begin every other sentence, whether they intend to fair and honest or not, much like they used to follow their every utterance with an unnecessary and often incredibly patronising "Do you know what I mean?" Clearly this recent outbreak is far worse as it serves to further undermine our already shaky concept of truth and decency. In days of yore, "to be honest" usually heralded a straight-up admission of guilt, it was used only when there was something you needed to be openly honest about. These days it's simple spin - as in "To be honest, it was a definite penalty and, to be fair, we'd have murdered them if the ref wasn't such a cheat, even though we did have two sent off for headbutting and another for spitting on the St John's Ambulance crew". If the phrases now have any meaning at all, it's the direct opposite of what they're supposed to imply.

But what if they *were* used properly? What if every time these words were employed they really *were* followed by words of truth and justice? For example . . .

"To be honest, I don't want to put my mum in a nursing home but she reeks of wee and keeps mistaking me for that fat bloke who used to play Barry in EastEnders".

"To be fair, I recognise that, as an MEP, I am an outrageous leech on society and I hereby volunteer to sit in the stocks on Tower Hill being pelted with heavily subsidised vegetables".

"To be honest, we solicitors could easily arrange for the sale of houses to take place at a time convenient for our customers, but we set them up for Friday afternoons so we can keep your money in our account over the weekend, thus stealing your interest. To be fair, we do this because we are low-life scum with not a shard of respect for our fellow human beings".

"To be honest, I would invite you to my barbecue, but I know you'll bring your guitar and, well, *really*".

And what about the one we should hear most often of all?

"To be honest, I've been practising this one day and night for weeks but there's still a really high chance I'm going to bugger it up".

The truth. It sounds almost surreal, doesn't it, so seldom do we hear it. Perhaps that's why we turn to music, in the hope that musicians might unearth some meaning buried in the daily avalanche of bullshit, or at least provide us with something beautiful (for, as Keats wrote, "Beauty is truth, truth, beauty, - that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know"). For this reason, musicians carry a huge burden of responsibility, whether they want to or not. Think on . . .

Back onstage Graham Rock would provide yet more proof of his high class with Bert Jansch's Dreams Of Love and a tender take on Simon and Garfunkel's For Emily, Wherever I May Find Her, before **Mike Batt** (no relation to the Womble-meister) delivered a fine self-penned

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instrumental with a pastoral Rush-like feel and a stirring rendition of Radiohead's High And Dry. He'd be followed by Mark Porter who defied his lack of practice-time to deliver confident versions of Stereophonics' Climbing The Wall and Bon Jovi's Bed Of Roses, and then **Tim Bromfield** with a deeply impassioned performance of his own Living On A Knife Edge. The session would be brought to a close by an on-form Gordon Campbell, kicking out a rootsy rocker, a sweet love song, Dave Olney's theatrical Barabbas and an earthy tale of a tough life out West. A tremendous finale to another wonderful night.

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

The coach trip to the Frome Festival was a great success. Club regulars (including the mighty **Dave Chave**, Milverton's **Kathy Macmillan** and **Sally Pritchard** and our own long-lost **Tim Dean** and **Paul Stradlin**) spread the word by rocking the Griffin all afternoon. There will be more of these trips, so keep your eyes and ears peeled. Not literally peeled, obviously - that would be gross.

Also, the Folk In The Park extravaganza was another winner, with heavy contributions from **Malcolm**, Greg and our glorious chairman Graham Cook who really don't get enough appreciation. Why not buy them a drink next time you pass the sound-desk, or pat them cheerfully on the head? But remember not to blow in Greg's ear - it makes him psychotically angry. No one knows why.

Incidentally, Graham is looking for new ideas for afternoon festivals to be held in Manor Gardens throughout the summer. Ideas tendered so far include Bark In The Park where only dogs will be allowed in, their owners coming to pick them up at 6 o'clock. Then there's Park In The Park, where the owners can get involved in a little dogging of their own. And, of course, there's Shark In The Park, where we'll turn the gardens into a gigantic pool and let loose a Great White, the entertainment coming from watching people trying to swim from their seats in the bandstand to the nearby floating beer-tent without being eaten alive.

