

The Raconteur

The Vaconteur The Newsletter That Really Sucks September, 2005

Thursday, August 4th

It was high summer and the whole country was going Ashes-crazy as Andrew Flintoff and his white-clad compadres thrashed the Aussies by 2 runs then crushed them by 3 wickets to take the greatest prize in sport (apart from the football World Cup, the World Series, the Superbowl etc etc). But down at the Ritz thoughts were on more serious matters, with all the talk at the bar concerning the battle raging for the leadership of the Tory party. Would the winner be a fusty old-hander, reeking of gin and cigars, or one of the smug and oily new boys, ripe for corruption? One suggestion was of a brilliantly conceived "dream ticket" where Kenneth Clarke would run for leader with our very own Treasurer **Doug Liles** as his Shadow Chancellor. And indeed Doug did have some radical ideas to fill the Exchequer's coffers. Visitors to our country, he said, could be charged £1.50 on entry, £2.50 if they planned to eat, while the NHS could be funded by a nationwide raffle (to be hosted by **Trish**), with the main prize being a weekend for 2 in Bangkok and the runner-up receiving a humongous slab of tasty cheddar. Given the projected income of the raffle, the slab would be literally humongous, approximately the same size as the stables at Blenheim Palace. As an added attraction it would be perforated in the Swiss style so that it could serve not just as a wholesome snack for several thousand people but also as a Hampton Court-type maze to bring hours of fun to the winner, their friends and, perhaps, paying customers, too.

Of course, there are some of us who might not be keen to accept delivery of a giant cheese maze, even if wrapped in miles of stink-proof cling film. These people, thought Doug, could receive their cheese mountain periodically, in more manageable portions, maybe a tonne a week for 25 years. Another notion, for any winners keen on gardening, was to have the cheese arrive in 15-foot cubes, perfect for the novel but surely soon-to-catch-on art of cheese topiary (let's face it, hedges are so passe). After all, which garden wouldn't benefit from a discreetly placed cheese squirrel, a cheese sun-dial or even a cheese obelisk, perhaps commemorating one of the great cheese innovators of our time - like Demetrius Von Kloof, the man who invented those round wooden boxes for Camembert, or Robert Van Kerr, the Dutchman who built a 183-foot tower out of biscuits and thin slices of cheese and reformed ham in a heroic but ultimately doomed attempt to bring Dairylea Stack'Ems into the arena of Olympic sport.

Onstage we needed heroes of our own as the Sidmouth Festival had drawn away many of our regular performers. Who would save us from the onrushing flood of silence? Well, first to stick his finger in the dyke (no, let's not go there) was Chairman **Graham Cook** who opened proceedings with a vibrant take on The Small Faces' Itchycoo Park, then a melancholy but rousing rendition of Del Amitri's Nothing Ever Happens. Next into the breach would be **Nigel Snook** with a flamboyant Moorishly-tinged instrumental he said was written by one Manuel Dexterity. Then there'd come **Rob Carey** with a sweet and pared-down take on Conway Twitty's It's Only Make Believe and then Bob Dylan's With God On Our Side, a track that's contentious even today. This is an outrageous generalisation, admittedly, but when one side is telling you to pack your rucksack with Semtex and splatter yourself all over the top deck of a bus, and the other is led by a former member of the Hitler Youth who refuses to sanction proper contraception and thus the saving of hundreds of millions from AIDS, what's a true believer to think? Really, if the Antichrist were to rise up now wouldn't he represent a viable Third Way?

The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter

The Raconteur

Then again, maybe he already *has* risen up. Maybe the government's strict new approach to security should give the police authority to completely shave suspects in case they're clandestinely marked with a 666, the number of the beast. Or even 668, the neighbour of the beast and a probable accomplice.

Following Rob would be newcomer **Sam Baker**, claiming to be the niece of Nigel Snook. Musical ability certainly runs in the family as she was excellent, her husky voice rising easily through the octaves as she delivered her self-penned and powerfully worded songs. After a brief interval, the wonderfully eccentric **Rowan Noddings** took to the stage with a theatrical hard-luck story called *Bad Day All Year* and then *The Foggy Dew*, a tragic historical romance involving the coveting of a serving-maid. Behind the bar **Doreen** and **Samantha** were quick to note that, while not being overly enamoured of being referred to as serving-maids, they're really wouldn't mind being coveted at some point in the not-too-distant future.

