

The newsletter that don't need no fought-control

Christmas, 2010

Welcome, welcome and thrice welcome to the Ritz Acoustic Club or, as the locals like to know it, Le Hot Club de Burnham. And a Merry Christmas to you. May your every social, economic and erotic desire be satiated in the coming year, in some cases several times a night. Ooer, don't mind me and no mistake, missus.

Before we move on to the now, let us briefly peruse the past, get our bearings, consider how Le Club has changed since the Raconteur last assaulted our eyeballs. Well, the GREG years are gone, the AYLMER era's over, and ROB BROWN is our new chairman. Or, as our constitution more correctly puts it, our new Obersongsuntbuffetfuhrer. Longstanding treasurer DOUG LILES has stepped down, taking with him our last hopes of winning a cheap weekend trip to Bangkok in the raffle. SUE STENT has taken over as Membership Secretary and, at the last count, our numbers had hit a new high of ninety-two. Ninety-two!!! Long gone are the days when our beloved JOCKSTRAP ENSEMBLE outnumbered the audience two to one. Sadly, the club has also suffered serious losses in the last 18 months. The very wonderful DOREEN ANDREWS has left us; so too has ED BORTHWICK, a gentleman of great humour and musical taste. They are both still much loved and missed tremendously.

As some of you know, the Raconteur is not simply a mindless mish-mash of inanity and casual obscenity. It's also an historical document, a snapshot of the RAC as she be. By reviewing a night or two at the club we are letting future generations know that, yes, they may have jet-packs, teleporters and eternal life but we had magnificent MAURICE SIMMONS and Rich's cider and we were very happy, thank you very much. In this edition we're letting future generations know about the evening of December 9th, 2010, when Greg, as is his wont, opened the show with his a cappella take on Murphy's Bricks (requested by JON HENDY) and then picked up his mandolin for a lovely medley of Simon Mayor's Dead Sea Dances. He'd be followed by Jon himself with a fun run through the Monkees' I'm A Believer and then David Bowie's Space Oddity. Jon exudes warmth onstage, immediately winning over the audience. His next step will surely be to memorize a raft of songs so he can dispense with the music sheets and engage directly. Then, able to concentrate on singing freely, he will become the performer he could be. And he will be bloody good.

After Jon would come the estimable DAVE GIBBON, widely regarded as the club's most improved musician and consequently the winner of the Endeavour Cup for 2010. It says Originality on the cup, but it means Endeavour. We just had an incredibly bad engraver, that's all. Also chosen as main support for the TEN POUND SUIT BAND at the club's Christmas Party, Dave would begin with Whistling Rufus, one of the tunes with which John Philip Sousa's band popularized ragtime in Europe in the early 1900s. Wisely, Dave would play the tune as an instrumental, the lyrics, added in the 1920s, being famously racist. He'd then move on to Tom Waits' San Diego Serenade, from the Heart Of Saturday

Night album, sounding quietly damaged rather than gruffly lovelorn, and all the more affecting for it. Dave occasionally delivers a haunting and fragile take on Shiver Me Timbers from that same album that's well worth catching, and the Raconteur would bet good money that he could pull off a fine version of Time from Rain Dogs and maybe, by way of variety, Invitation To The Blues from Small Change. There's never been enough Tom Waits played at the Ritz. Or Motorhead, come to think of it.

Finishing the first set would be Andrew's Half Sister. Unable to make the next week's party, they'd bring a little early festive cheer and get all mediaeval on our asses with the Boar's Head Carol, Lorna adding an impressive drone with her extraordinary shruti box. Metallic and leathery, like a heavily armoured lever arch file, this is an ancient Indian instrument recently employed by Karine Polwart and, sonically, reminding the Raconteur of the classic folk band Mr Fox. Coincidentally, on the following Monday in Bristol, during their concert with Maddy Prior, The Carnival Band would also play the Boar's Head Carol, but would not sound better or quite as mediaeval as Andrew's Half Sister. Lorna and Andrew would continue with In The Bleak Midwinter, an innocent tune from a time before Christmas became a cash cow milked dry by the slaving corporate monster. Actually, that's a lot of rot. Christmas is and always was all about presents. Indeed, that very hymn speaks of shepherds handing over precious livestock and the Magi offering an eye-popping selection of rare and pricey products. Unable to match their generosity, the poor songwriter even considers presenting her amputated and still-beating heart as a gift. As the writer was Christina Rossetti we should expect a little pre-Raphaelite over-dramatization, but her Christmas message remains clear. You must give and give and give until you're bled dry. Charles Dickens is more specific in his Yuletide parable A Christmas Carol. What does Scrooge do as soon as he recognises he's got Christmas all wrong? Why, he bowls round to Bob Cratchit's with bags of pressies and a gigantic bird for the oven. He buys and gives. So, at Christmas, like Scrooge reborn, we too must buy and give and buy and give until it hurts, until the cards are maxed and the future's mortgaged. We should behave like Gordon Brown in a red furry hat and fake beard. Buying and giving will make us whole. Buying and giving will set us free. So, buy and give and buy and give until you can take no more. This attitude may seem new and even avant garde to you but, as just proven, it's very English and dead traditional, so don't scoff. Or rather *do* scoff as Christmas is also about overt gluttony. We'll go into that some other time.

