

Sheila

The newsletter formerly known as The Raconteur

May, 2006

Thursday, April 6th

It was April at last. The beaming daffodils were blah. The cherry blossoms were blah. The Spring sunshine softly dappled the blah blah as the sweet breeze blah blah-ed over the blah blah blah. Yes, as Nature sprang gratefully back to life, all of us contemplated how tedious the Raconteur's rustic introductions had become.

At the bar discontent was rife, anger even. And the subject of all this ire was no less than cinema's premier superstar Tom Cruise. Despite his wide-open friendliness and gleaming smile, we'd read, this heartless swine was demanding that his partner Katie Holmes make no sound when delivering her first child, their impending sprog Suri. Not easy, that, as any mother knows. Or anyone who's passed a kidney stone. A kidney stone the size of a rugby ball, that is.

And it wasn't just RAC members who had something to say on the matter. The world was up in arms, eventually causing Cruise to state that Holmes wasn't actually expected to stay silent, and of course she could have an epidural if necessary. His point, he said, had simply been that, on arrival, the child should find the world to be as peaceful a place as possible, so it wouldn't be traumatised from the off (well, no more traumatised than any baby would be if the first thing they saw was Tom Cruise's giant lupine smile). There would be plenty of time for the poor mite to find out about human greed, cruelty, corruption, corporate slavery, AIDS, mass starvation, bloody civil unrest in Palestine, Darfur, Iraq, Afghanistan, Nepal, Nigeria et al, and the entirely preventable mega-deaths the rest of us witness on a regular basis.

Bearing this in mind, surely a more realistic preparation for a kid in 2006 would be for it to be born in the hospital car park outside Intensive Care, with its mother's cries of pain drowned out by the shriek of the ambulances, the ramblings of the drunk and the screams of the mutilated and the dying, perhaps with the midwife helpfully firing off a handgun and some shabby-suited company rep insistently asking whether the child's incubator is properly double-glazed and insulated. Naturally, the doctor should video the slapping of the baby's back on his mobile and send it to all his friends while a government official should also be on hand to scan the kid's eyes and take a sample of its DNA, in case it ever needs to be tracked down, heavily fined and incarcerated. Hey, if it never does anything wrong it has nothing to fear, right? Obviously, photo ID would not be necessary since, as we all know, every baby without exception looks like Winston Churchill.

Onstage, the evening would be opened by the mighty GREG AYLMEER with a mournful violin number then a chirpier Apple Blossom. Next would come ROB CAREY with Joe Brown's It Only Took A Minute and Marv Johnson's You Got What It Takes, the latter containing the extraordinary lyric "Nature didn't give you such a beautiful face". The line actually forms part of one of pop's most outrageous chat-up lines, one that invites either resigned acceptance or sudden violence. Chatting up women is a perennial problem for most men, particularly those keenly aware that Nature didn't give them such a beautiful anything. In fact, research was recently published stating that, on first contact, women are most immediately attracted by a man's self-confidence and a GSOH - that's a Good Sense Of Humour, by the way, not a Giant Sprig Of Holly, as the Raconteur found to his disappointment at numerous Christmases. A Goodly Slice Of Ham cuts no ice either, in case you were wondering. No, really, if a guy likes himself then a lady will probably share his assessment, *especially* if all her mates like him, too. Teenage girls in particular have a strong need to belong, to fit in. It's important for them to share and *be seen* to share their peers' taste in clothes, in music, in catch-phrases, in everything. Which goes some way to explaining why they've all got artless tattoos and chubby guts rolling out from under their cut-off teeshirts. And why they've all got chlamydia. And babies.

Going back to that research project, it was heartening for sensitive intellectual dudes everywhere that the ladies questioned laid great store by witty wordplay and a reckless ingenuity of mind. That said, the only chat-up line found to have a 100% success rate with women was "So, if you were on Stars In Their Eyes, who would you be?" How very depressing. No one replied "If I had to go on that show I'd hang myself with Cat Deeley's hair", or "Sorry, I never watch that, not while Strictly Come Wasting The Licence Payers' Money is on the other side" or "Tonight, moron, I'm going to be kicking you in the bollocks". Whatever happened to Grrrl Power? Did Geri die for this? (Whaddya *mean* she's not dead?) Perhaps they only asked girls whom Nature didn't give such a beautiful face and they all said "Meat Loaf. D'ya fancy a bit of paradise by the dashboard light, duck?" Ugh.