Musicians! The club's next theme night will be on July 21st and you will be required to play acoustic tracks from the Sixties. **Acoustic tracks from the Sixties. Acoustic tracks from the Sixties. Are we getting through?**

Members are hereby notified that Louis And The Iguanas (featuring the Cold Blooded Groovers) will be playing at the Victoria Rooms, Milverton on Friday, July 29th at 8pm. Mixing soul, ska, reggae and blues, they're a high-energy act guaranteed to send you spinning onto the dance floor. Tickets are £7.50 with proceeds going to the Lavender Trust, an organisation caring for those with breast cancer. They can be bought directly from Milverton Post Office or the Anchor Inn (Hillfarance). Alternatively call the Milverton Piano Company (01823-662-674), Lynne (01823-251-073) or the very wonderful Kathy Macmillan (01823-662-674).

Two gigs have been lined up for the coming months. First, on October 13th, we have **Steve Tilston**, a celebrated British singer-songwriter renowned for his guitar-playing. Then, on November 3rd, we have **Steve Ashley**, one-time member of the Albion Country Band, whose Stroll On album was hailed by Mojo as "a masterpiece". Tickets for both gigs are £5 and are available now from GC Music (01278-794-434)

The Ritz Acoustic Club's Famous Prize-less Quiz

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Welcome once again to the quiz with a heart of stone, where even the greatest champions are sent away with nothing but a flea in their ear. All you get is a chance to exhibit grace under pressure as the stinkers come flying thick and fast. Good luck. You'll need it.

- 1) By what name is Clementina Dinah Campbell better known?
- 2) What's the medical term for indigestion?
- 3) With which soon-to-be famous musician did Al "Year Of The Cat" Stewart share a London flat in 1965?
- 4) Who wrote the WW2 novel *The Naked And The Dead*?
- 5) Who released the albums *Uncle Meat*, *Burnt Weeny Sandwich* and *Weasels Ripped My Flesh*?
- 6) What's "I love you" in Italian?
- 7) Louis Armstrong grew up in Storyville, the red-light area of which town?
- 8) Other than the Queen, who features on a five pound note?
- 9) Who was known as "The King of Hi-De-Ho"?
- 10) What does ASBO stand for?
- 11) Which musician played with Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley and The Beach Boys, and also starred in a movie alongside John Wayne?
- 12) Name the 7 Deadly Sins.
- 13) Who was the singer and guitarist in the rock band Taste?
- 14) What's the capital of Cambodia?
- 15) Which ex-paratrooper played with Jackie Wilson, Little Richard and The Isley Brothers before breaking through with his own trio?
- 16) Which despot led the infamous Khmer Rouge?
- 17) Which multi-million-selling singer-songwriter first hit big as a jingle-writer for the likes of Macdonald's, Dodge automobiles and Carling beer (later including a medley of them in his live shows)?
- 18) In which song would you find the lines "O Lord God arise/ Scatter our enemies/ And make them fall!"?
- 19) What connects Frank Sinatra, Andre Previn and Woody Allen?
- 20) What's the ballet term for a jump where the legs criss-cross in the air?

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Answers to last month's quiz were as follows:

1) Fairport Convention 2) Ljubljana 3) Chester Arthur Burnett 4) Jack Straw 5) Chippenham, Dave Dee 6) Reversal Of Fortune 7) The Kick Inside, Lionheart, Never Forever 8) Sir Edwin Landseer 10) Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency 11) Bernard Hermann 12) John Adams 13) Clannad 14) Michael Caine 15) Cambridge, England 16) St Venerius 17) Anthony Newley 18) Dylan Thomas 19) Sam Giancana 20) Krishna