

The Raconteur

The Snackonteur The Newsletter That Supports Unhealthy Eating In Schools June 2005

Thursday, May 19th

The sun was baking down (in between the showers) and, as ever when the temperature rises, our thoughts turned to former chairman **Jim Topping**, sunning himself in scorching Spain with his hot Scot babe **Fiona**. Usually such thoughts of Jim are warm, fond memories of drunken nights and Solar Radiation, but now things had changed. Glad anticipation of his next visit had turned to cold, naked fear. Perusing the club's arcane and labyrinthine constitution, Secretary **Steve Brown** had discovered to his dismay that the Honorary Life Membership awarded to Jim in thanks for his selfless contribution to the club in fact granted him privileges far more sweeping than a simple Free Entry pass. For one, no one is allowed to touch the buffet till Jim has finished both his meal and his post-scran cigar. Musicians must halt their performance immediately if they notice Jim is talking. Ovations for Jim's own performances must be made standing and last no less than five minutes. And worse, far worse, like a mediaeval warlord, Jim can also take his pick of any of the ladies present, and they must submit to his carnal desires or suffer the immediate doubling of their RAC subscription fee. And - gulp - that goes for the blokes, too. . .

This means that on a mere sexual whim, Mr Topping could grab any one of us - even Steve Brown when he's in the middle of Bohemian Rhapsody - drag us into the club's exquisitely appointed Unisex lav, and brutally use our bodies to slake his obscene lust. This is quite obviously an outrageous state of affairs, iniquitous beyond belief, and all the more so now the Raconteur's own application for Life Membership has been so rudely turned down.

Another matter to bring up at the next AGM, it was mentioned at the bar, is the club's policy on drugs. We're just not getting enough in. Many members were complaining that they've been running out by the second interval and have been forced to prolong their high by lurking behind Steve Brown and taking deep sniffs of his aftershave. This, of course, can be very embarrassing, as Steve has been known to get the wrong idea . . .

Aside from these minor quibbles, we were on a major buzz. The week before, Talisman, ably supported by **Gary Day** and **Dave Chave**, had performed a superb set. Better still, unlike most gypsies, they'd left when they were supposed to. Beyond this, new caterer **Christine Clayton** was serving up some top-notch grub - all was right with the world.

Onstage, man of mystery **Greg Aylmer** kicked off proceedings with Old Joe Clark, a bluegrass standard from his new book, then ran The 8th Of January into Liberty and moved into Over The Moor To Maggie, an Irish classic he learned at the Griffin in Frome. He'd be followed by the sweetly harmonic **Kathy Macmillan** and **Sally Pritchard**, accompanied on keys by **Alan King**, with Sandy Denny's By The Time It Gets Dark and, with Alan departed, a delicate cover of the Saw Doctors' I Know I've Got Your Love. Next up would be guitar supremo **Nigel Snook** with a stylish blues medley then a smooth take on Jimmie Cox's Nobody Knows You When You're Down And Out. Then Alan King would return, this time on cello, performing a moody classical piece then, with Steve Brown on guitar, a take on Over The Rainbow so mournful you'd have thought

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he'd gone searching for a crock of gold and found only an empty beer can and a six-month subscription to Pigeon Fanciers' Weekly.

During the first interval, arguments raged at the bar over the efficiency of French marigolds in keeping insects off your vegetable patch. The Raconteur was quick to support the lowly Calendula, adding that it also wards off botulism and man-eating tigers. Well, you can't argue with results . . .

After the break, Steve Brown stepped up with an embellished take on the theme to The Deer Hunter, ignoring distasteful requests that, to spice up an already fine performance, he risk a Christopher Walken at the end. Instead, he expertly slid into touching instrumentals of My Favourite Things and Close To Me. Next there'd be newcomer ROB with the joyous pop of Herman's Hermits' You Won't Be Leaving and then, with Nigel Snook joining on guitar, a run through Route 66. With his soft voice, Rob sounded more like Mike Love than Chuck Berry, but it was good stuff, nonetheless. Far less soft but just as impressive would be **Tim Bromfield**, crashing out an invigorating version of Poison's Every Rose Has Its Thorn, then a pacy rendition of It's All Over Now. And leading us gracefully into the next interval would be Kathy and Sally with the sad romance of the Indigo Girls' Least Complicated and Anna Ryder's yearning Sailing Boat.