During the first break all the talk at the bar was of the student riots in London, in particular the student who appeared on a TV news broadcast angrily proclaiming that his rights had been "impeded on". "For God's sake!" millions of viewers cried in unison, "someone educate that dunderhead, and hang the expense!" Interestingly, unlike their French counterparts, British students no longer riot over points of principle, only cold, hard cash. One imagines their French counterparts might also have taken the trouble to guillotine Prince Charles had he fallen into their clutches, rather than just paintballing his motor. But there is a point of principle here. It's clearly not fair that English students must pay where Scottish students do not. But then it clearly wasn't fair that the English nicked all the money from the Scots' North Sea oil. Or that we killed William Wallace. Or that we laughed when their footie team lost of Costa Rica. Any one of these things was worth a

riot, really. But enough of civil disturbance. That's not Christmasy. Let's spare a thought for those suffering terrible mental traumas, for those crushed by regret, those drowning in despair. Let's pray for poor Gordon Brown. No, really. That guy spent his entire adult life as a leftie, dedicated to bringing power and wealth into the hands of the people. And he bugged it up so badly he's allowed the Tories to pass a series of measures - like the one shifting education fees from state to student - that so blatantly favour the rich they'd never have gotten away with it before. Poor, poor Gordon. He put in all those years of work just to bring about a Tory revolution. *Doh!*

Beginning the second set was the mighty DAVE "BUSKER" HARRIS, the only musician at Le Hot Club with his own nickname, if you discount STEVE "Oh no, it's Steve Brown" BROWN. Dave wanted to continue on Andrew and Lorna's festive trajectory and so began with Mull Of Kintyre, a Christmas Number One for Paul McCartney and Wings back in 1977. As ever, Dave did a great job on his trusty squeezebox, but we couldn't help flashing back to those dreadful winter nights watching Macca, Linda and Denny Laine strolling smugly through the Scottish countryside with those blasted pipes blaring out, week after week for nine whole weeks when we were all pretty convinced there was a punk rebellion going on *somewhere*. Bagpipes and pop seldom mix well. Remember that version of Amazing Grace by the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards? Number One in 1972, in the charts for 24 weeks, so boring the miners went on strike to stop them playing it on the radio. Or something. Still on accordion, Dave then went on to play Mairi's Wedding, AKA the Lewis Bridal Song, a bouncy Gaelic number written by Johnny Bannerman for his pal Mary McNiven back in 1935.

Next up would be ANDY ROMOFF from the CHEDDAR CHEESE BAND, with young OLIVER on bass. They'd run through a cheerful version of the Ronettes' Be My Baby, Andy's guitar held high, Oliver's bass slung low in a refreshingly rock'n'roll fashion, then kick into the Band's The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down. Excellent stuff, and the crowd sang along in recognition of that. They'd be pleased, too, by a super-smooth BRUCE HUDSON and his take on Gene Vincent's Keep It A Secret, an odd song where Vincent begged the listener not to tell him if they saw his girl canoodling with an old flame. Apparently, he thought the knowledge might damage their relationship. Clearly Gene had no future as a marriage guidance counsellor. Unfortunately he didn't have much of a future as a human being either. Bruce would move on to Badfinger's Without You, another longstanding Number One, this time for Nilsson in March and April of 1972 (coincidentally it would be replaced at the top of the charts by the aforementioned Amazing Grace). God, it was boring when songs were Number One for ages. The only thing worse was when they announced at the start of Top Of The Pops that your favourite song of the moment was coming on and your feverish wait ended in furious disappointment when the band never appeared and Pan's People danced to the song instead. Of course, the merits of Pan's People became more obvious as one grew older. Legs And Co were actually quite good sometimes, and Hot Gossip, well, that group was so sexy their allure still drips down the decades, the echo of their appeal even making Arlene Phillips seem a babe, freakish and heavily tampered with though she undoubtedly is.

Just at this moment, Steve Brown walked in, bringing with him the possibility that tonight's run of interminable Number Ones might be topped by the granddaddy of them all - Bohemian Rhapsody. Of course, there was also still a chance that someone might have a go at the unbearable Love Is All Around or the godawful Everything I Do I Do It For Me, sorry, You, just as there was a high likelihood that the Raconteur might quietly bleed to death at the back, after brutally jabbing his cheap biro into his own neck. Happily, all gruelling flashbacks from Top Of The Pops past were swept away by NICK and CHRIS ELSWOOD and their kickin' cover of the Rolling Stones' Little Red Rooster. Interestingly, this was also a Number One during the Christmas period, having hit the top in December, 1964, where, exhibiting unusual good taste, it remained for only one week. Even more interestingly, it's still the only blues song to've ever made Number One in the UK. Nick and Chris would continue with the salacious Spider And The Fly, the B-side to the Stones' Satisfaction, with Nick indulging in some hot scatting and the boys toying with each other hilariously in a series of fake endings.

