

The Raconteur

The Raconteur The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter March 2005

Thursday, February 17th

Buggerinell, it was cold. Winter had descended with a vengeance, and there was such a vicious nip in the air that many joined our less-well-endowed lady members in padding up good and proper. Indeed, people were so extravagantly wrapped it looked like the club was holding auditions to be the next Michelin Man. Unfortunately, our more arthritic members were clearly suffering badly as, when the music softened, you could hear a cacophony of creaks and groans that might have added much-needed atmosphere to the recent remake of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. Asked to offer some succour to the sick by breaking out her famous hot toddies, **Doreen** said she knew they were hot but she wasn't breaking them out for anyone - not without dinner and a bunch of flowers, anyway.

After this cruel disappointment, talk at the bar turned to human chimeras. Often occurring in IVF pregnancies, these are the result when two embryos fuse together, meaning that the baby born is actually a mixture of two completely different people. One child, outwardly male, was found to possess an ovary and a fallopian tube (in his body, that is, not in his bedroom cupboard - that would be really weird). Spooky stuff, and it might explain why Secretary **Steve Brown** occasionally transforms into Dick Van Dyke.

Onstage, the evening opened with the ever-dependable **Greg Aylmer**, conjuring more Mississippi magic and Celtic wonder from his trusty mandolin. He was followed by **Ken Jackson** of Woolavington, who gave us the traditional murder ballad Tom Dooley and a variation on The Girl In The Black Velvet Band, the Irish number here being infused with the bluegrass of Pete Rowan. The Raconteur must admit he'd never heard of The Black Velvet Band before, but they did sound fascinating. Next up was the estimable **Roy Cramer**, who delivered a superb rendition of James Taylor's Fire And Rain before being joined by **Eileen Hardacre** for a jerky, quirky reggae take on Men At Work's huge 1982 hit Down Under, and then a powerful run through The Moody Blues' Nights In White Satin. It's a very evocative, even sensual title, that one. But any members thinking of treating themselves to such a decadent night of passion should be warned that the static electricity generated can ruin the experience. At the very least, the man winds up looking like Stan Laurel while the lady resembles the bride of Frankenstein. Hardly a turn-on, unless you're on some pervy gothic comedy tip.

After Roy and Eileen, **Morgan** took to the stage, accompanied by **Dave Wright** on sax, performing smooth covers of Georgia, and Hank Williams' Your Cheatin' Heart. This led us into the first interval, after which **Ricky Topham** stepped up with a gentle, heartfelt rendition of Bread's Make It With You and then a stirring take on Jackson Browne's The Naked Ride Home. Inspired by the liberated attitude of the latter song, the Raconteur thought he'd try it himself that very evening. Needless to say, the cab driver was far from impressed. Not that there was much to be impressed about. Given the frosty weather, the Raconteur finally understood why his mum used to call it his "winkle". In fact, she still does. But only, it seems, in the presence of people he would very much like to impress.

Now came the excellent Steve Brown, first with a fine rendition of Dave Brubeck's Take Five (he's clearly been reading those jazz mags again), then an impressively complex Steve Howe

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piece blending The Diary Of A Man Who Disappeared into The Clap. Not many could match such technical expertise, but it was no surprise when **Nigel Snook** did, with some grand classical, then some polished blues. This should have been hard to follow, too, but **Pete Beach** managed it, simply by being so resolutely Pete Beach. There's no one like him, and his raucous run through Charlie Case's There Once Was A Poor Young Man Who Left His Country Home, and rootsy rendition of Tom Paxton's My Lady's A Wild Flying Dove elicited a great response.

After the second interval, Morgan and Dave Wright reappeared for a jaunty Sweet Georgia Brown and a mischievous Just A Gigolo. Then Roy and Eileen gave us a trad folk take on Steve Earle's The Galway Girl and a rocking rendition of Kirsty MacColl's There's A Guy Works Down The Chip Shop Swears He's Elvis. Interestingly, some twenty years ago there was a guy worked down the chip shop in Berrow who also swore he was Elvis. In fact, he was Elvis, as in his youth he'd changed his name by deed poll to become Elvis Presley. Quite a wise move when you're born Aloysius Bingley-Ottersthwaite. With a name like that you can really only be the Bishop of York or the ruthless owner of a dark satanic mill. Not much of a choice. Anyway, taking his Elvis obsession to unheard-of culinary lengths, he built a spire on top of his takeaway, installed pews in the waiting area and called the place Frying In The Chapel. He began to serve speciality dishes like the aggressively spiced goat dish Kid Galahad, and Love Me Tenderloin steaks. Later, as he slipped into madness, he banned cod and haddock and would serve only Jailhouse Rock, the shop finally being shut down when the police discovered that Elvis had not compromised on the ingredients of his popular Hound Dog burgers. It was probably all for the best, as Elvis had begun to roll his fish in a mixture of bicarbonate of soda and milk of magnesia before deep-frying. If that didn't leave the customers all shook up, he'd say with a satisfied smile, nothing would.

