

The Raconteur

The Raconteur The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter May 2005

Thursday, April 14th

What a Spring!

The bluebells were back (the pretty flowers, that is, not the dodgy Scottish pop combo with only one song) and the magnolias were carpeting the streets with their cupped blossoms. Though the wind still bit, the sun was already scorching and an early Easter brought the grockles out in force, promenading down the sea-front like a slow stampede of giant, tattooed balloon animals. Clearly Jamie Oliver's evangelical efforts to improve food for kids had had little effect on their parents.

Down at the Ritz Acoustic Club, all the talk at the bar was consequently about weight problems. Anorexia and bulimia, it was agreed, have been much-discussed, partly due to the trials of Princess Diana. But there seems to have been no research done into a far more common condition where, as soon as a lady hits 30 stone, she's suddenly overcome by the crazy delusion that she looks like Kate Moss. Known in medical circles as Grockulus Nervosa, this causes sufferers to wriggle into tiny bikinis, exposing sweaty acres of wobbling flab, the straps straining so dangerously that those of us who've seen Carry On Camping cannot help but flinch when in range. Yet these poor creatures see such flinches not as manifestations of fear and loathing, rather as a stunned reaction to love at first sight, or at least raging desire. They believe all the men long to nestle between their lithe and sun-tanned thighs, when in fact we wouldn't go in there with a guide-rope and a team of sherpas.

And what's with the tattoos? A barbed Celtic band may look good on the toned bicep of a warrior in Braveheart but on these people, colours faded and shapes distorted by violent stretching, all spiritual significance is lost. Beckham-like Sanskrit mottos are even worse, not least because yer average tattooist is no expert in ancient Eurasian languages. One classic example was supposed to ask "Unborn Tomorrow and Dead Yesterday - why fret about them if Today be sweet?" but in fact said "Woe unto you, for pickles see not the travails of Man". Even more aggravating is the fact that the tats are so small, their details drowned in the rolling waves of blubber. Why do they bother with these silly little symbols when you could easily copy the entire ceiling of the Sistine Chapel onto their podgy arses? Actually, that's not such a bad idea. Surely our lives would be enriched if these bulbous obscenities had Van Gogh's Starry Night or Turner's A Fire At Sea etched onto their hides. Our sea-front would then be like the Tate Gallery, rather than a cavalcade of corpulence, a fiesta of freak-show fatties. Just a thought . . .

Onstage, things were hot from the off. With the club holding their second theme evening, this time featuring the songs of Buddy Holly and Elvis Presley, chairman **Graham Cook** kicked off proceedings with a fine version of '(Marie's The Name Of) His Latest Flame', then an uptempo take on REM's 'The One I Love', a song containing perhaps the coldest line in lyrical history, describing a lover as "a simple prop to occupy my time" (ouch). Graham would be followed by the excellent Pete Stearn, with Marc Cohn's Cher-covered 'Walking In Memphis' and a gruff, countrified rendition of Elvis's 'Don't Be Cruel'. The latter would raise an interesting question at the bar - when ghosts turn up, do they resemble the person as they were when they died? If so, wouldn't the King spectrally reappear with his trousers round his ankles and a squirrel

The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter

The Raconteur

sandwich in his hand? Not very regal, you must admit. And as for Buddy Holly, well, that's just too gross to contemplate. Yuck!

After Pete would come a rare appearance by **Seb Doolan**, a young, very young guitarist exhibiting remarkable proficiency and a rare grasp of musical drama. Better still, he's obviously keen to challenge himself, courageously choosing to tackle Hendrix's tricky 'Hey Joe'. Fortunately, he played this as an instrumental as his watching father, a former policeman, would surely not have approved of the lyrics. Mind you, he seemed a tolerant sort as **MC Doug Liles** was, as ever, sailing close to the wind with his risqué repertoire of saucy gags. We all wondered if the eternally mischievous **Nigel Snook** might test the officer further with his classic rendition of Kevin Bloody Wilson's 'Amazing Grass'.

Next up was **Jon Austin**, on piano for Ketty Lester's 'Love Letters' and then a slow, hypnotic number that seemed to begin with the line "I wish I was in Dixons". A strange claim to make for, though Dixons is a fine electrical retail outlet, with helpful staff and a wide range of high-quality products, why would anyone want to sing a song about them? Especially Jon, who gets most of his appliances from Q's laboratory. And then it struck us - it wasn't Dixon's, it was Dixie! As we discovered afterwards, Jon had not prepared for the theme evening and, while onstage, his mind had gone blank, to the extent that the only Presley or Holly song he could recall was Elvis's showstopping and supremely difficult 'An American Trilogy'. So on he ploughed, courting disaster with every line, somehow managing to emerge relatively unscathed. High points indeed for bravery as few singers can get away with that one.