At the bar, vehement discussion had broken out again. As well as lifting our spirits, Tim Bromfield's Poison number had raised a controversial question. Now, even the most cursory glance at the David Austin catalogue would reveal that, actually, several hundred breeds of rose have no thorn. Why, you could weave them into fragrant underpants without a second thought. And this was the root of the argument - mutation! With the government and pressure groups still battling over the relative merits of wind farms and nuclear power stations as sources of energy, the fear is often voiced that nuclear power is unacceptably dangerous as leaking plutonium leads to rapid mutation in the eco-system and, indeed, in human beings. And mutation, it was postulated at the bar, is bad. As this is a widely held view, it was met with the usual murmurs of approval. What caused the trouble was the immediate counter-argument. Human beings already are mutations, it was said, and have been mutating for tens of thousands of years, via climate changes, technological advancements and natural selection. And where has it got us?

You could, quite reasonably, break it all down to one single example. In New York City a team of the planet's most ingenious minds is planning to replace the Twin Towers with a super-skyscraper, the tallest in the world, a colossal capitalist penis, figuratively spurting its bounty across the globe (a bounty that will only dribble on the vast majority of us who suffer in wage-slavery). On the other side of the world, meanwhile, another team of ingenious minds is working out how to blow that skyscraper up, another warning that we must live their way or die. And this is the result of natural selection, of ordinary mutation. We may be better than cavemen, but we're still rubbish. As such, it cannot reasonably be denied that the mutation process is too damn slow. Ergo, we should have more nuclear power stations, more leaking plutonium. Let's get this show on the road! Let's genetically modify everything! You wouldn't say no to a six-foot lettuce for the price of a Little Gem, would you? And wouldn't Sunny Delight be that little bit sunnier with a splash of enriched uranium? Really, it couldn't get much worse, so why not give it a go? Let's face it, intellectually speaking at least, wouldn't George Bush do better with two heads?

Back onstage, **Rick Topham** reintroduced some sanity and some high-class musical

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entertainment with two numbers of his own. The first was a rewrite of his Little Boy, inspired by the tsunami disaster, the second the tale of a brief affair ruined by emigration. Rick would be followed by **John Dixon**, ever-improving on his trusty sax, with the Everly Brothers' Let It Be Me and, with **Malcolm** joining him on drums, Glenn Miller's Moonlight Serenade. More stern, but equally melodic would be Gary Day with his own Stages and Infrequent. Next would come Nigel Snook with Shel Silverstein's comic short The Wreck Of The Old '49, then a perfectly slurred Amazing Grass and a bold, Spanish-style Light My Fire before **Gordon Campbell** closed the evening with two exceptional American narratives, the first recalling a frontier idyll and the second, Stan Rogers' heartbreaking The Jeannie C, recounting the tale of a sinking, a death and the breaking of a fisherman's spirit. It was an appropriately classy end to another brill sesh.

Thursday, May 26th

Hurrah! The half-term holidays were fast approaching and all were filled with gladness, especially the total losers amongst us, who'd been hugely inspired by Liverpool's coming back from 3-0 down to beat AC Milan in the European Cup final the night before. If those wretched Scousers could turn things around, we thought, well, dammit, so can we. And the first thing we were going to do was get the TV licence fee lowered, if not abolished altogether. Now, the Raconteur has on several occasions banged on about the BBC's overpaid incompetents living high on the hog on money extorted from the people of this nation. But now, out of sheer jealousy, even some of the overpaid incompetents themselves were complaining. Why's Fiona Bruce getting £400,000 when we're only on £300,000, they whined. At the bar, this crazed insensitivity to the plight of Joe Public caused an inferno of rage not seen since undercover agents from the Army spiked the Rich's cider with LSD to see if it was worth using on the Iraqis. What kind of society have we created when real nurses get paid less than the staff on Holby City? A major skirmish broke out, involving knives, broken glasses, vicious headbutts and even a flamethrower, but thankfully the ultraviolence was entirely contained within the Raconteur's head.