At this point, after several rather hurtful letters from musicians expounding at considerable length upon the Raconteur's supposed ignorance and ineptitude (and, in one outrageous case, smelliness), we'd like to introduce a new regular feature. Each month, one of our musicians will review their own performance within these hallowed pages, to ensure that (as they put it) they get a fair and unbiased write-up once in a while. Well, the Raconteur's always up for something different - as that lady tying up her shoelaces in Hurley's last Saturday found to her obvious surprise - so here goes. This month's contributor: Steve Brown.

"An awed hush fell over the crowd as Steve Brown, one of the club's most talented and good-looking performers, stood up, looking for all the world like the young Paul Newman, topped with a cheeky David Essex grin that had the ladies panting like rabid bitches on heat. He immediately confounded expectations by reaching for the mike, and anticipation reached fever pitch as the crowd realised that - oh, glorious day! - as well as searing the senses with his fabulous fretwork, he was actually going to sing. The track he'd chosen was the immensely complicated Different Strings by Rush, a song of love and the loss of innocence, with vivid images of dragon-slayers and giant-killers - very appropriate lyrics as Brown, wielding his guitar like a deadly weapon, put the crowd, sonically speaking, to the sword. His voice, a kind of cross between the dulcet tones of Wishbone Ash and the rougher edges of Paul Rodgers, was damn fine, too. Everyone clapped - so there".

Following Steve came the welcome return of **Liz May** with a new, self-penned track, inspired by the Asian tsunami disaster and dealing with the pain of the bereaved. Very different would be **The Jockstrap Ensemble**, this week featuring Pete Beach, Greg Aylmer on mandolin, Dave Wright on harmonica and Nigel Snook on guitar. The boys would crash through a rough-house take on Leadbelly's Digging My Potatoes (filtered through Lonnie Donegan) then, with Roy Cramer joining on piano, a quite beautiful Sweet Sixteen, before Ricky Topham returned with

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two classic covers. The first was Annie's Song, which John Denver wrote for his beloved wife before he dumped her and went from Rocky Mountain High to an all-time low in Monterey Bay. Then came a truncated version of American Pie.

The evening would end on a high note with Nigel Snook providing a lovely arrangement of Buddy Holly's Raining In My Heart and a hilariously disintegrating take on Kevin Bloody Wilson's Amazing Grass. In fact, Nigel would dominate the entertainment at the Ritz over the next couple of weeks. First, with full band, he'd play his own traditional birthday show, peaking with a beefed-up rendition of America's Sandman. Then he'd appear at the hugely successful benefit gig for **Noddy**, the notorious town character and promoter who sadly died last Boxing Day. All proceeds would go towards the treatment of asthmatics. A great gig for a worthy cause.

Thursday, March 3rd

At last, the daffodils were out and the world was a better, sunnier place. Yet this did not appease the ranting members at the bar who were quite convinced that the country, like Kevin Bloody Wilson, had gone to pot. First there was the news that the government were considering reducing payments to an over-funded BBC. Excellent, we thought, a long-overdue cut in the licence fee. But no, they were actually thinking of splitting the revenue between the BBC and the independent television companies. That's right, they were going to hand money, money unashamedly extorted from the general public, to corporate privateers. Eventually they bottled out, but the anger remained, and was heightened by the possibility that they were also plotting to raise income tax by 4p in the pound to fill the black hole in civil service pension funds - many of these civil servants having been hired by the present government. This was a plan that could only have occurred to MPs, whose expenses, we had recently learned, are at the very least four times the national average wage.

Beyond this, members were enraged by the behaviour of doctors, once respected pillars of the local community, now paragons of greed and lackeys to the drug companies. Cleaning up to the tune of at least £67K a year, on shorter weeks and no longer on call, many of them are now choosing to spend their extra free time working for the NHS at up to £100 an hour. This is what we pay if we can actually get hold of one. Members were fuming at the story of a Congresbury family who had to wait six hours for their wife/mum to be declared dead. Six hours they had her lying in the house, doing what dead bodies do, as the only available doctor drove 150 miles to do the decent thing. With Weston Hospital the way it is and doctors the way they are, a new dictum has become clear - don't get sick in Somerset.