In fact, in America only Elvis could do it, the song's proud references to the Old South being hard for many to take in these more enlightened times. One recent example of how wrong it can go in the States was the Scottish band Primal Scream. Having hit big with the award-winning 'Screamadelica' album, they decided to illustrate their new blues rock direction by putting a Confederate flag on the cover of its follow-up, 'Give Out But Don't Give Up'. Naturally, they also hoped this would endear them to American audiences and see them become the next Led Zeppelin. Sadly, said audience did not see the flag as a sign that the band were genuine rock'n'roll rebels. To them it simply said "We're a gang of white-trash rednecks - uppity niggers beware". And so the much-vaunted album went down like, well, like a lead zeppelin and a tough lesson was learned.

Back onstage, **Roy Cramer**, armed with guitar and panpipes, was piling into Leonard Cohen's 'By The Rivers Dark', an uptempo tale of doom and dread, marked by its warped religious imagery. Then would come Buddy Holly's infinitely more cheerful Raining In My Heart. Actually, strike that. Any song including the line "Oh, misery, misery. What's gonna become of me?" is not infinitely more cheerful than anything. Next would come the return of the mighty **Colin Hillier**, fresh from drilling through the main communications-cable between Britain and America at a cost of millions of pounds - just the kind of anarchic behaviour we'd expect from a man who makes Simon and Garfunkel songs sound like The Ramones. Tonight, Colin would race us through a Dylan number, then attack 'In The Ghetto' with such psychobilly gusto the track collapsed around him. It was musical mayhem, tremendous stuff.

After a short break, the crowd hushed as **Nigel Snook** took to the stage. Was it to be a cop-baiting 'Amazing Grass', or what? As it happened, the Presley/Holly theme was playing to one of Nigel's many strengths, and instead he rocked through infectiously joyful covers of 'That'll Be The Day' and 'Baby I Don't Care'. He'd be followed by **John Dixon** with sweet sax takes on 'Raining In My Heart' and 'True Love Ways' before Seb Doolan reappeared with a superb

The Raconteur

'Knocking On Heaven's Door'. Then would come Roy Cramer with energetic adaptations of 'Lawdy Miss Clawdy' and 'Rave On', and **Pete Stearn** with a soulful take on The Band's 'The Weight' and a hugely bluesy 'Little Red Rooster'. Taking us into the break would be the irrepressible **Pete Beach**, blending 'Oh Boy' into 'Blue Suede Shoes' then delivering a terrific 'Rambling Boy'.

The second interval brought much debate at the bar over the corporate decision to make Smarties tubes hexagonal. What, it was asked, would they have done on Blue Peter if this decision had been taken years ago? One member (who asked, no, begged not to be named) reckoned he couldn't have lived without the home-made penis pump he claimed he saw John Noakes assemble on the programme back in the late Sixties.

After the laughter had died down, there was yet more mayhem onstage in the shape of **Mike Ludlow** and **Will Sealey**. These two tearaways began in predictably unpredictable fashion, with Will, usually a drummer, on vocals, and Mike, usually a keyboard player, on drums. Their attempt on 'Knocking On Heaven's Door' seemed doomed when they had to ask Seb Doolan how it went, and indeed it was. And their next effort was not improved by Will, usually a drummer, switching from vocals to keyboards. Thankfully, they would pull it all together at the end when Will, usually a drummer, went on drums, and Mike, usually a keyboard player, went on keyboards. Everyone at the bar agreed it was very selfish of them not to share whatever it was they were on.

Next was the third coming of Roy Cramer, this time accompanied by Pete Beach on banjo and **Jack Cobbe** on his trusty bodhran. This rough-house trio treated us to Elvis's 'That's All Right' and Buddy Holly's 'Heartbeat', then kicked into Woody Guthrie's 'Grand Coolie Dam' and Lonnie Donegan's 'Does Your Chewing Gum Lose Its Flavour On The Bed-Post Overnight?' The last of these, of course, asks a serious question and it's one the Raconteur would like to reply to right now. The answer is No, Mr Donegan, we put it in the bin before we go to bed - you filthy animal!

Happily, our Government is now doing something about these Wrigleys-spitting beasts by taxing their gum to pay for the disgusting mess they leave on the streets. Other taxes, we hope, will follow, including one on horse-owners. Why is it that dog-owners suffer fines if their animal does the dirty, while a horse can leave half a hundredweight in the middle of the road with no questions asked? Why, only recently the Raconteur crashed his car into just such a pile, causing considerable damage to his suspension and incurring penalty charges from the mechanic called to the scene who angrily explained that he was a qualified engineer, not a bleedin' dung beetle.

