

Ritz
ACOUSTIC

10 Years
Young

Provide, Promote, Perform

The Raconteur

Good evening, dear reader, and welcome to the Ritz Acoustic Club, or Le Hot Club de Burnham, as it's been known since the town was twinned with Paris last September. Don't tell the French we did that, mind. They don't like to be twinned with *les cochons rosbfifs* (something of a meaty mix-up there, *n'est-ce pas?*). You are currently perusing The Raconteur, the club newsletter, which has been in hibernation longer than the laziest bear ever born. It has been rudely awoken, of course, to celebrate the club's 10th anniversary. Yes, it's been a full decade since founder **DAVE NEVILLE** took a ramshackle crew featuring **PETE BEACH, NIGEL SNOOK, DAVID CHAVE, JIM TOPPING** and **NAUGHTY TIM DEAN** to the sacred temple of music that was the skittle alley in the Crown, set up the rudimentary gear and made a noise that echoes to this day. Ten years of strumming, picking, yowling and hammering. Ten years of dancing, prancing, crooning and spooning (playing the spoons, that is - innovative sex-play is not encouraged at the Ritz). Ten years of humping equipment, twiddling knobs, lighting candles and banking small change. Ten years. Ten bloody years. Where have they gone? Why must we get older? Why must we all die? Why? Why? *Why?*

Sorry about that. This is no time for existential crisis. But then the Raconteur is no ordinary newsletter and the Ritz is no ordinary acoustic club. And we have **MAGNIFICENT MAURICE SIMMONS** to prove it. This is a club that actively encourages musicians to strut their stuff, hone their craft, make their bones. We celebrate incompetence as a stepping-stone to greatness. We pride ourselves on our friendly, occasionally orgiastic spirit. No musician is too young or inexperienced, no musician too old (and we have Magnificent Maurice Simmons to prove it). No musician is too beautiful, no musician too ugly - and, by God, we've had our share of mingers.

So, what's changed since the Raconteur's been away? Well, it's all altered behind the bar, where **DOREEN** and her pulchritudinous handmaiden **SURETHA** have been replaced by the inordinately comely **JANE, HELEN** and **CHELSEA**. Our glorious oberfuhrer **GRAHAM COOK** has stepped aside, allowing young pretender **GREG AYLNER** to take the reins as the club's Grand Poobah (we called Greg the Young Pretender because he was natural heir to the chairmanship, by the way, not because he pretends to play the fiddle). On the tech front, how lucky we are to have seen the arrival of **DAVE WOOD** - resourceful, trustworthy and, above all, punctual. We're also seeing a lot more youngsters at the club, many of them drawn down by **NATHALIE** from the Pier, whose efforts should be noted. Much else remains the same. **TRISH LILES** still runs the raffle that keeps the club afloat, while Treasurer **DOUG LILES** still expands his vast repertoire of obscene jokes. **BRYAN** and **DON COUNSELL** still pack the gear away, **HARRY** and **CAROLINE BOYCE** still man the door and maintain our vital peanut supply-line.

Oh, and one other change. **DEBBIE BECKETT** has become club secretary. Belated apologies to Debbie who for years the Raconteur name-checked as Debbie Bennett. It was an absurd mistake, a schoolboy error, but it did at least have historical precedent. As we all know, back in 1170 when King Henry II was warring with the church and, in particular, with the Archbishop of Canterbury, he was famously heard to mutter "Who will rid me of this turbulent priest?" and so four knights took it upon themselves to visit Canterbury and off the offending cleric. What's less well-known is that, on approaching the terrified Archbishop and shouting "Are you the heinous Thomas a-Becket, whose head we mean to cleave from his shoulders and whose entrails we mean to leave steaming in the dust?", these heavily armed thugs received the reply "No, actually, I'm . . . er . . . um . . . Thomas a-*Bennett*". The unhappy priest got cleaved anyway and, in penance, King Henry would walk from London to Canterbury. The Raconteur's atonement for his literary crimes against Debbie will also see him trudge a wearisome distance - perhaps from one end of the buffet table to the other.