Back onstage, GARY DAY made a triumphant return with two of his own numbers, I Wish You Could Drive and Hymn Away, both rearranged, harsher and more powerful than before. He'd be followed by SAM BAKER, also singing her own songs, this time the melodic and literate Too Close and Can't Stop Loving You. After a brief interval would come BEN RUDGE with two new harmonica compositions, both of them slow, despairing and conjuring the ghosts of Gettysburg, like the moan of a bitter wind across a blackened battlefield strewn with the ill-prepared dead.

The mood would be exuberantly lifted by MAUREEN BROMFIELD, happily back after illness, who, with NIGEL SNOOK accompanying on guitar, would give us Leaving On A Jet Plane. Then would come Gary Day once more, with his excellent Stages. Next, ROWAN NODDINGS would deliver a very popular Paddy McGinty's Goat, its verses split with tremendously dodgy kazoo solos, then Gene Pitney's Looking Through The Eyes Of Love, a tribute to Gene who'd died the day before in a Cardiff hotel while on tour. He was only 24 hours from Bristol, now known as the Town Without Pitney.

Going back to Rowan's kazoo solos, readers will perhaps be interested to learn the history of the instrument. It was actually invented in the 1950s by Jean-Baptiste Kha'zou, a second generation French-Algerian who tried to assassinate President de Gaulle by sneaking up behind him and, in the hope of inducing a heart attack, going *Whheeee!* really loudly on a specially customised North African ear-flute. Convicted of Third Degree Treason, the unfortunate Kha'zou was given a sentence reserved by the French for comedy killers and condemned to the rubber guillotine, his head finally being severed at the 48th attempt - appalling for his watching wife and children but apparently absolutely hilarious for a crowd of 80,000 Parisians gathered in the Parc des Princes, many of them chanting "*Boing!!*" as the blade rebounded yet again. They eat horses as well, you know.

After Rowan would come TOMMY McDADE with a take on The Verve's Lucky Man so energetic he broke a string, then the same band's The Drugs Don't Work. Though excellently performed by Tommy, this latter track has never been wholly convincing, in particular the line "Like a cat in a bag waiting to drown". Really, does any cat in a bag fearfully foresee a watery demise? Isn't it far more likely to be thinking "Wow, with all this secrecy they must've got me a really *special* surprise birthday pressie. I can't *wait*". Whatever, all thoughts of frightened felines were swept away by TIM BROMFIELD with an arse-kicking rendition of Sweet Home Alabama, his vocals rising to a fever-pitch so anguished it sounded like he was actually on Lynyrd Skynyrd's tour plane. Classic stuff.

After a second interval, Rob Carey would return, this time accompanied by his friend CLIVE, with another Joe Brown number, A Picture Of You. Sam Baker and Nigel Snook would next cleverly and movingly turn the Bee Gees' ecstatic Stayin' Alive into a maudlin song of desperation. Then newcomers DAN DOWNSON and NATALIE SIMMONS would deliver Fairground Attraction's Perfect, a powerful, churning take on KT Tunstall's Black Horse And The Cherry Tree and a hugely atmospheric Scarborough Fair. They'd be followed by Rowan Noddings with another set of comic impressions, this week doing Bob Dylan doing Little Bo Peep, The Grand Old Duke Of York and Mary Had A Little Lamb. Rowan would give way to Nigel Snook, really in form with a Moorish-Spanish extravaganza, an impressive blast of kazoo and then the Bee Gees' New York Mining Disaster 1941. Nigel would remain up there to end the evening with the JOCKSTRAP ENSEMBLE - this week featuring PETE BEACH, Rowan, Greg and JOHN DIXON - and How Long Blues, Blow Up The TV, Sweet Sixteen, Maggie May and The Very Unfortunate Man.

But even then the evening was not over as the earlier discussion of Tom Cruise's antenatal blustering reared up again at the bar, in particular the bit about Happy Slapping. Many members had seen and rejoiced at footage doing the rounds where a young thug, filmed on his mate's mobile, punches a stranger for no reason at all, then gets cold-cocked himself by his infuriated victim. Could this, asked a hopeful few, bring about an end to this peculiarly unpleasant craze? Or would it simply be replaced by another of the outrageous fads invented by youngsters in recent months? Happy Napping, where yobs are filmed snatching forty winks, is at least socially acceptable. Happy Lapping, where hooligans drink milk from a saucer, is disgusting but hardly pushes back the boundaries of indecency. Happy Gapping, meanwhile, where spotty louts are viewed buying products from, er, Gap, might be a slap in the face for anti-capitalists but really does not constitute a crime.