Up onstage, things were bouncing. It was another club theme night and this week the general flavour was to be Irish. Gary Day started off with a sylvan and as-yet-unnamed instrumental, then a version of Anne Briggs' Blackwaterside, a song adapted and popularized by Bert Jansch which inspired Led Zeppelin to, er, rip it off as Black Mountain Side. Up next were the hugely welcome **No Shame**, getting into the spirit with a rocking take on Rory Gallagher, then a comic blues number involving booze, women and more booze. Borrowing Gary Day's new guitar would be Steve Brown who, with Gary himself on vox, surprised us with two U2 numbers - a mournful, echoing Sunday Bloody Sunday and pained and subdued I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For. They'd be followed by **Dave Wright**, on sax for a light and jazzy Danny Boy, then harmonica for a melancholy The Leaving Of Liverpool.

As we moved into the first interval, those at the bar were moved to ponder the actual meaning of Danny Boy. Who was the titular Danny anyway? Someone suggested that the song was inspired by Daniel Bolsover-Pitt, the fellow who first calculated that a pint of Guinness should be left to settle for 6 minutes and 12 seconds, and not 5 minutes and 48 seconds, as had been the industry standard for 250 years. Someone else thought it might have been about Daniel the Hermit, the infamous 5th Century reformer who brought all the snakes back to Ireland after St Patrick had cleared them out, while another radical idea had it that Danny was actually the Dark Ages noblewoman Danielle O'Rafferty, who'd fought side by side with the legendary Brian Boru against the invading vikings. Due to her heroics, a great vaudeville tradition had sprung up

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in Ireland where female impersonators would wear horned helmets, drink mead from the skulls of oxen and repeatedly stab anyone they suspected of being Scandinavian. And, in her memory, each would call himself Danny the Tranny. Eventually, though, it was agreed that the ditty was probably based on the true-life tragedy of Daniel Monaghan, lynched by Dublin tour operators in 1931 for publicly proposing that leprechauns don't really exist.

Few are as well-equipped to deal with an Irish theme night as **Pete Beach**, and he now proved it with storming takes on Paddy McGinty's Goat and The Banks Of Pontchartrain. He'd be followed by Steve Brown who, with Dave Wright on sax, ran through a couple of his own self-penned instrumentals. It was later noted that Mr Brown had had the temerity to openly flaunt club rules by employing a delay pedal, thereby running the risk of instant sanction. Page 84, Section 5, Sub-clause 14 of the club's constitution clearly states that anyone caught using such a gizmo must sign over all his possessions to the club within five working days (including his wife and children), to be disposed of as the Committee sees fit. He must also MC every Thursday for the rest of his natural life - and half his unnatural life, too, just so long as he doesn't scare the members with his zombie wanderings.

Fortunately for Mr Brown, **Jason Grey** was quick to the stage, allowing the offending pedal to be hidden away as if it had never been used to desecrate the temples that are our ears. Jason, as ever, was having it, pounding out The Verve's The Drugs Don't Work and Queen's I Want to Break Free, neither of which were remotely Irish but, hey, this club's not all about rules, for God's sake. Anyway, the mighty **Steve Holford** quickly brought matters back into line with a superb a cappella rendering of Sweet Sixteen.