But were these the subjects vexing the nation as a whole? Was the general population concerned that the IRA were suspected in a £26 million Belfast bank robbery, with a consequent possible breakdown in the Northern Ireland peace process? Were they riled by the revelation that the French had armed the Hutus in preparation for the Rwandan genocide, while the UN, with Kofi Annan in prime position to prevent it all, had turned a blind eye? No, what the country really cared about was foxes. That's right, foxes. Human beings are getting ripped-off, battered, stripped of all dignity and murdered, and the big news is about pointy-eared, bushy-tailed vermin. Let's ask ourselves this question: if Woody Guthrie were alive today and resident in England, would he be singing Fox Ain't Got No Home, or This Fox Is Your Fox? Sadly, if he was signed to Simon Cowell's label, the answer is probably Yes.

The fox argument was as facile as it was absurd. In a nut-shell, it went like this:

Government: *You cruel, cruel people are no longer allowed to run terrified animals into the*

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ground then have your packs of slavering hounds tear them to shreds.

Huntsmen: But what if we happen to be riding along with our hounds and accidentally tear an animal to shreds?

Government: Er, that would be OK.

Huntsmen: What if we're chasing one and it has a heart attack and dies and then we tear it to shreds?

Government: Um, yes, alright.

Huntsmen: What about the suicidal ones that come up and ask to be run into the ground and torn to shreds?

Government: That's fine, it's a mercy killing.

Huntsmen: And what if they attack us - can we fight back and tear them to shreds?

Government: You are perfectly entitled to defend yourselves in any way you see fit.

Huntsmen: Oh, and what about those smelly hunt protestors? Can we chase them and tear them to shreds?

Government: Er, do they vote Conservative?

Up onstage, things were looking good. This was, after all, the first in an ongoing series of RAC theme nights, with all musicians being required to play tracks recorded by The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. We began in the safe hands of Steve Brown, who started things off with delicate instrumental versions of Michelle and Eleanor Rigby. And then it all fell to pieces. Briefly. Trouble was, **David and Issy Emeny** didn't know about the theme night and arrived totally unprepared. Still, true to the generous and adventurous spirit of the club, they were allowed to serve up a melodion-dominated folk ditty, before David had a solo pop at Under My Thumb. It was truly energised and quite menacingly heartfelt, rammed with gratifyingly un-PC misogyny, and very different to **The Willbees** with their soft and pleasant versions of The Beatles' Baby's In Black and George Harrison's Something, the latter featuring a ukelele. The Raconteur feels the ukelele is a sorely under-rated instrument. Utilised with proper care and attention, it can be a tremendously effective source of kindling on a cold winter's night.

Next up was **Pete Stearn**, another unaware of tonight's theme. Luckily, though, Pete's a major Stones fan and delighted us with a rough and mournful I Got The Blues and the bitter but melodic country rock of Dead Flowers, both tracks emanating from the classic Sticky Fingers album. An interesting song is Dead Flowers, hearkening back to the special flower language constructed by pale and melodramatic English ladies in the 18th and 19th centuries. Sending hortensia to someone, for instance, meant that you considered them to be cold. Magnolia asked them to persevere, buttercups accused them of ingratitude, while acacia revealed a hidden love. Dead flowers, then, meant "Suffering worst drought in 200 years. Please send water tanker by return of post".

Following Pete came Ricky Topham with his own eyes-wide-open love song, possibly titled One Woman Man, and then the Stones' As Tears Go By, featuring an opening couplet that these days would probably have you banged up if you dared sing it in the presence of the social services. Then came Greg Aylmer, accompanied by Steve Brown and Dave Wright and singing - yes, singing - Norwegian Wood, before piling into one of his trademark Irish mandolin reels. Dave Wright would then step up with a jazzy sax take on Fool On The Hill, a vivacious harmonica stab at When I'm 64, and then, back on sax, She's Leaving Home.

As **Jon Austin** took to the stage, we all thought, what with his Aston Martin and ladykilling reputation, that he was bound to play Live And Let Die. But no. Instead, he delivered a bouncy When I'm 64 on guitar (apologising to Dave Wright for upstaging him) then, on piano, a

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melancholy Long And Winding Road. The Beatles' tyranny would continue with Steve Brown delivering Here, There And Everywhere and, with Dave Wright returning on sax and Steve singing for the second time in a month, a poignant And I Love Her.