Far more antisocial is Happy Crapping, where acne-spattered ruffians get super-sized at McDonalds then unload from mall balconies onto horrified shoppers below. Then there's Happy Bapping where teenage barbarians run up to unsuspecting ladies, shove their face between their breasts and go *Flubba-lubba-lubba-lubba*. How disrespectful, how sexist, how disgraceful is *that*? And yet it's nothing compared to Happy Zapping, where sniggering teenage vandals film each other as they incinerate entire continents with a super-powerful laser-gun orbiting the Earth. And we complain about skateboarders being rowdy on the sea-front? Really, we don't know we're *bom*.

Thursday, April 20th

The Royal Family, eh? For all their waving, smiling and patting children on the head, does a week pass when one of them doesn't stick their regal foot in it? This week all the talk at the bar was of Prince Harry who'd been spotted visiting

the Spearmint Rhino, an infamous lap-dancing haunt. Apparently his girlfriend, Chelsy Davy, was not pleased at all. Neither were we. For a start, this was wholly improper behaviour from a representative of the Crown. The problem wasn't that he went to the club in the first place - considering the filthy history of the English monarchy, that's entirely to be expected - but that he got *caught* there. It was embarrassingly incompetent of him, another manifestation of his Pinocchio Syndrome. Trapped in a Royal existence, the poor blighter just wants to be a *real* little boy.

Beyond the lad's foolishness, members were annoyed that the episode had planted heinous images in their minds. We'd had no wish to imagine a buxom, be-thonged blonde grinding her rump into Harry's crotch, the already ginga prince turning bright puce as he screams out "One is coming! One is *coming!*" However, one positive did spring from all this awfulness. Most members had been entirely unaware that Harry had a girlfriend, let alone one called Chelsy. Chelsy? *Chelsy*?? For God's sake, if something terrible happened to William, if he French-kissed a swan as a student prank (just to wind up grandmama who owns them all, dontcha know), and got bird flu we'd all be ruled by Queen Chelsy! We can't have a Queen *Chelsy*! Queens are supposed to have posh names like Victoria, or Camilla. At the very least they should have a bloke's name (why is the Princess of Kent called Michael?). Frantically we scoured the laws of the land, desperately seeking any obscure Act of Parliament that might prevent some bint with a chav name from ascending to the throne. But there was none. All we could do was pray for William's safety, and urge him to watch his back as that debauched, copper-topped fiend lurks in the shadows behind him.

The lap-dancing debate did not stop at Prince Harry. That very week it had been noted in the local press that a lap-dancing club had been proposed at Shakers nightclub on the High Street. Naturally, this news received a mixed welcome among RAC members. With club finances ever at the forefront of her mind, TRISH LILES suggested that we add a few lap-dancing vouchers to the raffle prizes. They'd go like hot cakes, she said, though she did voice her concern that PAUL LAWRENCE would be dead from exhaustion within a month. Treasurer DOUG LILES heartily welcomed his wife's suggestion and said he'd be leading a fact-finding mission to Shakers the very next time Trish was called out of town. Trish, as ever, countered forcefully, saying that if Doug ever tried that he'd no longer have a lap to dance on. It had all got very sticky. The situation, that is, not Doug's lap.

As is usually the case, discussion at the bar rapidly veered towards questions of philosophy and morality. What exactly is wrong, it was asked, with a woman shaking her bottom and breasts in a fellow's face as she wildly gyrates to the rhythm of MC Hammer's U Can't Touch This? In feminist terms, she's all-powerful, extracting a high price for her brief services, while her client is clearly just a dirty little monkey. DOREEN wholeheartedly agreed with this opinion, saying that was exactly why she and her voluptuous handmaidens SAMANTHA and LUCY had already applied to Shakers. They would not, though, be mere lap-dancers, rather they were to perform an exotic costume drama, a comucopia of eroticism based on tales from Greek mythology and featuring such goddesses and heroines as the beautiful Helen and Aphrodite, the charismatically tragic Cassandra and Medea and, in a pulsating finale, Medusa and her gorgon sisters. This, they believed, even if it did not turn their customers to stone, would at least turn part of them to wood. Proper job, as they say.