After the raffle, in which **Paul Lawrence** extended his record-breaking winning run to 243 weeks in a row, talk at the bar turned to the problems of oil consumption and the real reasons behind the invasion of Iraq. Why, it was asked, are the Americans moving in on other nations' oil reserves when they have a huge and untapped energy source at home? Not the rich coal of Pennsylvania or the black gold of Texas and Alaska but the hundred-million-strong legion of fatties wobbling down their streets. That's right - melt a couple of those down and you could run your car for years. Think about it, you'd be killing two birds with one stone. No more unsightly wind farms and no more unsightly people. Aesthetically, it would work wonders and the obesity problem would be solved in a flash! We could send out special vans to catch them - we could call them Dumpy Trucks, or Pork Lifts - driven by strong men with reinforced nets and special scales to ensure that the captured chubber is indeed over the weight limit of, say, 25 stone.

Some podgers might prefer a more dignified end (and, let's face it, what could less dignified than a sweating, puffing, red-faced gutbucket desperately fleeing his mocking pursuers only to collapse in a steaming, defeated heap after about ten yards?). For them we could have a special volunteer service, like in SoyLent Green, where if they give themselves up they could spend one last happy hour watching video footage of Ready Steady Cook and stuffing themselves with cream buns (buns laced with painless poison ahahahaha!). Also, we could perhaps come to an agreement whereby some of the oil subsequently extracted from them would be used to fire a memorial flame for them in a local Chapel of Rest. It seems only fair . . .

Of course, we would have to be vigilant in keeping this process right and proper and, above all, tasteful. There would be many corporate vultures ready to swoop. Having made rather puny efforts to move into the salad market, and suffered a public lambasting after the revelations of

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the hit documentary *Super Size Me*, you could imagine McDonald's taking this opportunity to seize back their place at the heart of the American psyche. You can see the TV advert now. A big, red and white locomotive surges across the open plains of the mid-West, its wagons overflowing with juicy lettuces, tomatoes, melons and cucumbers, all bound for the plates of hungry, healthy kids queuing at fast-food outlets across the States. Up in the cab, clean-cut young workers in red and white paper hats swing fat people by their arms and legs into the fire feeding the engine, as Ronald McDonald, in a red and white Casey Jones cap, toots merrily on the draw-string whistle every time a chubber flies screaming into the hole. It's a horrible image, isn't it, wholly degrading to stout folk, and it's something we should avoid at all costs.

Back onstage, No Shame leapt up, with Dave Wright on harmonica, to blast out Bill Withers' *Ain't No Sunshine* and, with Dave shifting to sax, an improv-heavy take on Gershwin's *Summertime*. The session would then be brought to an elongated climax by **The Jockstrap Ensemble**, featuring Pete Beach, Nigel Snook, Dave Wright and MC-for-the-night **Jack Cobbe**. They'd really give it some welly with *Digging My Potatoes*, *Whiskey In The Jar*, *Nancy Spain* and *Sweet Sixteen*, before Steve Holford joined them for a showstopping *Danny Boy* that had **Doreen** openly weeping for the first time since she discovered that the Fun Pub is Fun in name only. The band then continued into Whizz Jones' nostalgic *Night Ferry* (filtered through *The Fureys*), then banging takes on *Maggie May* and *Goodnight Irene*. It had been a good night, indeed.

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

Members are reminded that the next club concert will be by female duo **Foo Foo** on Thursday, June 16th. Contrary to reports in last month's *Raconteur*, tickets will be £5 for which you will also get a buffet meal and free entry to the raffle. Having been lent several *Foo Foo* CDs by the most excellent **Janet White**, the *Raconteur* can guarantee the band's high quality and good humour. Should be great.

Musicians! The next theme night will be on Thursday, July 21st, also a buffet night. The theme this time will be *Acoustic Artists Of The Sixties*, a wide, wide repertoire to choose from, so please do make an effort to play something you haven't played at the club before.

Our glorious chairman **Graham Cook** is seeking acts to play at this year's *Folk In The Park* on June 19th. There is still space, too, for anyone wanting to perform at the *Frome Festival*, at the *Griffin* pub on July 3rd. Ask Greg for details.

Also, Priddy is almost upon us. If you're thinking of going (it starts on Friday, July 8th) then please contact Graham Cook, who's organising transport and stuff.