Next up was **Ben Rudge**, this week on piano and performing a sparse, deep, funereally slow song called *If I Had You* that MC Graham Cook said reminded him of Tom Waits. Far more lively would be **Jason Grey**, fresh from his fabulous annual house-party, who delivered passionate takes on Lone Star's *Amazed* and Spandau Ballet's *Through The Barricades*. Call us dopey, but the lyrics to this second piece have long mystified the Raconteur, in particular the punch-line "We made our love on wasteland/ And through the barricades". Now, making love on wasteland strikes us a tad exhibitionist. It also can't be that comfortable to get it on amidst the broken fridges, used tires, shattered milk bottles and empty Special Brew cans that litter the average site. Hard on the knees, the bum and the shoulder-blades, one imagines. But making love through barricades - what's *that* all about? Were the ramparts across the Parisian boulevards riddled with glory holes in case the political stand-off grew too tense and the revolutionaries found themselves in need of relief? And exactly how big does a bloke have to be down below to poke effectively through such a fortification? Maybe the French really *do* deserve their reputation as the world's greatest lovers. What's certain is that the thought of Spandau Ballet lined up, with their pantaloons round their ankles, grinding themselves against torn-up fences as the bullets fly, the dying scream and the smoke rises over a burning city is absurd, disturbing and most unwelcome. Thanks for sharing it with us, Jason, you *weirdo*.

Following Jason we'd have the irrepressible **Pete Beach**, accompanied by Nigel Snook, with John Prine's *Blow Up The TV* (they don't mean Transvestite, do they? - *that's* not very PC), then *Sweet Sixteen*, Nigel playing with such trembling delicacy the crowd demanded one more and were treated to *How Long Blues*. Then would come the second interval, ended by **Tim Bromfield** with 2 of his own grand rock anthems. Next would be **Phil** and **Debbie Bennet** with Fairground Attraction's *Perfect*, a song Eddi Reader hates so much she refuses to play it even to this day, and Janis Joplin's earthy belter *Piece Of My Heart*, delivered by Debbie with true cajones. That's a great track, an utter classic, but these days it unfortunately tends to recall the grotesque antics of the German cannibal Armin Meiwes. You remember that news-story. He advertised himself as a cannibal on the 'Net and got a reply from one Bernd-Jurgen Brandes, a fellow obsessed with being consumed. The ad was for a "well-built man, 18-30 years old, for slaughter". They met up at Meiwes' place in Rotenburg, discussed their options and experimented by cutting off Brandes' penis and eating it together, flambeed. Then, after much wavering, Meiwes stabbed Brandes repeatedly in the neck and dissected him. When the police caught up with him he'd already eaten half the body. Ugh, almost unthinkable. But can you imagine the initial planning stage?

Ring ring . . . ring ring . . .

The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter

The Raconteur

Hello?

Hello, it's Bernd-Jurgen.

Uhuh.

I was thinking we could meet up, maybe next Tuesday?

Meet up?

Well, I thought we could have a bit of a chat . . .

Ye-es

Then perhaps we could, erm, cut my willy off and eat it.

I beg your pardon?

Yes, then you might like to stab me to death and hack me up into roasting joints and chops and steaks and enjoy me for months afterwards.

What?

No, really, a sprinkle of chopped chives, a sprig of rosemary, a knob of butter, I bet I taste great. Like spotted dick, *hahaha*. Honestly, it'll save you a fortune. Fresh meat's so expensive these days. And I'm completely organic . . .

Who the hell is this?

(*pause*) Armin?

No, I'm not Armin, you disgusting freak!!!!

I'm terribly sorry, I appear to have the wrong number . . .

Click. Bzzzzz.

