

The Raconteur

The Raconteur The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter September, 2004

Friday, August 20th

Ah, yes, the dog days of summer were upon us. The rain crept up in sly storms, the cars were bobbing happily through the streets of Cornwall, and everyone was suffering a bad hair Groundhog Day. In the Ritz, all the talk was of Treasurer and Acting Chairman **Doug Liles'** plans for a Ritz Acoustic Club golf tournament, entry for members to be compulsory, along with fancy dress. Doug himself, he announced solemnly, would come purrrfectly attired as Eartha Kitt, while **Tony Harvey** would appear in full panto-gear as a Caliph (oh, yes, he would!). Early favourite for the tournament itself was **Gary French**, who never misses with The Eagles (oh, somebody STOP me!).

Onstage, **Roy Cramer** and **Eileen Hardacre** opened with a country-blues song titled A Smile Upon Your Face, written by Eileen about a close friend and melodically recalling the Rolling Stones' take on Fred McDowell's You Gotta Move. Coincidentally, they'd follow this with a deft cover of The Stones' Lady Jane, with Roy delivering a sweet burst of Pan pipes. Next up was **Linda Bond**, who considerably lowered the club's average age by bringing along her children - **Joe, Tom** and **Megan**. At 6, Megan was the youngest-ever performer at the RAC, though you wouldn't think so if you heard Doug's jokes when he MCs. Employing piano, accordion, shaker and bodhran, then singing a cappella, the family would engage us with some charming rustic folk.

Now **Nick Maddocks** took to the stage to perform the title track of his album, Friday Night Star, and also an impressive, self-penned, Nashville-style narrative. He was followed by - Gawdblessya! - Gary French, who widened his repertoire with lively covers of The Beatles' All I've Got To Do and John Fogerty's classic Joy Of My Life. Then there was **Mike Ludlow**, a young dude in a Metallica t-shirt who took to the piano and created a hugely entertaining ad lib medley veering wildly from Guns N'Roses' November Rain to the bit of Nino Rota's Romeo And Juliet that Simon Bates nicked for the Our Tune theme. Our Tune - how the tear-streaked memories came flooding back. Remember Dolly, the jovial lollipop lady from Clacton, whose first love was killed by an air-dropped food-parcel while holidaying in Sudan? Tragic stuff. How wonderful, then, that love came knocking again, only for her second husband to develop a mortal case of gangrene when holding a Polaroid in his armpit for just a few hours too long. She still kept the photo in her wallet, though it was a bit green round the edges. But dogged Dolly kept on, her pursuit of happiness continuing with Malcolm, an airport Customs inspector who met his Maker while conducting an internal drugs search - he lit a match to take a deeper peek. Then there was Roberto, the first man ever to contract salmonella from a Cadbury's creme egg. And Harry, accidentally strangled by Mickey Mouse at EuroDisney. Poor, brave Dolly. She'd never have made it through without Robert Palmer's Some Guys Have All The Luck.

But we disgress. Next onstage came **Damien Donnellan** with a super-rapid Spanish-style guitar instrumental he called Death Of A Wasp. He was then joined by his wife **Fay** for fine renditions of Your Cheatin' Heart and Fred Neil's Everybody's Talking. Sax-god **John Dixon**, accompanied by **Jeff Wright** on guitar, would keep the standard high, before **Greg Aylmer** finally introduced us to his fiddle. However, anyone hoping for some backwoods bounciness was sorely disappointed as Greg proceeded to scrape out a melody so maudlin it would have made

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Leonard Cohen cry. Thankfully the pleasant mood was restored by the vivacious Irish reel he then delivered with **Jack Cobbe** on bodhran, and continued by the evening's compere **Steve Brown** who gave us his well-practised version of Henry Mancini's Pink Panther theme, then ran through Bohemian Rhapsody once again. Incidentally, members are requested to join our campaign to stop Steve defecting to the Milverton folk club. Our motto is "Bismillah! NO!!! We will not let him go!" and badges are being made up as we speak. Unfortunately, they'll be rather expensive due to their unusual size.

After the break, **Leo St Mark** threatened to inflict Bohemian Rhapsody on us yet again, but instead treated us to Queen's Crazy Little Thing Called Love. An excellent performance, though he did fail to include the original's funky finger-clicks - they're not easy when you're playing guitar at the same time. Mark then nailed another excellent take on the Groover From Vancouver's (Everything I Do) I Do It For You. It's worth noting Bryan Adams' clever use of bracketing in the title of this song. Had he made it Everything I Do I (Do It) For You, he might well have become embroiled in a Judas Priest-like trial. That's the kids of today for you. Not so long ago, if a singer had sung "Do it" to them they'd have thought he meant for them to fall in love. Nowadays, they'll take the message as "Hey, why not go shoot yourself in the face with a sawn-off shot-gun?" Or a flaming arrow, like in Bryan's video, though that might be a tad trickier...