Greg, as is usually the case, now went that little bit further. Why not, he asked, leave an enormous wooden horse in front of the customer then, when he fell asleep from sheer boredom, we could all climb out, clad in loincloths and armed to the teeth, slaughter the customer, massacre the bar-staff, security and management and burn Shakers to the ground, returning to the Ritz in triumph to divvy up the spoils. We would certainly, he added with a devilish cackle, have the element of surprise on our side. Chairman GRAHAM COOK immediately scotched the notion, saying he could imagine the press headlines now - Local nightclub sacked by mysterious gay dance troupe. He wasn't going to be *anyone's* Troy boy, he said. He did, though, relent when Greg said he could be Achilles, like Brad Pitt in the movie. Of the other volunteers, Greg himself would be Agamemnon, the Raconteur would be Menelaus and, well, we could probably get Ajax from Teddy's Parlour.

Onstage, the session was kicked off - in time-honoured fashion - by Greg, with two chirpy mandolin pieces. He'd be followed by ROY CRAMER - long in talent as well as leg - with Pay Me My Money Down and an uptempo, fun-time take on Nottamun Town. Next would come John Dixon with Gershwin's A Foggy Day and, with Rowan Noddings joining on vocals, a fine Summertime. After a short break, Greg would return, this time on violin, with Britches Full Of Stitches. He'd then revert to mandolin and, joined by Pete Beach, race through a pair of scorching reels. Pete would remain for Dylan's Cocaine Blues and Tom Paxton's yearning, regretful Leaving London before Roy Cramer stepped up with Cat Stevens' Wild World and Sam Baker gave us her own Human and a more romantic number reminiscent of Robert Smith's lighter moments.

During the next interval, talk at the bar was of dogs. One member, having recently purchased a Labrador bitch, was considering whether to have her spayed and was urged to do so by pretty much everyone. The warning was clear - you can't stop the mucky little harlot slipping off and get herself up the duff, and you can never tell with which breed she'll do the nasty. In these days when no one will make do with anything less than a pedigree, how will you get rid of a mongrel litter? What do you *call* them, for a start? If, say, your corgi is serviced by an Alsatian, do you take out an advert saying Algis For Sale? Would Cortians Available be any better? If your poodle was porked by a Doberman,

who's going to buy a Doodle, or a Pooman? If, maybe during a holiday or a fraught visit to the zoo, your bulldog was assaulted by a dingo, could you ever hope to flog a Bingo, or a Dulldog. Doesn't sound promising, does it? Heaven forbid that your shitzu ever be poked by a pointer. You'd have to advertise it as a Pointzu. The alternative doesn't bear thinking about. For further information on the subject, members are advised to take to the Internet and seek out www.imterriblysorryiappeartohaveshaggedyourmother.com.

Back onstage, Tim Bromfield would now up the pace with Whitesnake's Here I Go Again and his own Living On A Knife Edge, before Sam Baker and Nigel Snook reprised their haunting take on the Bee Gees' Stayin' Alive. Rowan Noddings would cause howls of laughter by singing nursery rhymes in deliberately pompous classical style, then be joined by Nigel for his own Caribbean pop number Deathly Dreamers. Nigel would stay up to run through Misty and the punchy blues of Long Handed Shovel, with the evening being topped off, as ever, by the Jockstrap Ensemble, this week featuring Nigel, Pete Beach, Greg and John Dixon, with newcomers IVAN on drums and DAVE on guitar. Together, they'd race us through The Whitby Bay Smuggling Song, Marty Robbins' The Strawberry Roan and the naughty Digging My Potatoes.

If anyone thought this was the end of the night they were very wrong as all that talk of lap-dancing had caused the impromptu formation of the RAC's long-anticipated Free Love Society. Their first meeting, held under the air-conditioning unit to keep members from over-heating, was intended to iron out exactly what they meant by "Free". After all, said Acting Chairperson Doug Liles, love, in the real world, is never entirely free. Bacardi Breezers don't grow on trees, you know, and condoms can be pricey, especially those Chicken Tikka Masala-flavoured ones available in the water closets of many upmarket establishments. The price of *not* wearing a condom, however, can be even *more* prohibitive. Why, having a child can cost a chap upwards of £100 - considerably more should the CSA ever catch up with him. No, the Society needed to get its definitions straight before the first blow was administered, as it were. Free would mean Free, as in "Cancelled credit card? That'll do nicely, sir".