For all that the club has gained over the years, there have also been severe losses. We lost **BUDDY** for one, sticksman extraordinaire. Then there was former chairman **JACK COBBE**, the man who started FolkFest and a bodhran player of, er, considerable enthusiasm. And, of course, there was **NIGEL SNOOK**, a brilliant guitarist and one of the club's founders, who for years kept it going onstage, filling in for hours if there weren't enough musicians - and there usually weren't. We really miss all three of them. They're not replaceable, not at the club or in our lives outside.

We've also have some near misses. **JANET WHITE**'s brain exploded during the Bag Of Rats gig but, thank God, she's back to her charming self. The very wonderful **DOREEN ANDREWS** has had a hard time of late, a really hard time, and we all wish her the absolute best. And, to end the bad stuff, our best wishes also to **JANE FISHLOCK** who recently became sick to make someone else better. She's a brave girl, and one we should be proud of.

It used to be the Raconteur's wont to review two of our musical get-togethers each month. In this edition, because the Raconteur is lazier than the laziest bear ever born, only one evening will be recalled, the sultry night of April 30th when a real rain came to Burnham, washing all the scum off the streets - only for them to come back next morning. Opening up onstage was **JON HENDY**, Burnham's own Betjeman and, as yet, the only man to have written a song about the problem of seagull shit in Somerfields car-park. There might possibly be another one on the next Coldplay album, but it seems Chris Martin and that simpering wretch Gwyneth Paltrow have got BT to block our calls. Jon got us off to a rockin' start with a warm version of Bryan Adams' Summer Of '69 and then the funky blues of The Hollies' 1971 hit Long Cool Woman In A Black Dress.

Following Jon would be **TIM FARDON** with two guitar instrumentals. First an intricate, percussive take on Andy McKee's Ebon Coast, then a mellow but dynamic version of Don Ross's Elevation Music. It was great stuff, dextrous and soulful, worlds away from the horrible Oceanic New Age muck that's foisted upon us so often these days, those vile albums with dolphins and mountains on the cover (that's dolphins *or* mountains - not mountain-climbing dolphins). Music should make you dream of broken hearts and shattered senses, rioting teenagers and social deviants, lost love and grand designs, not smugly grinning fish. But dolphins are mammals, you cry! Get real. They live in the sea, they've got fins and tails - they're fish. Like tuna, but tastier. Probably.

Next up would be **DAVE GIBBON** who should have been intimidated by Tim's exploits but wasn't, instead piling into some heads-down no-nonsense mindless ragtime with Ralph McTell's That'll Do Babe, a song dedicated by McTell to Oliver Hardy, then a smooth run through another McTell number, Summer Lightning. It was yet another great performance by Dave - quiet, nicely understated, truly graceful. After him would come **ANDY** from **THE CHEDDAR CHEESE BAND**, revealing a surprisingly sweet voice and delicate guitar work on his cover of The Sound Of Silence, then the mighty Maurice Simmons, or Maurice Le Magnifique as we know him at Le Hot Club. On his hot, pulsing organ (ooer), he'd give us a Bilk-style take on Stranger On The Shore then a cool run through She's Funny That Way, unusually playing both songs standing, presumably to give them more welly. Not literally, you understand, not like some yokel Jerry Lee Lewis. Then again, maybe he could pull it off. Maybe after a course of ashtanga yoga, a massive dose of glucosamine and a few pints of Rich's he could flick his leg up there and we'd all be cheering for Maurice the Killer.

During the first break there was a brief to-do at the bar when one of our members was found to suffer from a mild form of Tourette's. This is an unfortunate condition where the victim finds himself uncontrollably shouting out "Gosh!", "Hot dang!", "Blitherin' 'eck!" or even, in more severe cases, "Asterisk! Asterisk! Asterisk!" The mood quickly turned to one of hilarity, though, when someone cracked that old Jethro joke. Bloke goes to the doctor's complaining of hereditary diarrhoea. "What makes you think it's hereditary?", asks the doctor. "Well", says the bloke, "it's in me jeans". Interestingly, extreme incontinence is now so common that major washing machine manufacturers have started adding a new super-powerful programme to their products, known as The Ring Cycle.