After Phil and Debbie would come Rob Carey with a smooth, heartfelt cover of James Taylor's Fire And Rain and, backed by Nigel Snook, Lieber and Stoller's rock'n'roll smash Baby, I Don't Care. Another contentious lyric, that one. After all, some women take exception to being called buxom, some dislike being described as pear-shaped, but *all* of them will give you a thick ear if you call them square. Even if you're Elvis Presley. Next up would be Rowan Noddings replaying the Japanese suicide comedy Lychee Fair, then belting out his own composition, I Wish That I Had Known Me Better. Then there'd be **Rick Topham** with 2 of his own tasteful and considered numbers, before Nigel Snook returned with a yearning South American instrumental and Gilbert O'Sullivan's seemingly simple but actually hugely complex Nothing Rhymed. Pete Beach would join Nigel to bring the evening to a noisy conclusion with Ragtime Millionaire. It had been another winner.

Thursday, August 11th

It was boiling, God, it was boiling. Life was drifting serenely by in a shivering heatwave (as opposed to the tepid, rather dull wave it usually drifts by in) and everyone was suffering a pink and steaming lethargy. Down at the Ritz, though, the conversation is forever bubbling like an incontinent's bathwater. This week all the talk at the bar was of the latest experiments in cloning, as ever more species were successfully replicated. Are clones really real, was the main question because, if they're not, we'll all be able to eat as much meat as we like without actually killing any animals. Experiments with human clones were generally viewed a little more harshly, but isn't it always the way that people frown upon such things until they themselves need a transplant or a cure for cancer?

Onstage the session began with the welcome return of **Greg Aylmer**, inter-county man of mystery and master of mandolin. He'd give us a folky ditty and a medley of reels before Rob Carey stepped up with a pleasantly nostalgic take on Josh MacRae's Messing About On The River. Regular readers will recall a discussion of riverside activities in last month's Raconteur.

The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter

The Raconteur

Thankfully Rob's sweet song made no mention of stabbing or shooting innocent women, or of hitting them in the face with a rock and slipping a rose between their broken teeth. Sound too hideous to be true? Well, connoisseurs of the murder ballad will know that that's precisely what Nick Cave did to Kylie Minogue in *Where The Wild Roses Grow*. How we all cheered! But anyone lobbing accusations of misogyny beware, for Cave himself gets whacked by Polly Harvey on the very same album, succinctly titled *Murder Ballads*. It's actually one of the funniest CDs of modern times - check it out.

Rob would cause further controversy with his second number, Elvis Presley's *Stuck On You*. Though the song's protagonist declares his intention to "stick like glue" to his beloved, a quick straw poll of the lady members present revealed that not one of them wanted her man that close at all times. This was partly because he'd then discover all the sneaky tricks she uses to make herself so irresistibly alluring (a lot of them springing from a deep paranoia over her looks), but mostly because she'd be dragged off to skittles and golf and have to slump on the settee watching the cricket all day. A woman's love is a profound and wonderful thing, but it can be tested only so far. So best keep your relationship Loctite-free, eh?

After Rob would come the super duo of **Roy Cramer** and **Eileen Hardacre**, first with the misanthropic anthem *Mad World* then the cheery rush of *Canned Heat's Goin' Up The Country*. Very different would be **Gary Day**, keeping on the murder ballad tip with a remorselessly dark rendition of *Dock Boggs' Pretty Polly*, then his own pulsing *Doors-like* instrumental. Keeping up the relentless variety would be **Colin Rogers**, strumming his tiny guitar-thing during the charming woodland fable *The Gypsy Rover*, a bluesy number and the rustic *Freeborn Man Of The Travelling People* (readers are here reminded that Mr Rogers was only supposed to play 2 tracks. It was unfair to all the other musicians present that he played a third).

Following the first interval, Secretary **Steve Brown** stepped up with a comic singalong called *My Friend Has The Biggest Ears In The World*. It seemed innocent enough at the time, but when you consider the old country adage "Big ears, big *ahem*" you're forced to the inevitable conclusion that Steve, cheeky at the best of times, was on this occasion surreptitiously subverting the club's policy on X-rated material. Unaware of this outrageous subterfuge, male members (ooer) merrily joined in. Lady members, though, naturally more highly tuned to the subtle language of sex, remained quietly contemplative. Who was this "friend" to which Steve was referring, and indeed was there a "friend" at all. And what exactly did that quizzical smile of his *mean*?

