

4/Feb/2004 The Scene (Luton News/Dunstable Gazette)

The Brian Heywood Column

A change is in the offing for local melodic rock band **Devlin** as guitarist Volker Patent is moving on to other things. The Luton based outfit - who in the past have topped both the Luton News pop poll and The Dunstable Battle of the Bands - have recently been making their mark further afield with more triumphs in band competitions. Their music has been likened to the Levellers and the Saw Doctors, with the tunefulness of Deacon Blue and the edge of Crowded House. For the present **Rik Taylor** - local guitar hero and former member of the band - will be sitting in with the band until the new guitarist gets up to speed. The band are playing down at The Well in Hightown, Luton on Friday (Feb 6) if you want to catch them in the act (www.devlinrock.com).

As mentioned in last week's Gazette, South Bedfordshire District Council have finally published the plans for the venue that is to replace Dunstable's Queensway Hall. The new arts centre will be based around a 750 seat auditorium with removable seating so that up to 1,000 could be accommodated if necessary. There will also be restaurants and bars as well as an area that could be used for functions. This could be a great opportunity for getting live music and dance events back into Dunstable as well as acting as a core venue for bigger events such as the Dunstable Folk and Dance Weekend and the Battle of the Bands. It could not only be used to encourage local bands and musicians but to put Dunstable back on the national touring circuit, giving South Bedfordshire residents the chance to see big acts - a facility that was lost when the Queensway Hall was closed.

The developers reckon that work could start as early as the autumn with completion in spring 2006. The most interesting thing about the proposal is that the council has earmarked £250,000 towards management costs, which might imply that they are actually going to programme acts themselves. This would be a welcome change from the previous regime when the Queensway management seemed to discourage use of the venue rather than encourage it. As other local authorities seem to be able to provide a mixed schedule of entertainment and still not break the bank it would be nice to see this happening in Dunstable which - despite a few sparks of light in the local pub scene - is something of an entertainment black hole. I also hope that they learn from other mistakes they made in the old venue, such as not paying attention to the sound proofing which annoyed the hell out of local residents when any kind of loud music was on the bill.

11/Feb/2004 The Scene (Luton News/Dunstable Gazette)

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They used to be Barking!

The **Blues Squad** have been going in one form or another for just over a year, but with the addition of Humdrum multi-percussionist and former Barkin' Spider member **Chris Pulleston** on drums the band have finally found a settled line up. Joining Chris is another former Spider, **Alan Sweeney** on guitar and vocals, Alan's sister **Pamela Hall** on saxophones and **Martin Cheshire** on Bass. According to Martin the band play Blues fused with the energy of rock and rhythmic drive of funk, along with plenty of interplay between guitar and saxophone. There is also a good dose of humour thrown in as you might expect from a band containing two former Barkin' Spiders. The squad are currently working on a demo at Justin Fabans' studio in Luton and you can catch them live at the Wheatsheaf in Dunstable on Saturday (February 14), and later in the month at The George II in Bute St, Luton (February 28). If you want more information about the band - or even to book them! - you can email Martin on: martin.cheshire@ntlworld.com or phone Alan on 01582-494025.

Moving alone from spiders to snakes, another local band that have contacted me recently are the five piece rock outfit the **Imperial Vipers**. Although the band is now based in North London, line-up is made up entirely of former Northfields and Manshead students. They sound like they've been pretty busy as well as they have toured in Europe and had a stint in Australia after which they then came home to record a number of CDs which have been heavily play listed on both Total Rock Radio and Storm Radio. They describe their music as a new rock sound, using influences from all the greatest rock legends (as well as the more obscure) to produce a unique show that can only be found when experiencing this band live. For more information and a list of gigs then check out www.imperialvipers.com or call Callum Rice on 07900-277507.

Friday (Feb 13) sees the next Dunstable Tyre Kickers' Ceilidh (i.e. Barn Dance) taking place at St Mary's Catholic Church Social Club, West Street, Dunstable. This month's ceilidh has a European feel with local band **ODE** which is a five piece outfit that features **Mick Brooks** on melodeon and fiddle, **David Chatterly** (Noise of Minstrels) on Hurdy Gurdy along with sax and whistle, bass, percussion and caller **Pete North**. Tickets are £6 or £3 for concessions and under 12s and there is a bar available. For more information phone Elaine on 01582-867647 or e mail esmith7@tiscali.co.uk and details are on the web at www.roots66.net/tkc. Future fixtures on the series are **Nelsons Arm Band** with caller **Chris Jewell** (March 12), MoonDance with caller Malcolm North (May 14) and **Time of your Life** with caller **Barry Goodman** (June 11). There is no event in April due to the Easter holiday.