Back onstage, Pete Stearn would now blast out fine takes on 'Memphis, Tennessee' and the Stones' brilliant 'Dead Flowers', before **Tim Bromfield** ripped into 'Wanted Dead Or Alive' and Neil Young's 'Heart Of Gold'. Next Nigel Snook would reintroduce the evening's theme with Buddy Holly's 'It Doesn't Matter Anymore' and 'Words Of Love'. Pete Beach and Jon Austin would then join him for raucous but skilful versions of 'How Long Blues', John Prine's 'Blow Up The TV' and Leadbelly's 'Digging My Potatoes', matters becoming ever more ramshackle as Dave Ilsley was called up for 'The Wild Rover', **Maureen Bromfield** again taking the portable mike and accompanying him from the back of the room. This wonderful chaos would be brought to an end by Pete Beach with a truly touching 'Sweet Sixteen'.
Another great night.

The Raconteur

Thursday, April 28th

Summer was fast approaching, heralded by soft April showers. And one far-from-soft shower that landed on us was the hundreds of politicians bleating about the upcoming General Election. TV had become unwatchable, a rage-inducing sequence of empty promises, hypocritical U-turns and barefaced lies. Indeed, the only onscreen entertainment was to be found in marvelling at how much Michael Howard sounded like Kaa, the incompetent but still-dangerous snake in *The Jungle Book* ("Trutht in meee, jutht in meee").

Despite the underhand practices of his political peers, the Raconteur was, as ever, on the campaign trail, hoping to seize the pervy popular vote (ie. you) by standing for the Ann Summers Party. His manifesto was three-pronged. First, we would improve community life in several different ways. We would grab people who don't pick up their dog's doings and rub their noses in it. To teach them, like. We would strike fear into the hearts of criminals by having the police wear their underpants outside their trousers. We would recycle Neville Jones, and engage in the indiscriminate carpet-bombing of Bridgwater. Secondly, we would reduce Council Tax by introducing various ingenious money-saving schemes. We would demand that the Lidl sign be so big and bright we could turn off all the street-lights between Berron and Highbridge. We would also erect several hundred enormous electricity-generating windmills on Burnham beach with (and here's the clever bit) giant capsules on the end of each arm so grockles could pay to ride in them (probably one over-sized grockle per capsule, for insurance reasons). It would be like lots of London Eyes, but with Tower Bridge and the Houses of Parliament replaced by endless mud flats and hazy visions of Barry Island. And, thirdly, we would seek to raise our town's profile in the international arena. To do this we would court controversy by twinning Burnham with Baghdad. Or, if not Baghdad, Rik Waller. We would compete with London and Paris by putting in a late bid for the 2012 Olympics (Linda Snook says she'll help out should extra accommodation be required). And we would also record and release a new town anthem, to be sung by Pete Beach and that woman out of Peters And Lee and opening with the lines "Tell 'em all 'bout dear ol' Burnham/ Tell 'em twice an' that'll learn 'em". It could be huge in Belgium, huge.

Hopes were high, but sadly misplaced. The Raconteur would lose his deposit, along with much of his dignity. But his desire to do good works remains undiminished, and he will most certainly be standing at the next election, probably for the Toga Party.

Down at the RAC it was quiet, too quiet. Too many musicians are arriving too late and still expecting to be allowed stage-time. By thus forcing their more punctual peers to open proceedings every Thursday, their behaviour is directly contrary to the spirit of the club, a spirit that's beautiful in a very special, bead-wearing, patchouli-scented kind of way. So don't be so mean, Gene. There's no time like on time, comprendido, mi amigo?

Anyway, as ever we had more than enough stalwarts to see us through. With Malcolm successfully taking over as MC, **Greg Aylmer** made a surprise comeback, confounding those who thought he'd gone forever. Greg, as club regulars will know, has always been a bit of a dark horse, but for the last few months he's been a dead ringer for Shergar. We all believed he'd been working his fingers to the bone in a Frome brewery when, in fact, he'd been jollying it up in Devon with those buccaneering reprobates **Mark Porter** and **Dave Chave**. You'd never know to look at him, would you? Sweet, innocent but totally inscrutable.