Nothing, as it turned out, as Steve was now joined onstage by his wife **Gill**, and further accompanied on piano by **Mr Keys** from Bahrain. Gill would prove to have something of the torch singer about her as the trio delivered a fine romance (fine, but not as fine as the version of *Kashmir* that Steve and Gary Day would nail a couple of weeks later - perhaps the best performance the Raconteur has ever witnessed at the RAC). Equally good would be **Tim Dean** and **Paul Stradling**, returning after a ludicrously long absence. With Tim on guitar and Paul providing bass and vocals, they piled into two self-penned songs, the second concerning a sad loser who finishes it all in *Reggie Perrin* stylee. At this point the Raconteur would like to reply to all those e-mailed accusations from readers that he is a pathetic waste of space who's never made anything of himself. Actually, he *can't* fit all of his possessions into one carrier bag, OK? Well, maybe one of those big ones from Iceland, but certainly not a standard issue from *Tesco's*. So, can the carping stop now, please? As a great man once said, it's wrong to mock the afflicted, just as it's wrong to flick the amocked.

The Raconteur

Tim and Paul would be followed by the multi-talented **Linda Bond** with a strong melodian reel then a moving a cappella folk narrative. Then would come **Liz May**, at her very best performing a tumbling piano instrumental with a dramatic Seventies feel, and a song to a gorgeous lover. Rob Carey would keep up the quality with Jerome Kern's Start All Over Again and Cole Porter's Just One Of Those Things, as would Roy Cramer and Eileen Hardacre with romping takes on Carl Perkins' Matchbox and Richie Valens' La Bamba. Based on a traditional Mexican dance tune, this second track is interesting for its terrifyingly prophetic fourth verse, which roughly translates as "Oh, woe is me/ For I am doomed to die/ In a light aircraft/ With a fat rocker/ And some specy guy from Texas". Not very catchy, really, which is probably why Valens chose to sing it in Spanish.

Gary Day would now return with Jackson Frank's ultra-maudlin My Name Is Carnival, before Tim Dean and Paul Stradling stepped up again with 2 more numbers new to the club, the second being a hilarious psychedelic pop song where a red-headed hero saves the world and gets the girl. Hilarious but highly unlikely. Many gingas, driven on by bitterness at society's rejection of them, achieve financial success. Few, though, get the girl. Just look at Chris Evans. A media superstar, a radio and TV entrepreneur, he sold his company for £20 million plus and he *still* only managed to pull that jailbait chubber Billie Piper. *And* she left him. The prosecution rests . . .

With Rick Topham gallantly stepping aside, room was made for **Mike Batt**, first with a self-penned guitar instrumental called For Today that reminded bodhran maestro **Jack Cobbe** of Gordon Giltrap. Then came a highly dextrous take on Classical Gas, filtered through Eric Clapton, that caused such a crowd reaction that Mike was actually ordered back onto the stage to play it again. He was a hard act to follow but Rowan Noddings managed it with his thoroughly bizarre Jonah Has A One-Track Mind, concerning his own ravenous cat. Rowan clearly needs to be careful near this menacing moggy. Anyone who's ever had any contact with cats knows that they are born predators (as well as being bone idle, irredeemably smelly and completely crap at crossing the road). And while they may temporarily content themselves with mice and birds and the occasional chunk of other cats (you may have noticed how they like to eat the ears of their own kind - the dirty lug chuggers!) it's evident that their hoped-for prey is none other than *us*. It's no coincidence that they come alive while we humans sleep. And it's no surprise that they hit a peak of hungry anticipation when their owner opens a can of Sheba. It's not that they're looking forward to a dishful of gourmet gloop made from mashed-up cows' eyeballs, it's that they're hoping you're going to cut your finger on the can and spill some scrummy human blood on their dinner (the suppliers know this, that's why they invented those ingenious key-lids that roll back and slash your knuckles - the bastards!). This is why they mewl madly for their food then dismissively turn their back as soon as the dish hits the floor. It's because you didn't put enough of yourself into the serving.