Back onstage, the second set would open with the aforementioned Dave Wood, as ever raising the general spirit, this time with Fred Wedlock's British Railways Pies. Then would come **GARY FRENCH**, first with his own plaintive love song, then The Beatles' You Can't Do That, a track from Hard Day's Night, the first album entirely written by the band. Joining Gary on bass would be the estimable Mr **PAUL STRADLING**, he of the crushed velvet garb and quicksilver fretboard action. Watching him do his wicked stuff reminded the Raconteur of a conversation we had some time ago, one carnival night in the Ritz. Why, it was asked, do terrorists bother attacking politicians, diplomats or the general public? The attacks of 7/7 were a dismal failure, only making us angry, drawing us together in support of what most had hitherto believed to be a supremely dodgy war. Blowing up our politicians wouldn't help their cause either. There's plenty more incompetent, deceitful, money-grubbing creeps where they came from. No, if extremists really want to get to the Brits, fracture their resolve and leave them teetering on the brink of surrender, they need to ignore traditional targets and aim at mid-level celebrities. Imagine the black tides of woe that would sweep the nation if Terry Wogan were beheaded on YouTube, that genial blarney silenced forever with a machete. Imagine the morale-sapping effect of the simultaneous slaying of Messrs Lynam and O'Connor, a double-Des decapitation (a *Desaster!*) from which the afternoon telly audience would surely never recover. There's no telling the damage that might be done to England's stiff upper lip if Barbara Windsor were to be

mown down with a Kalashnikov, or if Jonathan Ross's BBC-sponsored limo were to wipped apart by a woadside wocket.

This is how to strike at British hearts in 2009. No one would really care if the bearded nutters took out Gordon Brown, Harriet Harman, Peter Mandelson, or any of those other scheming, self-serving scum-bellies. Christ, most of us would happily do it ourselves if we had the nerve and could get the price of the bullets back on expenses. We despise our government because they clearly despise us, shamelessly performing a Chinese burn on our wallets to finance their catastrophic social experiments, all the while decking out their many homes with every available luxury. God forbid, they're behaving like *Italians*.

Phew, *that* one's better out than in. Back onstage, the impossibly long **BRUCE HUDSON** was laying down some sweet country folk with Kris Kristofferson's To Beat The Devil. He'd then get the ladies swaying with a groovy rendition of Dream A Little Dream Of Me, a song popularised by Frankie Laine, Doris Day and, latterly, Mama Cass. What a splendid addition to Le Club Bruce has been. His delivery's so smooth, so easy. And, of course, he's singlehandedly doubled our tally of moustaches, thereby boosting our credentials as a folk club.

Following Bruce would come **ED** and **STEVE** from The Cheddar Cheese Band with Tom Petty's The Last DJ, a song apparently banned from the band's set for being "a minor key dirge". Obviously, Petty's a pop-punk country rock god with a host of brilliant songs in his repertoire, so Ed and Steve are very welcome to perform his minor key dirges any time they like. After this one track they'd be joined onstage by the rest of the CCB (complete with fake drums - an *outrage!*) for a bouncy Peggy Sue Got Married and Merle Haggard's Sing Me Back Home, a song with an interesting history. Haggard was sent to San Quentin for burglary in 1957 and, in the January of the next year, was in the audience when Johnny Cash played the prison. Inspired, Haggard would join the prison band and launch a career upon his release, Sing Me Back Home concerning his time back in pokey. Whether the results would've been as pleasant had it been Marlene Dietrich who'd played San Quentin in '58 is open to question, a transvestite Merle Haggard growling out Falling In Love Again being hard to imagine.

With the second set coming to an end, all the talk at the bar was of the latest generation of mobile phones, usually a tedious subject approached only by cyber-numpties. This time, however, the discussion revolved around phone sex. Not the sort where you pay premium rates to hear a granny beg you to lick her thigh-length leather boots, but the sort where Premiership footballers set their expensive handsets to Vibrate, insert them into their botties and get their mates to call them up. The Raconteur covered this topic many moons ago but, far from discouraging members from this unholy practice, it seems the vile fad has rather caught on. Cast your eyes around the room right now. Do you see the secret smiles? Do you hear the clandestine rumblings from within? It's nothing to do with the reconstituted fish-sticks in the buffet, that's for sure. Really, it's happening everywhere, and what follows is an exchange that occurs daily in branches of Carphone Warehouse up and down the land.

Assistant: May I help you, sir?

