

The Raconteur

## The Draconteur The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter Halloween Special November, 2004

Thursday, October 7th

Those October nights - ah, bitter chill they were. What sympathy we all felt for the gas and electric board-members who'd just upped our bills by 15% to keep pace with their burgeoning wages, share options and pension plans. It is not cheap, as the man once (nearly) said, to heat the mansion on the hill. More confused were feelings about the alleged activities of incoming club chairman **Graham Cook**. Ugly rumours swept the bar that he was plotting to spend the entirety of the RAC's hard-earned stash on equipment from his own well-appointed music store on College Street. With no discount for cash! New monitors, speakers and desk were on the shopping-list, it was muttered, as well as a baby grand, daddy grand and granddaddy grand. Then there were the kettle-drums, double-necked sitar, 45-strong collection of triangles and even an Aeolian harp, the last of which would force us to leave the back door open to create the requisite breeze - a move strongly opposed by some of our creakier members.

One idea did find some support, though - the purchase of a giant gong. Indeed, Treasurer **Doug Liles** immediately volunteered to strip to the waist and strike the instrument at the beginning of each session, like in those old Rank movies. A quick straw poll revealed that no lady members will now be showing up before 9. Maybe half-past, just to be on the safe side.

Onstage, the evening opened with another jaunty blast from the trusty mandolin of club stalwart **Greg Aylmer**, who stayed up to accompany **Gary French** on a racy version of The Band's Up On Cripple Creek. Gary would then perform a soulful, sorrowful take on Dwight Yoakam's I Sang Dixie before making way for **Nick Maddocks** and a couple of his own songs, Over You and Too Many Ghosts, the former being a tribute to the Everly Brothers that contemplated the problems of incompatible couples.

Next up was **Jon Austin**, first on piano for a moving run through Cole Porter's 1944 hit Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye, then on guitar, with Gary French on backing vocals, for a storming rendition of The Eagles' Lyin' Eyes. Towards the end of the song, Gary would interject with a brief "Dunnit go on?" - hilarious at the time but, in retrospect, a supremely dangerous thing to do, much like The Raconteur's spelling his name wrong for the last 4 months. It's not John, it's Jon, and you'd do well to remember that. Jon, you see, takes the misuse of his name very seriously, as his parents, in the time-honoured Johnny Cash tradition, deliberately named him Jonquil to toughen him up. So many jibes has he avenged over the years. In fact, it's said the only man who can lick him is his own brother Chris. Or rather Chrys, short for Chrysanthemum.

Jon would remain onstage (well, who was going to make him get off?) to brush the drums while **Geoff Wright** gave a masterful rendition of Duke Ellington's Take The A Train. Then **Dave Chave** made a welcome return, first with a sweet and solemn guitar instrumental, then The Bells Of Rhymney, adapted by Pete Seeger from an Idris Davies poem. Following Dave would come a real treat in newcomer **Tim Bromfield**, a professional musician who gave us a track from his latest album, a song, like Nick Maddocks' Over You, dealing with badly matched lovers. Unlike Over You, though, this was a super-dramatic heavy metal folk, and it came as no surprise when Tim followed it with a powerful and faithful take on Whitesnake's Here I Go Again.

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After Tim came **Nigel Snook**, still showing the fine form he exhibited when supporting **Bob Brozman**. After a classical intro, he burst into the blues of Long Handed Shovel then nailed some truly exceptional flamenco. Keeping to the Spanish theme, **Steve Brown** now stepped up with a Catalan folk number that put you in mind of an interestingly warped Rock-A-Bye Baby, then a mercurial rendition of Steve Howe's The Clap. Following a brief break, Steve would also start the second half, with a floating Eleanor Rigby and a bouncy Bare Necessities. He was clearly inspired to new heights of delicacy by the presence of his father, who'd apparently travelled 300 miles to see him play.