The thing is, cats don't love you, they *want* you. They're a lot like people in this respect. But think on this. If you invited someone over for dinner and placed a lovingly prepared plate of nosh in front of them, only for them to pounce off into the other room casting a withering glance of disappointment and contempt over their shoulder, would you invite them back? Of course not. You'd think they were a rude and ungrateful tosser. Which is what cats are.

Getting back to the dangers of these bloodthirsty felines, did you ever wonder why Catcott is called Catcott? It wasn't always called that. Time, you see, has changed the name from the infinitely more chilling Cat Cut, a sinister name inspired by a sinister occurrence. It happened, so the story goes, on a cold Friday in October, 1949, sometime between 6 and 7 in the evening.

The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter

The Raconteur

In that fateful twilight, twelve members of the same nuclear family took turns trying to open a can of Whiskas with a sharp knife usually used for de-scaling slow-worms. With doom-laden coincidence, each of them slipped in their attempt, variously slicing their fingertips, their knuckles and that chubby bit under your thumb that has no medical name. Twelve in turn slipped, twelve in turn bled onto the food, twelve were never seen again. Did you know that they found a cat on the Marie Celeste? A *fat* one? Think on . . .

After Rowan would come Jason Grey with flaming renditions of Queen's Save Me and John Cougar's Hurts So Good, featuring some excellent guitar work. Once again the crowd roared their approval, demanding that Jason stay on and end the session with Whitesnake's Here I Go Again. It was a cracking finale, more than making up for the continuing non-appearance of laidback guitar supremo **Rob Ellis**. There was some news from the Ellis camp, though. It's said that, ensconced in his quaint Scottish croft, Rob has written a track so lascivious, so wild in its sexual abandon he's afraid that if he plays it at the RAC lady members may lose control of their naughty bits. Those new to the club may consider this to be a tad presumptuous, even arrogant. But longstanding members will understand Rob's concern, well remembering that awful incident back in July of 1977, the last time the entire female population of the Ritz simultaneously let go down below. It was at a gig by that infamously amorous cowboy minstrel Bob "El Gringo" Puddy, when he sang a song of dusty lust down in old Mexico so fraught with sexual tension that the ladies simply lost it. Specifically, the moment came when he reached the third verse, which went something like:

I'm a bad boy, baby
A killer mean and scary
But I just wanna git back in the saddle, babe
And ride your hairy prairie.

Women of all ages went mad. It was like a Tom Jones concert but so high was the sexual fervour that the rain of panties hit the stage with a series of dull splats.

Now, these lyrics may seem a little too uncouth to send a roomful of ladies into paroxysms of desire. But they don't call Somerset the Wild West for nothing. Besides, we all know that women may pay lip service to the cultured charms of Hugh Grant and Johnny Depp, but deep down what they all really, really want is to be ravaged by The Rock. Or, in this instance, that incorrigible renegade Bob "El Gringo" Puddy. What a man, and how fitting it was that he should meet his end in a gunfight. Well, it wasn't exactly a fight. He actually took a shotgun blast in the arse from an irate Spaxton farmer while attempting yet another bedroom-window escape. Ordinarily, this would've been no problem - over the years Bob had had several pounds of shot surgically removed from his buttocks. But this time his desperate leap for freedom saw him land in the midst of a passing flock of geese, waspish creatures well known for their antipathy towards Mankind. Poor Bob didn't stand a chance. The pecker was pecked, the philanderer gandered. It was a terrible tragedy. And ironic. Though Bob had always exhibited prodigious courage in his ceaseless pursuit of nookie, he died in a flurry of white feathers.

For any visitors keen to retread the footsteps of the past, Bob's gravestone can be found in a small churchyard in - rather inappropriately - Littlehampton. It bears the simple inscription:

Here lies Bob "El Gringo" Puddy.
Limp at last.

We shall not see his like again, though several hundred Somerset folk aged between 28 and 50

The Raconteur

do bear an uncanny resemblance. But that's enough of my yacking. Till next month.