Beyond this, great store was laid by the Society's motto, which needed to be catchy and sexy but sophisticated enough to attract the right class of member, as it were. Greg's suggestion of "Sex!! I want it! Now!!!" was deemed a tad too aggressive, while LAURA SMITH's "Love's gentle spring doth always fresh remain" was rejected on the grounds of sheer ponciness. Doreen's cunningly libidinous "Every little helps" was considered a genuine contender, while BRYAN COUNSELL's sudden ejaculation of "I'm *lovin'* it" was seen as a trifle premature, if not suable. Eventually, there was unanimous agreement on Doug's classy pun "Greater love hath no man than to lay down his wife for his friends", though Trish did want it minuted that her vote would be withdrawn instantly should Doug fail to become buddies with that nice James Blunt.

It had been that kind of evening - extraordinary.

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

Members take note!!!! In order to freshen up the club and generally make things more interesting, from June onwards the third Thursday of each month will now be a Very Special Thursday, indeed. On those days, on top of our monthly buffet (and what a damn fine job they're doing with *that*), we will host either a Visiting Artist or a Special Extended Performance by one of the club's own regulars. The first two sets of the evening will be Open Mic as usual, so musicians will still get a chance to play. In order to cover costs, price of entry will now be £3 for members, £3.50 for non-members. This means members will get a proper concert, two open mic sets and a damn fine buffet for just £3. That's ridiculously cheap and you know it.

Will the member who generously contributed the live badger to the raffle prizes on April 13th please make him/herself known. The RSPCA would like a word.

The club website at www.ritzacoustic.com is sailing along under the guardianship of Webmaster Graham Cook. Many thanks to Gary Day for leaving it in such a solid state. As well as all the back issues of the present incarnation of the Raconteur, you can now view a list of all the gigs ever put on at the club (kindly provided by STEVE BROWN). Remember to run your cursor over the pix for Cookie's krazee captions.

Progress of the RAC-backed FolkFest, all set for September 2nd and 3rd, can be followed at www.folkfest.co.uk. We're going to need your help so please volunteer it to Graham or JACK COBBE.

The club's best wishes to the aforementioned Jack. He went into Weston Hospital recently for a simple transfusion but was forced to stay for weeks due to complications. Apparently, the doctors had attached him to a bottle of Glenfiddich instead of his usual brand. Hope you get back soon, Jack, we miss you.

The Ritz Acoustic Club's Famous Prize-less Quiz

Why? Why do you persist in coming to this page? You know that only shame and humiliation await you, yet still you come back for another bout of head-scratching, lip-biting and eventual surrender. Better get on with it, then. The sooner you start the sooner your suffering will be over . . .

- 1) Which band is fronted by singer Nina Persson?
- 2) For her part in which film did Hilary Swank win the Best Actress Oscar in 1999?
- 3) Whose recent album is called At War With The Mystics?
- 4) Who, in 1945, became the first communist prime minister of Yugoslavia?
- 5) Which singer's real name was Norma Egstrom?
- 6) What is a hummum?
- 7) When, in the early Seventies, Bette Midler won a cult following at New York's gay club The Continental Baths, who was her musical director?
- 8) Which Persian king was defeated by the Greeks at Marathon?
- 9) Which band had a drummer called Rick Buckler?
- 10) What's the capital of the Bahamas?
- 11) Which pop star of the 60s and early 70s had the middle names Oliver Ulysses?
- 12) Who was British prime minister on January 1st, 1979?
- 13) Who wrote Alan Price's 1967 hit Simon Smith And His Amazing Dancing Bear?
- 14) Who was the second Doctor Who?
- 15) Which singer was born at Locust Ridge, Tennessee, on January 19th, 1946?
- 16) From which country did Audrey Hepburn hail?
- 17) Who played the famous sax solo in Gerry Rafferty's Baker Street?
- 18) Which comedian held the office of Rector of St Andrew's University between 1979 and 1982?

19) Who made her name with the original version of Leiber and Stoller's Hound Dog?

20) If Monday's child is fair of face, what's Wednesday's child?

Answers to last month's quiz were as follows:

1) David Vorhaus 2) Nux vomica 3) Penetration 4) Caligula 5) Trees 6) John Dee 7) Ringleader Of The Tormentors 8) Emil Jannings 9) Veruca Salt 10) Bel And The Dragon 11) 1977 12) Yeomen Of The Guard 13) Geezer Butler 14) Martin Jol 15) Alecia Moore 16) Lionel Jeffries 17) Christine Collister 18) Watling Street 19) Diamond Life 20) George