At last, the Stones would now return, courtesy of **Tony Harvey**, thankfully back from his panto sabbatical (Tony's next panto, by the way, will be a surreal political satire involving a class war breaking out on top of a giant chocolate bar. It'll be called Mutiny On The Bounty). He'd slam into the grimly beautiful Paint It Black, though his performance would be fatally undermined by a comically and continually slipping mike-stand. Then, having promised the crowd that he would under no circumstances play that song of his with the Na-na-na chorus, he then burst into Hey Jude, probably the most famous Na-na-na song ever written. And joining him in his treacherous Na-na-na-ing would be **Maureen Bromfield** and, quite extraordinarily, Treasurer **Doug Liles**. To the Raconteur's (as ever, limited) knowledge, Doug had never sung at the club before and, naturally, reviews were mixed. One member did claim, though, that at one point Doug may have inadvertently stumbled upon the Lost Chord.

Once all the Na-na-na-ing had died down, Nigel Snook arrived with his own take on Paint It Black, an expert display that rediscovered the Eastern feel originally provided by Brian Jones. Then he revisited Something. Next would come Ricky Topham, getting the audience singing along with Hide Your Love Away. While on the subject, Doreen would like to remind male members (ooer) to be sure to do as the song says. She doesn't want a repeat of the farrago that occurred when the Raconteur failed to zip up before leaving the club's beautifully reappointed loos on the night of February 10th. Rick then continued into Neil Young's Heart Of Gold, deftly holding the song together despite the onslaught of **Tim Bromfield's** impromptu backing vocals.

At this point, MC Steve Brown asked for ideas for the club's next tribute night. The Raconteur's suggestion of Cradle Of Filth and Cannibal Corpse was met with a contemptuous silence, while Doug Liles' request for Joe Dolce, Telly Savalas and Renee And Renato was received with even less respect. Eventually, it was decided to go with Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly, the event to take place on April 14th.

Back onstage, Pete Stearn came up with another pair of winners in Arthur Alexander's You Better Move On (once covered by the Stones) and the more well-known and far ruder Honky Tonk Women. He'd be followed by **Steve Holford**, who presented us with an unexpected treat in A Hard Day's Night, which saw Steve doing Peter Sellers doing Laurence Olivier doing Richard III, then bursting into song for a deep, deep finale. Excitingly for the classicists among us, this was the first reference to Richard III since Doug Liles attempted to drown himself in a barrel of wine. Mind you, Doug was trying it one glass at a time.

A sudden thought. Going back to the fox debate, the Raconteur may have come up with a solution to please all parties. It's just been announced that, after the Pentagon spent \$70 billion on Future Combat Systems, the biggest military contract in US history, they've finally come up with Cyclops, a four-foot-tall android soldier with one electronic eye and an arm ending in a gun that fires a thousand rounds a minute. It will soon replace American troops in combat zones. Well, why not build a robot fox, like the Duracell bunny but red and less irritating. It wouldn't need to breathe so it could cross rivers, it would feel no pain so it could force its way through thick brambles, it would never get exhausted and have to stop. Why, hunters could chase the little metal sod forever, if they wanted to. And if they really missed the thrill of the kill, they could programme it to get itself caught after a set period of time, and even to scream and squirt blood. Christ, they could even have it shout things like "I am no

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match for you, you big, hunky, red-jacketed God!" and beg for mercy.

But, as is always the case with such technological advancements, there could be problems. What if their little cyborg brains began to develop and they started to think for themselves? What if you've programmed one to shout "You can go home now, hunt protestors, they're not hurting me!" and instead it turns to you and grunts "Hasta la vista, baby"? Donner und vixen! Now you're confronted by furry terminators, titanium dog soldiers bent on destruction. Imagine a phalanx of foxy killing machines in tiny leather jackets and Raybans, marching across the Mendips as the crimson-coated cavalry quake in the woods below, hoping against hope that the chink of their sherry glasses won't give their position away. These guys won't be shredding your bin bags at night, in a desperate search for a few measly chicken bones. They'll be kicking your door in at Sunday lunch-time and taking the lot. You can see the movie now. The Furminator: A Brush With Death (tagline: Who's going to ground now?). Fantastic stuff - bring it on!