Greg would entertain us with a couple of slices of Mississippi magic on his mandolin, then stand

The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter

The Raconteur

to deliver another impressively comic a cappella rendition of 'The Sick Note'. Next up would be **Steve Brown**, deeply tanned after his Florida holiday and looking less like a young Paul Newman than a middle-aged Robert Mugabe. Steve would deliver Dave Brubeck's 'Take 5' and Queen's immortally silly 'Bohemian Rhapsody' as well as a complicated Steve Howe instrumental called 'Nude for A Day'. This naturally re-fired the debate about whether we should hold naturalist evenings down at the RAC, where we'd all get our kit off and proudly strut about in our birthday suits - a debate that's raged in previous Raconteurs. One new suggestion was that we might combine wholesale nakedness with another theme night, where musicians might cover the songs of, say, Bobby Bare or Barenaked Ladies. Doreen has already agreed to provide fig-leaves fashioned from beer-mats for those buzz-killers desperate to protect their modesty (ladies take note: going by the last official measurement, taken on November 17th, 2004, the Raconteur will require five!!!). Of course, the debate quietened a little when Steve told us the track he was playing is actually called 'Mood For A Day', but discussions will surely continue. The fascist Committee cannot keep us imprisoned in our clothes forever, you know. We will escape! We will be free! Free! Free! Freeeeedom!

Back onstage, **Jason Grey** stepped up, wondering aloud if we'd ever heard of the band Thunder. Sadly, we had, but this didn't stop him whaling into their hit 'Like A Satellite', following it up with crunching takes on Boston's 'More Than A Feeling' and Queen's 'Is This The World We Created?' Far less fraught would be **Fay** and **Damien Donnellan** with their sweet, countrified takes on Gene MacLellan's 'Snowbird', 'Your Cheating Heart' and 'Blue Bayou', this last song eminently suiting Fay's richly emotive voice.

Following Fay and Damien would be the relentlessly classy **Dave Chave** with the exquisite folk of Dylan's Days Of '49 and The Bells Of Rhymney, the latter's lyrics being taken from the work of Welsh poet Idris Davies. Dave would also treat us to Sting's Children's Crusade, a song that caused a flurry of excitement at the bar. Though no politicians were bringing it up in the run-up to the election, wouldn't another Children's Crusade be a spot-on idea? Rather than starting another dodgy war in the Middle East, why couldn't we just round up all the kids and send them off to liberate Tehran from the mad mullahs? Timmy Mallett could lead them with his big polystyrene hammer. Meanwhile, in their absence we could sort out the education system. No, really, it makes sense. For a start, the exercise would do them good. There's nothing like being chased by wild animals and white slavers to stave off child obesity. Also, if the UN complained we could simply blame it all on violent video games, or claim the kids were trying to impress the new Pope who, in his own youth, was not averse to marching into other people's countries.

As an aside, while on the subject of kids, did you know that Jamie Oliver actually began his school dinners experiment at St Joseph's in Burnham? Apparently they sacked him because he couldn't achieve the requisite inch of impregnable skin on the strawberry blancmange.

Returning to the onstage action, after Dave Chave came **Rick Topham** with his own piece about a brief romance cruelly terminated by emigration, then Annie's Song and Damien Rice's The Blower's Daughter. His understated stylishness would immediately be counter-balanced by Tim Bromfield with forthright renditions of Cat Steven's Moon Shadow and Whitesnake's Give Me All Your Love, then a self-penned number of monumental regret. In Tim's songs, relationships always turn sour - and we're glad they do, otherwise he'd be singing about weeding the borders and Saturday morning visits to B&Q.

After Tim came a real surprise when, accompanied by Nigel Snook on guitar, Maureen Bromfield made her onstage debut with Patsy Cline's Crazy and John Denver's spookily

The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter

The Raconteur

prophetic Leaving On A Jet Plane. Though it was understandably shaky in places, we're all hoping Maureen will persevere and, like many club performers before her, gain in confidence and entertain us well into the future. The voice and personality are so clearly there.

With Maureen departing, Nigel remained up for a jokey take on the Harry Lime theme from Carol Reed's The Third Man. He'd move on to one of his favourites, Gilbert O'Sullivan's Nothing Rhymed, a track he played with true care and heart. The session would then be brought to a climactic close by Pete Beach, accompanied by Dave Chave and Greg Aylmer, with stirring covers of Ragtime Millionaire, Maggie May, Sweet Sixteen and, with Maureen Bromfield taking over vocal duties, Putting On The Style. Superb.

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

Following the success of our last food night, the tradition is to be continued on the third Thursday of each month. A new caterer has been hired, and hot food of some description will be available from now on. The buffet will start at 8.30 sharp, so get there early.