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

Members are reminded that the club's next concert will be by **Eddie Martin**, on Thursday, September 22nd. Eddie has been described by the UK's top blues magazine Blues In Britain as perhaps the finest bluesman of his generation. Support - hurrah! - will come from our very own Tim Dean and Paul Stradling who do not play at the club enough, the lazy blighters. Tickets are £6, available from GC Music (01278-794-434) and a buffet is included in the price. Blues, booze and food - what more could you want?

Other forthcoming gigs are STEVE TILSTON on October 13th (supported by Gary Day) and STEVE ASHLEY on November 3rd (supported by GORDON CAMPBELL and JERRY CAHILL).

Musicians! Yes, *you*. The next club theme night is on Thursday, September 29th. Songs by Bob Dylan and Donovan must be learned for the occasion. As the song goes: Here we are now, *entertain us*.

Remember that September is year-end at the Ritz. At the end of the month you must renew your membership of the Ritz Social Club. If you are not a member of the Ritz Social Club you cannot attend the Ritz Acoustic Club more than once a month. Come on, *pay up!* You'll make your money back many times over on the cheap drinks and buffets.

Musicians! Yes, *you again*. Please remember that the Raconteur is more than willing to advertise any upcoming gigs or CDs for sale. Just let us know the details. Also, if you need any padded Jiffi-bags to send CDs around the place the Raconteur has loads you can have for nothing. Again, just ask.

The Christmas Party is still booked for Friday, December 16th. Looks like Fastest To Canada will be playing and a great time will be had by all. Sadly, having been rebuffed by Sir Ian McKellen, Secretary Steve Brown still has no one confirmed to play Santa. We may be faced, he says, with a difficult straight choice between Sir Richard Attenborough and the bloke who used to play sax in Showaddywaddy.

Finally, many thanks to everyone who's served on the committee this last year. Especially me cos I'm great . . .

The Ritz Acoustic Club's Famous Prize-less Quiz

Nobody likes it, everybody hates it, yet here it is again, the world's most annoying quiz, where the whole object is to humiliate and enrage the players as much as possible. Answer 5 of these questions correctly and you are officially no dunderhead. Answer 10 and a job at NASA may be in the offing. Answer 15 and you're a damn cheat! Now get on with it and stop wasting our time...

1) Which play, after its American premiere, was described by critics as "bestial", "fetid" and "slimy"?

The Ritz Acoustic Club Newsletter

The Raconteur

- 2) Who said "You know what you do when you shit? With singing it's the same thing, only up!"?
- 3) What's the 5th Commandment?
- 4) In The 12 Days Of Christmas, what is given on the ninth day?
- 5) Which store is the official supplier of groceries and provisions to the Queen?
- 6) Who's the bass-player in Cream?
- 7) In the shipping forecast, what was the name of the sea-area Finisterre changed to in 2002?
- 8) In the Ian Dury classic, where did Dickie come from?
- 9) If £25 is a pony, what's the slang term for £500?
- 10) What was George Formby's real name?
- 11) What are the four Cardinal Virtues?
- 12) Who produced Benny Hill's Ernie and wrote both Petula Clark's Downtown and the theme from Neighbours?
- 13) If your 50th wedding anniversary is Gold, what's your 20th?
- 14) Who wrote Wet Wet Wet's horrible mega-hit Love Is All Around?
- 15) What do Cleeks, Mashies and Jiggers have in common?
- 16) Who was the manager of the Sex Pistols? Which famous group did he manage before that?
- 17) Who's the patron saint of people with syphilis?
- 18) Who is folk goddess Eliza Carthy's mum?
- 19) What does ICBM stand for?
- 20) Who sang (aaaaoooo!) Werewolves Of London?

Answers to last month's quiz were as follows:

- 1) Howard Carter 2) Carole Klein 3) Edward 4) Fats Waller 5) Russian 6) 300,000 7) 1666 8) 1966
- 9) Divorced White Male 10) Benny Hill's Ernie (The Fastest Milkman In The West) 11) Freddie Starr 12) Nino Rota 13) Dopey, Sneazy, Grumpy, Bashful, Doc, Sleepy, Happy 14) Frankie Laine
- 15) Melchior, Balthazar, Caspar 16) Yes 17) Hercules 18) Freddie Garrity from Freddie & The Dreamers 19) Monster's Ball 20) Enya