Remember the Christmas party has been booked for Friday, December 16th. The Committee are still in the process of booking a band. Sadly, Secretary Steve Brown has been rudely rebuffed by Michael Douglas, who will now not be playing Santa as we had hoped. Ice Cube was ruder still. Steve, though, is persisting and is convinced that, after his appearance in *Coronation Street* and as *Widow Twanky* at the *Old Vic*, Sir Ian McKellen might be persuaded to join in the fun. From *Gandalf the Grey* to *St Nicholas the Red* - why not, eh? Good luck Steve!

Please note that the new club polo shirts are on sale at the back, in five different colours.

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They're £10, which is cost price. Treasurer **Doug Liles** would like to point out that, unfortunately, club members who buy one will no longer be able to sing "I'm too sexy for my shirt" as they strut down the high street, as their shirt will now be sexier than they are.

Members are hereby informed that, as **Jon Austin** has gone away (probably to destabilize the Russian government), his place on the Committee has been taken by Gary Day, creator of the new RAC website at www.ritzacoustic.com. This means that members can no longer point at Gary, or say terrible things about him behind his back. The power he now wields is unimaginable. He can have you thrown to Jim Topping, for a start . . .

Finally, though the club is not one of those precious places where talking is verboten, we must remind members to show due respect to the musicians onstage. This is not to say **SHUT YOUR PIEHOLES!!!**, simply to ask people to keep it down - especially in the bar area. Thanks in advance for your kind co-operation.

The Ritz Acoustic Club's Famous Prize-less Quiz

Welcome to the quiz that takes unseemly pride in giving nothing away. Let's be clear about it. No matter how well you do (though you probably won't do very well) you'll be taking nothing home. No wine, no repulsively sweet Lidl's biscuits, no humongous lump of tasty Cheddar. Nowt. Nada. All you will find here is pain and humiliation. Dare you continue? Dare you?

- 1) With which band did Sandy Denny make her name?
- 2) What is the capital of Slovenia?
- 3) What was the real name of blues legend Howlin' Wolf?
- 4) Who is our current Foreign Secretary?
- 5) Near which town did Eddie Cochran suffer his fatal car crash? A 16-year-old police cadet called to the accident later became a famous musician. Who was he?
- 6) Jeremy Irons won a Best Actor Oscar for his performance in which 1990 film?
- 7) Name Kate Bush's first three albums.
- 8) Which artist painted The Monarch Of The Glen, and also modelled the lions in Trafalgar Square?
- 9) By which name is James Osterberg better known?
- 10) What does DVLA stand for?
- 11) Who wrote the music for the films Citizen Kane, Psycho and Taxi Driver?
- 12) George Washington was the first US president. Who was the second?
- 13) Which band did Enya join in 1980?

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- 14) With which other budding film star did Terence Stamp share a flat in the early Sixties?
- 15) Where was Olivia Newton-John born?
- 16) Who is the patron saint of lighthouse keepers?
- 17) Who wrote the lyrics to Goldfinger, and was also married to Joan Collins?
- 18) Whose last words were "I've had eighteen straight whiskies. I think that's a record"?
- 19) With which notorious gangster did Phyllis McGuire of the McGuire Sisters have an affair?
- 20) Name the Hindu god of love.

Answers to last month's quiz were as follows:

1) Shirley Jones, Oklahoma, Carousel 2) Glen Matlock, Sid Vicious 3) Iris 4) Eagles 5) It's All Over Now 6) Earnshaw 7) Riga 8) Oliver!, Artful Dodger 9) Paul Hewson, David Evans, Adam Clayton, Larry Mullen 10) Titus Andronicus 11) Caspian Sea 12) Larry Grayson 13) Alice Cooper 14) Ted Heath, Jim Callaghan 15) Brian Eno 16) Lewis Carroll 17) Lyle Lovett 18) Green - Peter Green, Green Green Grass Of Home, the album Green, Green Onions 19) Alan, Wayne, Merrill, Jay, Donny, Jimmy 20) Giscard D'Estaing