Musicians! The next club theme night will take place on May 26th. This time you will be required to get all Irish on our asses. The Dubliners, Van Morrison, Thin Lizzy, U2, The Pogues, Christy Moore - they'll all do. Just don't do a Jack Charlton on us and start playing songs written by people whose grandparents were Irish, will you? And no Johnny Logan, none.

After Talisman, the club's next concert will be by the ever-popular **FOO-FOO** on Thursday, June 16th. This will coincide with a food night, so members will get a buffet and great entertainment, all for the ridiculously low sum of £3 (non-members £4). Could it get any better?

Members are hereby informed that stylish new club polo shirts, in 5 different colours, are on sale now. They're £10, which is cost-price as they are of top quality. Thanks to TRISH LILES for sorting it all out.

Remember, this year's Christmas Party has been booked for Friday, December 16th. The Committee is in the process of organising a band. Also, after last year's fiasco, Secretary Steve Brown has already begun seeking a celebrity to play Santa. Sadly, John Travolta has regretfully declined, but Steve is hearing encouraging noises from the office of Michael Douglas who, as we all know, is no stranger to slipping youngsters the odd package.

Treasurer Doug Liles would like to vigorously refute claims that he attempted to fill a suspicious black hole in the club's accounts by selling Pete Beach on E-Bay.

Noticing the high sales of CDs by the likes of **Gary French**, **Nick Maddocks** and **No Shame**, the RAC is proud to announce the imminent release of its own CD. We've taken the very best performances recorded at the club and handed them to several famous remixers, to add extra spice. So far we have a take on Steve Brown's work by Public Enemy, called Fear Of A Pink Panther, while Eminem has re-worked Gary French's efforts into Sylvia's Motherf***er. More news when it comes in.

Members are reminded that the next AGM will be held in September and new Committee members will be elected. As is now traditional, thousands of music lovers will gather outside the Ritz waiting for the white smoke to billow out. Then there's the extra wait to find out if a new chairman has really been anointed or Doreen's just burned the chips again. Do turn up. It's

The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter

The Raconteur

your club, yours to change as you see fit.

The Ritz Acoustic Club's Famous Prize-less Quiz

Welcome once more to the quiz that gives nothing away. No bottles of wine, no family packs of mini Mars bars, no humongous slab of tasty Cheddar. Achieve marks of 100% and all you'll get from us is a very supercilious "And?" But deep down you will know that you are dead brainy and therefore far better than the person sitting next to you. The feeling's worth it, believe us. Good luck.

- 1) Who played the mum in The Partridge Family? In which two major Hollywood musicals did she appear in 1955 and 1956?
- 2) Who was the original bass player and songwriter for the Sex Pistols? Who replaced him?
- 3) For which 2001 movie did Jim Broadbent win an Oscar?
- 4) They started out as Linda Ronstadt's backing band. Under what name did they find mega-fame?
- 5) What was the Rolling Stones' first UK Number One.
- 6) What was the surname of Wuthering Heights' doomed heroine Cathy?
- 7) What's the capital of Latvia?
- 8) Steve Marriott found fame as the singer in The Small Faces. But in which West End musical did he make his stage debut, as a kid, in 1961? Which character did he play?
- 9) What are the real names of the 4 members of U2?
- 10) Which Shakespeare play features a mother being fed her own children, cooked in a pie?
- 11) Which sea is actually the world's biggest lake?
- 12) Which comedian had a fictitious friend called Everard?
- 13) Who scored big with the hit albums Love It To Death and Muscle Of Love?
- 14) Name the men who replaced Harold Wilson as Prime Minister in 1970 and 1976.
- 15) Which former glam star, now a famed producer and renowned experimentalist, has the middle names Peter George St Baptiste de la Salle?
- 16) Who wrote the poem Jabberwocky?
- 17) Which country star was once married to Julia Roberts?

The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter

The Raconteur

18) What connects Fleetwood Mac, Tom Jones, REM and Booker T and the MGs?

19) Name 5 of the Osmond brothers.

20) Which Frenchman wrote the bulk of the new European Constitution, upon which we may be asked to vote in a forthcoming referendum?

Answers to last month's quiz were as follows:

1) The Man With The Golden Gun, he had three nipples 2) Roy Wood, The Move, ELO 3) Peters And Lee, Lennie Peters 4) Lady Emma Hamilton 5) Tom Cruise 6) Barbara Dickson, Chess 7) Jim Morrison, Paris, Oscar Wilde 8) Morocco 9) Black Sabbath 10) Prince Andrew 11) Neil Diamond 12) Cher 13) Tolstoy 14) The Stooges 15) Hamlet 16) Two Of A Kind 17) Kenneth Williams in Carry On Cleo 18) Tarzan 19) Punic Wars 20) Coldplay