Now Gary French returned and, by popular request, gave us another pained rendition of Sylvia's Mother. This one gets requested a lot, and it's not simply because Gary plays it so well. In fact, sad songs act like a drug upon us. Strike that, they ARE a drug upon us, as they cause the release of endorphins into the body, natural substances that have much the same effect as morphine. Thus, you could actually become addicted to sad songs. Let's hope no one tells the government, otherwise they'll crack down on it, as they have on all our other pleasures. You could get 6 months for possession of Leonard Cohen's Songs Of Love And Hate, 2 years for selling it (with time off for good-humoured behaviour). Alternatively, you could voluntarily undergo a course of aversion therapy, listening to S Club 7, Girls Aloud and Joe Dolce 8 hours a day for 6 months, your programme only coming to an end when, at half-time at the next England football international, you perform The Birdie Song in the middle of a packed Millennium Stadium. Guaranteed to turn that frown upside down, eh?

Gary continued with a superb medley, including Johnny Kidd's I Know and Bad Company's Can't Get Enough Of Your Love, then vacated the stage for **Liz May** who performed a self-penned, heartfelt love-song on piano then, with Jon Austin taking over at the keyboard, she gave us Elton John's Your Song. Nick Maddocks then stepped up with 2 new ones - The Good Wind and It Could've Been Me, the latter about getting bumped off the Borderline's Slaid Cleeves bill. Then would come **Gary Day**, first with a brilliantly moody and image-packed slice of American gothic, then Neil Young's inflammatory Cortez The Killer.

By now dominating the evening (and who would dare stop him?), Jon Austin came back up, this time on guitar, for Simon & Garfunkel's The Boxer, with Graham Cook joining him on vocals (well, the double-necked sitar hadn't been delivered yet), then Dave Chave delivered a flawless rendition of Sting's If You Love Somebody Set Them Free. Up next were Jeff Wright and **Steve Holford** for Steve's rumbling speciality Old Man River, MC Steve Brown noting that Steve might easily have been a singing coach for Barry White. A question immediately arose: why did Barry White never complain about being nicknamed The Walrus Of Love? It's like being called The Obscenely Fat And Ugly Monster Of Love or The Grotesquely Obese Gargoyle Of Love or, perhaps catchier, The Lump Of Lard Of Love. It's not exactly flattering, is it? As an aside, it's a shame Barry's dead, otherwise he could've joined Rik Waller and Michelle McManus in The Travelling Pillsburries.

Finally, and miraculously as it was already nearly 11.30, Tim Bromfield ended the session with an extended and highly spirited version of Bon Jovi's Wanted Dead Or Alive. DOREEN wanted him dead, we wanted him alive. It was a fine finale.

### Friday, October 22nd

Yes, Halloween was nearly upon us, that terrible night when ghouls walk abroad and feast on

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the entrails of the unsuspecting. Yummy! Dread whispers of supernatural events, though, did not extend to the bar where all the talk was of David Beckham getting himself sent off against Wales and not joining the England team in Azerbaijan. Was it a cunning ploy to avoid being barred from later, more important matches, or was it just that Posh has said she doesn't want him playing away any more? And what of Celine Dion? Is it true she's to star in a sequel to a recent hit movie, to be titled *Seabiscuit: The Vegas Years*? Then there was Treasurer Doug Liles who, asked why he never sings onstage, replied he only ever performs in the shower - though club members are welcome to install a live web cam if they wish, at their own expense. Just don't tell **Trish**...

Onstage, with few musicians present (a situation that would not last long), Nick Maddocks had a chance to really warm up with four numbers, choosing Steve Earle's Tom Ames' Prayer and I Ain't Ever Satisfied, then his own The Good Wind and a stirring song by his friend Gary French. Greg Aylmer would then raise the tempo with a couple of mandolin reels, before Gary French himself stepped up with The Eagles' Love Will Keep Us Alive and a storming take on Tim Hardin's If I Were A Carpenter. Steve Brown entered the fray with a complex, semi-classical Steve Howe instrumental, then the **John Dixon Quartet**, all 5 of them, took to the stage. Fortunately for form's sake, Greg Aylmer immediately departed to leave John, Geoff Wright, **John Brown** and newcomer **Norman Boardman** to run through Georgia and Unforgettable, each taking solos, the whole thing being unreasonably smooth given the lack of rehearsal.