The third set would be opened by the awesome STEVE HOLFORD and a take on Mel Torme and Bob Wells' Christmas Song, more commonly known as Chestnuts Roasting On An Open Fire, officially the most performed Christmas song ever written. Egged on by big cheers, he'd continue with White Christmas, his voice now so deep all the old fears returned. Could the super-structure of the Ritz stand this level of resonance? Would the walls collapse, burying club members beneath the rubble of two cinemas, a skittle alley, a bar and a weird room readied for a telephone mast that never arrived? Would we be like the Chilean miners, stuck for months in this hell-hole, surviving only on HARRY BOYCE's tightly rationed peanuts and the box of All Gold Greg won in the raffle? Would we be kept from despair only by Doug's dirty jokes and thoughts of the book and film deals we'd inevitably be offered upon our release? Immediately the club began to buzz with ideas of who might play us in the movie. Jeff Bridges would make a cool and groovy Nick Elswood, we reckoned, with Jack Black as devilish Chris. Robert Downey Jr could probably pull off GRAHAM COOK's hilarious Germanic patter as MC, while Meryl Streep might manage CAROLINE BOYCE's sexy acidity on the door. J-Lo, naturally, would do the raffle with the Raconteur played by, oh, let me think, Johnny Depp? Clooney? Pitt perhaps? It's so hard to decide . . .

Onstage, Steve Brown would keep to the Chrimbo theme with pretty instrumental adaptations of Winter Wonderland and Silent Night, then challenge all subsequent performers to get festive, too. A returning Dave Gibbon would take up the gauntlet, cleverly slipping a slice of Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer into a ragtime mash-up. He'd then deliver a sweet take on Richard Thompson's Waltzing's For Dreamers. Up next would be DEBBIE BECKETT with a swinging, soaring cover of Big Yellow Taxi, a song that has particular meaning for Burnham and the rest of Somerset these days. At some point in the near future, we are going to have to start protesting about the endless building on green spots. Debbie would end with a super take on Bob Dylan's Make You Feel My Love, a big hit when sung by Adele. The evening would then be closed by ROB CAREY, who'd start with a truly affecting attempt on T.Rex's Get It On, in his repressed desire coming on like a ticking time-bomb of love, about to explode into . . . no, let's not take that any further. What a strange song Get It On is. To get it on generally means to make love,

does it not? Why would Marc Bolan then urge us to bang a gong? Does he mean during or after? Is it out of sheer joy at getting to have sex with somebody? And if you don't have a gong to hand, would another percussive instrument do? A triangle, for instance, or a tambourine? Or is he talking in a Gong Show sense, where your lover is so incompetent you bang the gong to end their ineffectual performance and throw them out of bed? A bit harsh, surely? Anyway, Rob would now reintroduce the Christmas spirit, ending with a spruced up take on Chuck Berry's Merry Christmas Baby and then Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas, sung by Judy Garland in the 1944 flick Meet Me In St Louis. Is this not the saddest Christmas tune ever written? And so very wrong for the Ritz. After all, none of us want a merry little Christmas, do we? We want a ginormous behemoth of a Christmas, sacks of glittering goodies, hours of sub-mistletoe snogging, stacked cases of the finest wine Threshers have to offer. We want to ram turkey into our dribbling maws, to gobble sprouts till our bottoms detonate, to quaff egg nog till our stomachs need pumping. That's Christmas at the Ritz. *Get it on.* BONG!!!!

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

The committee is sorry to announce that Christina Aguilera's planned appearance at the Christmas Party has been vetoed by ex-Treasurer Doug Liles. Doug feels Miss Aguilera's performance wouldn't be lewd enough.

Andrew and Lorna from Andrew's Half Sister are seeking the music to Harold Darke's version of In The Bleak Midwinter. Can anyone help?

A big Ritz Acoustic Club howdy to ERIC GILL who's suffered health problems of late. Best wishes and season's greetings from all of us to all of you, Mr Gill. Get well soon.

The committee is sorry to announce that Britney Spears will also not be appearing at this year's Christmas Party. Apparently, she heard what Doug said to Christina Aguilera.

Chairman Rob Brown is now welcoming suggestions for ways of celebrating Elizabeth II's jubilee in 2012. And there won't be a Queen tribute act, OK?

Arbitrary albums of the month:

Folk: Spyro Gyra - A Canterbury Tale (the real deal from the early Seventies)

Pop: The Cardigans - Super Extra Gravity (best pop LP since Blondie's Parallel Lines)

Indie: Lydia Lunch - Uncensored/Oral Fixation (underground poetry to burn your ears off)

Will the person who knocked the Raconteur's wing-mirror off earlier this year please go boil their head?

The next buffet night at the RAC will be on Thursday, January 20th. Guest artistes will be the bluestastic TIM FARDON and ROWAN ENSOLL.

Remember, there will be Ritz Acoustic Club meetings on Thursday, December 23rd and Thursday, December 30th. Be there or be, er, *elsewhere*.