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The Brian Heywood Column

A Feast of Folk

Next weeks sees two well known folk acts coming into our local patch. On Thursday (Feb 26) **Leon Rosselson** - who one of the country's most well regarded political songwriters - is appearing at The Cricketers pub just opposite Redbourn Common, Redbourn. Leon started on the circuit in the early days of the folk revival when he was a member of the **Galliards** who made numerous radio and TV broadcasts and concert appearances. On the song writing side he started writing seriously - and humorously - in the early 1960s when his songs were featured on TV in the satire show 'That Was The Week That Was'. He has since performed in every conceivable venue around the country as well as touring North America, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland and Australia. His songs have been covered by many artists including Roy Bailey, Frankie Armstrong, Dick Gaughan and Billy Bragg who took his song 'The World Turned Upside Down' into the pop charts in 1985. Later in 1987, his 'Ballad of a Spycatcher' (backed by Billy Bragg and the Oyster Band) which made fun of the ban on Peter Wright's book, went into the Indie Singles charts in 1987. As well as writing songs he has 17 children's books published has written for stage. This will undoubtedly be a very popular gig so book early by calling:01582 452954 or 07850163241

On the dance front, Friday (Feb 27) sees the Watford based **Random Band** playing 'electric ceilidh music with guts' at the regular Unicorn Ceilidh at Hitchin Town Hall with **Mick Brooks**, one of the most popular callers in the UK. The band - who launched their CD in Dunstable last year is made up of six guys who bring their vast experience of all kinds of folk and dance music to bear on their performances. Their gutsy, melodic, folk-rock interpretation of tunes with traditional roots, creates scintillating but subtle ceilidh music that will make you want to dance. The line-up features **Saul Rose** who has toured world-wide with Norma Waterson and Martin Carthy and **Paul Nye**, bringing together two very exciting melodeon-playing talents. This dynamic duo are supported by the bass guitar of **Keith Holloway**, the guitar rhythms of **Ian Woledge**, the bass trombone harmonies of **Glynn Burch**, and the rock-solid drumming of **Roger Smith** to give the very danceable **Random** sound. Also appearing on the night as interval entertainment are the **Bedford Gallery Quire** who are a four part harmony group who feature unusual instrumentation. The doors open at 7:30 for an 8pm start, with an 11:30pm finish with tickets at £6 adults (or £4 children under 14) which are available at the door or in advance from 01582-724261.

25/Feb/2004 The Scene (Luton News/Dunstable Gazette)

The Brian Heywood Column

Ambitious Showcase

Next Saturday (March 6) the Well Music Venue in Hightown, Luton plays host to 'Northern Ambition', a Manchester based record label that has some superb bands. The line-up for the night features artists off the Ambitious roster; **The Beans**, **Lisa Brown** and the Wrexham singer/songwriter **Nathan Burton**. The gig was organised when a local member of one of their mailing lists put the record company in touch with **The Well** by email, which just goes to show an upside of the Internet revolution - the downside being the endless 'spam' and malicious computer viruses. The first two acts are quirky, somewhat retro, pop outfits featuring a load of atmosphere and tipping their collective hats to the last four decades of popular musical endeavour.

This is the type of music that deserves the name 'pop', not manufactured pop idols rehashing somebody else's tired hits but accessible rock influenced music with depth and passion. On a quieter note, **Nathan Burton** rounds off the bill with thoughtful acoustic songs drawing from influences such as Tim Buckley, Bob Dylan and the Beatles. To quote Matchbox Recordings; "A Buckley/Badly Drawn Boy-esq feeling with touching falsetto and personal lyrics. Beautiful.". Entry will be £4 on the night, check it out. For more information you can phone Andy Sizmur on 07789-670873

On Sunday (Feb 29) Hitchin Folk Club presents well-loved Anglo-Australian duo **Nancy Kerr** and **James Fagan** at The Sun Hotel, Sun Street, Hitchin. Nancy, as well as singing plays fiddle, viola, and guitar while James wields the guitar, bouzouki and piano as well as singing. Together they combine highly skilful and innovative performance with accessibility, warmth and stage presence which won them the 2003 BBC Radio 2 Folk Award for Best Duo. According to the Western Mail, their "irresistible combination of fiddles, flat-backed bouzouki and voices blend perfectly into a sound that is playful, sweet and gutsy". For more information, visit www.hitchinfofolkclub.org.uk or phone Maureen on 01462 812391.

The annual **New Roots** competition for young musicians is still looking for entries. Designed to encourage acoustic and traditionally based performers under 25, the prizes include performance opportunities at various local festivals and folk clubs. The 'competition' is totally supportive to aspiring musicians so there is no overall winner, instead the judges give constructive criticism and award prizes appropriate to the performers. There are two categories; under 18 and 18-24 which are judged by Damien Barber, Fay Field, Lynne Heraud and Andy Stafford. Styles covered include traditional or contemporary folk, roots or world music, either traditional or self penned. To enter you need to send a cassette, CD or minidisc with up to 15 minutes of music to Alison Macfarlane, 40 Warwick Road, St Albans, Herts AL1 4DL. But hurry, the closing date is on February 29 2004.

Send gig information to "The Brian Heywood Column", PO Box 649, Dunstable, Beds, LU5 4XD or info@lutonscene.com. A search-able archive of the column is available on the web at www.lutonscene.com.