Returning to the stage, The Willbees, with Dave Wright on harmonica, now gave us a wonderfully smooth rendition of The Beatles' This Boy, then Tony Harvey got the crowd going with an a cappella version of Let It Be, though the song's religious imagery did provoke a little indignation from the Al-Qa'eda splinter group drinking at the bar (you have to splinter off from Al-Qa'eda if you want a pint, apparently). Tony was unexpectedly joined by Tim Bromfield towards the end of his performance and he now returned the favour as Tim stepped up to end the evening, appropriately enough, with It's All Over Now. There was even dancing - what a night.

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

After the success of our last concert, Hoover The Dog, the RAC will be booking Talisman, a world-class Russian gypsy 3-piece, for May 19th. Keep your evening free.

Musicians are reminded that at the next club theme night, on April 14th, they'll be required to play tracks recorded by Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly. If members have any other ideas for further theme evenings, please hand your suggestions in at the door. The first person to mention Tiny Tim will receive the Raconteur's heartfelt gratitude.

Members are also asked to let the committee know if they'd like monthly food nights to start up again.

Once more, we remind musicians that, if they'd like to play at the Griffin Pub on July 3rd, as part of the Frome Festival, please let Greg know as soon as possible.

Also, if musicians would like any outside gigs mentioned in the Raconteur, you only have to ask.

Thanks to Dave Wright, whose treatise on improvisation appears in this month's Raconteur.

Thanks, too, to Steve Brown for his eye-opening contribution.

Remember, the club is now running every Thursday. Not Friday. Never on Friday. Always on a Thursday. Always Thursday.

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Finally, Treasurer Doug Liles would like to strongly reprimand those members who broke into his house last week and brought back in the bin bag he'd put out for collection. You're not going to send him mad, you know. He's well aware of what you're up to.

The Ritz Acoustic Club Prize-less Quiz

Yes, it's another trivia-fest for your delectation and delight. As usual, the winners will receive bugger all, but they will enter the pantheon of previous winners, the names of whom none of us can recall. In response to accusations that last month's quiz was too hard, the Raconteur has made this month's so easy even Jon Austin might get one right. Good luck to you all.

- 1) By what name is Pat Andrzejewski better known?
- 2) Who taught Parsley, Sage, Rosemary And Thyme to Paul Simon during his pre-fame sojourn in London in the mid-Sixties?
- 3) Name the carcinogenic colourant that recently caused hundreds of items to be removed from supermarket shelves.
- 4) There were three unrelated Taylors in Duran Duran. What were their Christian names?
- 5) Which Shakespeare play opens with the line "If music be the food of love, play on"?
- 6) Playwright Arthur Miller died recently. Who was the doomed hero of his play The Crucible? Who was Miller's film star ex-wife? Name her famous sporting ex-husband, and in which big Sixties hit did his name appear?
- 7) What's the capital of Albania?
- 8) In which band did Neil Young feature with future pervy funk star Rick James?
- 9) Who had a hit with Enola Gay? What was Enola Gay?
- 10) Name the lion in the ancient kids' programme The Herbs. Now name the dog.
- 11) Which famous film star was decapitated in 1967 when her sports car went under a lorry?
- 12) Which artist notoriously plastered the inside of a tent with the names of all her ex-lovers?
- 13) Which name connects Thunderbirds, Ghostbusters and Buggy Malone?
- 14) Which stretch of water separates Russia from Alaska?
- 15) Which Sudanese religious chief led the revolt that saw General Gordon killed at Khartoum?

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16) Which British actress, later an Oscar winner, starred in her own TV comedy series in 1988? Name the two other future Oscar nominees who also appeared in it.

17) Which name connects Moby Dick and The Munsters? What was the name of Ahab's boat in Moby Dick?

18) Who sang the theme to the TV series Rawhide? Which future multiple Oscar winner starred in the show?

19) What was Mussolini's first name?

20) Who killed Cock Robin?

Answers to last month's quiz were as follows:

1) Poland 2) Nico 3) Minos 4) Yardbirds 5) Snowy 6) Weston-Super-Mare 7) Gomez, Morticia, Wednesday, Pugsley, Fester, It, Lurch, Thing 8) Willem Dafoe 9) Joad 10) Walker (Walker Brothers, T-Bone Walker, Walker's crisps) 11) Adge Cutler 12) Swaling 13) Ophelia 14) Regan (John Thaw, Lear's daughter, Julianne Regan) 15) Huskies peeing 16) Huddie Ledbetter 17) Delia Smith 18) Defenestration 19) Anne Bancroft, The Elephant Man, Mrs Robinson (she played Mrs Robinson in The Graduate, Simon wrote the song, Mary Robinson was Irish president) 20) You're So Vain