Given the contemporary worship of Jeff Buckley, it was good to hear Gary Day now perform his father Tim Buckley's melancholy, haunting classic Song To The Siren. He'd be followed by another newcomer, **Nina Fulbrook**, who gave us a courageous a cappella version of Alanis Morissette's Ironic. An interesting point to make about that song - none of the situations Morissette describes are ironic. Coincidental, unfortunate, annoying, but not ironic. Though it is quite ironic that she had a hit with a song called Ironic that doesn't contain any irony. Or is that just stupid?

Anyway, after a short interval, Nick Maddocks returned with sturdy takes on Townes Van Zandt's Tecumseh Valley and Steve Earle's It's All Up To You, then Tim Bromfield delivered his own fraught I Guess It's Over and a tasty, instrumental Stairway To Heaven. Next the John Dixon Quartet, happily 5-strong once again with the addition of Steve Holford, breezed through a splendid Summertime. On the subject of summertime, what a wonderful Indian summer we enjoyed this year. The Raconteur spent a week of it in south Somerset, at one point seeking out an old leper colony in the woods near Porlock. All was well until, attempting to park outside the hotel, he inadvertently left his foot on the accelerator (boom boom!). Staying on the leprosy tip, what a bad press that disease has had, considering all the advantages it brings. Say, for instance, your nose was to drop off. There'd be no more unsightly red marks from ill-fitting spectacles, no more coming out of Somerfields with bags of freshly baked bread and rotisserie chickens you don't really want, no more accusations of sticking it into other people's business. All good stuff. Then, at Halloween, you could have a glass eye made up that exactly matched your other two, and stick it in the hole where your nose used to be. THAT should see off those pesky trick-or-treaters.

Back onstage, John Dixon and the lads grooved through a reconstructed Lady Is A Tramp, before being joined once more by Steve Holford for I'm Gonna Sit Right Down And Write Myself A Letter. Then Nina Fulbrook, accompanied by Steve Brown on guitar, delivered an affecting take on Olivia Newton-John's Hopelessly Devoted To You, giving way to Gary French with Dr Hook's A Little Bit More and a rousing rendition of Paul Anka's Diana, the song that first

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introduced the world to teen angst (No, it didn't. Yes, it did. No, it didn't. Yes, it did. YOU JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND ME!!!). Following Gary, Jon Austin took to the piano and **David Wright** to the harmonica for a passionate run through Bridge Over Troubled Water then, with Jon on vocals and David on sax, Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye. The evening would be topped off by Gary Day with stripped-down and hair-raisingly fraught versions of Pearl Jam's Jeremy and Joni Mitchell's Woodstock. The session had been another riotous success.

### **BREAKING NEWS . . . BREAKING NEWS . . . BREAKING NEWS . . .**

Members are reminded that **Clive Gregson** will be performing at the club on Saturday, November 27th, supported by our own Nick Maddocks. Tickets are a snip at £5 and are available from GC Music (01278-794-434). This will be the last RAC concert of 2004 and should match the excellence of the **Angelo Debarre** and Bob Brozman shows.

More bad news about the Christmas party, set for Friday, December 17th. That heartless little hobbit ELIJAH WOOD has refused to play Father Christmas for us, even though we threatened to set Jon Austin on him. Secretary Steve Brown has now officially given up on Hollywood and turned his beady eye on the world of soaps. Unfortunately, with Yuletide fast approaching, LESLIE GRANTHAM, PATRICK MOWER and WILLIAM ROACHE are already booked for panto, but Steve says there's a fair chance we'll get CHESNEY from Coronation Street - in which case we'll need someone to alter the Santa costume. Volunteers please make yourselves known at the desk.

To all musicians: if you have any upcoming gigs you'd like mentioned in The Raconteur, just pass on the info and we'll do the rest. All we require is free tickets, drinks and a lift there and back. Fair do's.

Finally, the committee are welcoming suggestions for a new club logo, something similar to the old one, but a tad punchier. So far they have Provide Promote Pontificate, Provide Promote Pillow-fight, Provide Promote Protrude (guess which Treasurer suggested THAT one), and Provide Promote Palaeontology (which The Raconteur believes is in keeping with many of the songs that get played down here). Any SENSIBLE ideas should be mentioned to Graham, preferably when he's wearing his head-phones at the sound-desk.