Anyway, Mark was followed by Mike Ludlow and his buddy **Will Sealey**, something of a lookalike for Free's Paul Rodgers. The duo burst into an exuberant a cappella version of Janis Joplin's Mercedes Benz that made up in spirit and hilarity for what it lacked in tunefulness. It was great fun. So too were the returning Roy Cramer and Eileen Hardacre with their takes on Scissor Sisters' Take Your Mother Out and The Lonely Shepherd, the latter representing the very peak of Welsh erotica. **Liz May** was next, first delivering a very pretty self-penned piano instrumental, then inviting Steve Brown to back her on Madonna's Crazy For You.

It's always a pleasure when visitors perform at the RAC, and now uber-groogle **Andy Stamp** stepped up to show real talent on the violin, first exploring Summertime, with Steve Brown on guitar, then the Blue Peter theme, with Jack Cobbe on bodhran. Not to be outdone, Nick Maddocks and Gary French joined forces for stirring covers of Slaid Cleaves' Horseshoe Lounge and Guy Clark's Come From The Heart, the second track urging us to "dance like nobody's watching". This would surely be most liberating, but not altogether wise. After all, did anyone really want to be subjected to the outrageous and hitherto secret exhibitions of trousersnake-charming that pass for dancing in The Raconteur's house? A quick canvassing of RAC members revealed the short answer to be No. The long answer was really quite hurtful, actually...

After Linda Bond had entertained us once more with a solo Ten Thousand Miles, Jeff Wright and **Steve Holford** rounded off the evening with superb renditions of Rodgers and Hart's Where Or When and Johnny Mercer's Autumn Leaves. It was great to have Steve back, he's such an effortless performer. **Doreen**, too, was pleased that he didn't endanger the foundations with his awe-inspiringly deep take on Old Man River. It's possible, though, that Steve's Autumn Leaves may have caused seismic reverberations further afield, as Florida would soon be hit by Hurricanes Charley and Frances. Indeed, George and Jeb Bush were said to be considering having Steve's lips stitched together by the counter-terrorism branch of the CIA. Let's hope it doesn't go to a vote....

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In the continuing and really rather irritating absence of **Colin Hillier**, Greg Aylmer opened the evening, cajoling from his violin a tune so sad it made Danny Boy sound like Shaddup You Face. Truly, the man is the master of melancholia, the lord of the lachrymose, the duke of despair, the wizard of woe. But only when he's playing his violin. With the mandolin, which he picked up now, he's thoroughly uplifting, particularly when accompanied by Jack Cobbe's trusty bodhran.

With our frowns now mercifully turned upside down, Linda Bond gave us some compelling squeezebox folk then an a cappella version of Kate Bush's timelessly beautiful The Man With The Child In His Eyes. **Ben Rudge** then blew manfully on his bugle, receiving tremendous applause. He'd be followed by the ever-popular **Brian Embleton** who delivered a lilting Irish romance and then a hilarious The Lady Who Swallowed A Fly (well, she should've made sure it was stitched on properly).

After Brian came Tony Harvey, in one of his final appearances before he takes the second star to the right and goes straight on till morning. Actually, this time Tony's panto will be Sinbad, which he'll be performing in Brean for a week next February. Official DVDs should be on sale soon afterwards, so watch out for pirates (no, really, somebody's got to STOP me!). Tonight, Tony gave tremendous performances of his own composition, Take Me Home, and Saw Doctors' Share The Darkness, the songs' titles, taken together, sending out a clear and rather lascivious message. There were many takers (oh, no, there weren't!).

Gary French now stepped up with Dr Hook's A Little Bit More and then The Eagles' Best Of My Love, a track he doesn't play often and which seemed to lead him to one of his finest performances in ages, controlled but still genuinely emotional. As an aside, isn't it a shame that the name Dr Hook is now forever attached to sentimental pop songs? It would have been far more appropriate for a cartoon super-villain, probably one who has a iron claw instead of a hand and wants revenge on Superman because it was Superman who inadvertently sat on his hand on the bus and crushed the bones to jelly beneath his super-buttocks. That would put a totally different slant on things. "Mrs Avery, if you do not bring Sylvia to the phone immediately I will ... flay ... you ... alive. NO ONE escapes the vengeance of Dr Hook! AHAHAHAHA!". Mmm, that's more like it.

Steve Brown would now keep the quality high, first with a rocking Steve Hackett instrumental, then by slipping seamlessly from Moon River into The Carpenters' Close To You. Following Steve would be perennial RAC guitar hero **Nigel Snook** who, like Gary French before him, delivered his strongest performance in some time. First, it was all Iberian drama then, as he himself pointed out, it WASN'T Iberian as he raised his guitar to his chin and, combining raw pace with rare grace, really let us have it.

John Dixon now mellowed the mood with smooth sax takes on Cry Me A River and then My Funny Valentine, thus raising that age-old question one more time. What's funny about valentines? There's NOTHING funny about valentines. They're painfully, back-breakingly expensive, as anyone who's recently visited a florist could tell you. Small wonder the cemeteries are so callously denuded come February 14th. Yet, despite this controversy, still the spirit of romance persisted, as now Gary French returned with Bobby Darin's Dream Lover and then an unlikely but cheering take on I'm Gonna Knock On Your Door, a song last taken into the charts by that irritating little freak Jimmy Osmond.