Customer: Yes, I'd like a mobile phone.

Assistant: You've come to the right place. We have some very sexy items in store.

Customer: I was rather hoping you might.

Assistant: Any particular specifications?

Customer: Er, waterproof would be good.

Assistant: No problem.

Customer: And no sharp edges.

Assistant: Can do.

Customer: Multi-speed vibrate?

Assistant: Oh yes, sir. We have a pretty little number just for you. Hands-free, naturally.

Customer: Does it have, er, attachments?

Assistant: Attachments?

Customer: You know, extra knobs for, er, better reception.

Assistant: No, sir, but many of our clients recommend leaving it plugged into the mains during use.

Customer: For an extra charge?

Assistant: Exactly.

Customer: Is it Pay As You Come, sorry, Go?

Assistant: Contract only, sir. We have several alternatives - the Siemens Thruster, the Virgin Killer, the O2 Go-To, the Orange Intruder . . .

Customer: Ah, yes . . .

Assistant: Is your current phone Orange, sir?

Customer: Actually, it's kind of *brown* . . .

The final set would begin with club stalwart **ROB CAREY**, always there with a new tune, this time mixing it up big-time

with covers of Dylan's A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall and The Girl From Ipanema. He'd be followed by the ever-lively **DAVE "BUSKER" HARRIS**, on guitar and harmonica for Randy Newman's You've Got A Friend In Me, an Oscar-nominated song from the Toy Story soundtrack, then dealing well with the complex word-patterns of Arlo Guthrie's Alice's Restaurant. After Dave would come those Milverton minxes **SALLY PRITCHARD** and **KATHY KING** ("We're *not* from Milverton, dammit!"). They'd give us a wonderfully harmonious reprise of the Dixie Chicks' Not Ready To Make Nice, another song with a story behind it. Back in 2003, ten days before the invasion of Iraq, the Chicks played a London gig where singer Natalie Maines announced that she didn't support the war and was ashamed that President Bush came from her home state of Texas. Back home, the band and Maines in particular were labelled unpatriotic, un-American. Their concert audiences halved, their albums were burned, they received hate mail, even death threats. And Maines, a pretty heroic woman, wrote this song in response. As such, it's a strong and important defence of freedom of speech, as was Tom Petty's Last DJ, heard earlier in the evening, and Kathy and Sally did it full justice. They'd also give us a lovely rendition of Janis Ian's Lover's Lullaby, taken from her 1975 album Between The Lines, which also included Ian's biggest hit, At Seventeen.

Up next was the mighty Debbie Bennett - Doh! - Beckett with a storming version of Annie Lennox's first official solo single Why, then Hazel O'Connor's Will You. Debbie said she thought the second of these missed the saxophone part - not true. No song ever written would miss a saxophone. Especially not Baker Street. Closing the show would be the notoriously cheeky **STEVE BROWN** with a rapid, almost metallic take on the Pink Panther theme, then a sparkling run through The Beatles' Michelle, the first song he ever created an arrangement for. He'd then end by getting everyone singing and whistling along to Always Look On The Bright Side Of Life. We at the Ritz do always look on the bright side, even when we discover we've been paying to spread 500 bags of manure over our local MP's giant garden. Here's to another glorious ten years. *Cheers*.

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

1) As mentioned earlier, Doreen Andrews is presently having a tough time of it, and is currently in Weston Hospital. Feel free to send her your best wishes, as well as cards, flowers, chocolate and blank cheques.

2) We have some most excellent gigs coming up. They are:

June 18th: Polly & the Billets Doux

July 16th: Pamela Wyn Shannon

August 20th: Debbie Bennett - DOH!!! - Beckett

October 15th: Kit Holmes

November 19th: Siren (featuring Steve Brown)

December 17th: Christmas Party (with Bill Smarme & The Bizness)

3) It's been noted that recently people have been getting a bit noisy, particularly around the bar area. This is a social club and we all like to chat and have a good time, but please remember to show some respect to the artists onstage. *Keep it down*.

4) Treasurer Doug Liles has announced that the committee's expenses have been passed without question and there's absolutely no need for details to be released to members. The lorry-load of fertiliser seen arriving at his allotment was within the rules, as was the "executive relief".