After Linda Bond had movingly interpreted the trad classic Waterbound, complete with brief clog dance, **Mark Porter** came on with Bad Company's Shooting Star and a nicely soulful version

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of The Calling's Wherever You Will Go. Surely it's about time Mark covered Johnny Cougar's Jack And Diane? It would suit his voice and the lyrics strike deep. "Ooh, yeah, life goes on, long after the thrill of living is gone" - it would make perfect sense to anyone who's ever sat in on an RAC committee meeting. After Mark would come GARY DAY, up from Cornwall and claiming this was his first public performance in two years. He showed few signs of rust, though, and his two self-written songs were excellent, a very contemporary folk recalling the likes of Tom McRae and Ed Harcourt.

Steve Brown now took to the stage, only to be ordered, with unseemly glee in some quarters, to get off. It wasn't that Sir Paul McCartney had finally put an embargo on him ever playing Eleanor Rigby again, rather that it simply wasn't his go. That honour belonged to Mike Ludlow and Will Sealey, who now brought to bear the musicianship they exhibit in their band, currently named The Moomins. With Will on drums, Mike let loose on the keyboards, coming over like a cross between Deep Purple's Jon Lord and The Abominable Dr Phibes, a description totally undermined when he ended by dropping into Scott Joplin's The Entertainer. Entertaining it was, indeed.

Following a brief fracas at the bar when Treasurer and Acting Chairman Doug Liles revealed his plan for all committee members to be allowed the use of company cars, **Jon Austin** now performed Robbie Williams' Better Man and Simon And Garfunkel's The Boxer with great style and feeling. One hopes he'll do an equally fine job on The Raconteur's mum's kitchen and, while we're at it, that he'll be "asking only workman's wages".

Finally, it was Steve Brown's turn, and, having laid down a tasteful Killing Me Softly, he was joined by Tony Harvey for gender-sensitive adaptation of The Man With The Child In His Eyes. It was lovely, but it was very, very wrong, as no song can be played twice on the same night. It's in the rules. Or so we thought, for, when angrily confronted, Steve calmly explained that the club's constitution (which, as Secretary, he is currently in the process of reworking) clearly states that playing songs twice is actually one of the Club Secretary's privileges. As is having his mortgage paid, and the season ticket at Anfield. As the constitution now stretches to 800 closely-typed pages, no one could be arsed to check, so we let it lie.

Nigel Snook now returned with some hard-edged old-school r&b and a masterfully delicate arrangement of Erroll Garner's 1954 hit Misty. He'd then remain onstage as **The Jockstrap Ensemble** formed around him, this time featuring **Pete Beach**, Greg Aylmer, Jon Austin and Jack Cobbe. As ever, a storm was kicked up as they raced raucously through Maggie May and Me And Bobby McGhee, bringing the evening to a sweaty, satisfied close.

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

Members are hereby reminded that **Bob Brozman**, American master of slide and Hawaiian guitar, will be playing at the club on Friday, October 15th. Tickets are £10 and available in advance from GC Music (01278-794-434). Really, this is not to be missed.

Also, the RAC has booked **Clive Gregson** for Saturday, November 27th. Clive was frontman and songwriter in ANY TROUBLE, a band from the same "pub rock" class as Dr Feelgood and Elvis Costello. He later enjoyed a fruitful folk career in tandem with CHRISTINE COLLISTER before releasing a series of well-received solo albums. Tickets are priced at a ridiculously low £5 and, as ever, GC Music will sort you out.

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As the windows in your Filofax rapidly close, please note that the RAC Christmas Party is booked for Friday, December 17th. Major plans are afoot and a bar extension has been applied for. We reckon an extra 25 feet should do it. Unfortunately, BRAD PITT has turned down our invitation to appear as Santa, but keep your hopes up as secretary Steve Brown is now in frantic negotiations with KEANU REEVES.

The RAC AGM is scheduled for Monday, September 27th, in the Ritz's flash Gatsby Bar. All members are welcome and anyone wishing to stand for office should add their name to the list by the door. Wary applicants are reminded that those shirts Doug wears are not the compulsory uniform of the chairman.

Musicians are hereby informed that, in place of Folk In The Park, a CADS show is being held at Highbridge Community Centre on October 23rd, with a pro headlining act. If you'd like to perform (each support set is 30 minutes), please sign up at the door. Obviously, there won't be time for everyone to have a go, but some will get the opportunity. Finally, on behalf of the RAC, thanks go out to the committee for their hard work over the last 12 months. Their names have been put forward for the Queen's New Year's Honours List (sadly, the letter has already been returned, stamped with a big black REJECTED and a very fierce-looking corgi). The club is in an ever-healthier state and we look forward to an action-packed 2005. Thanks too to the musicians who entertain us week in, week out. Without you we'd all be sat here looking bemused and faintly embarrassed.