

2/Mar/2005 The Scene (Luton News/Dunstable Gazette)

The Brian Heywood Column

Snowy Montreal

Just back from the Strictly Mundial World Music convention on Montreal (Canada) and I'm trying to keep my eyes open so that I can finish this column since I've been on the go for over 26 hours now and it is a bit difficult to keep awake. I was over the other side of 'the pond' showcasing and generally schmoozing with North American promoters trying to get transatlantic bookings for WoodworX. Conventions like Strictly Mundial and South by Southwest in Austin (Texas) later on in the year provide an opportunity for British performers to get enough of a profile to get work in this very large, but also, very competitive music scene.



Another aspect of the convention are the briefings with industry professionals. I was particularly interested in a session about how to get a performer's visa for the USA. Since 9/11 it has been almost impossible for independent artists to get one of these precious visas and it can even be difficult for well-established artists; for instance both Cat Stevens and Kylie Minogue have recently had to cancel US dates recently due to having their visa applications either delayed or refused. One precious nugget of information that I took away from that session is that you don't need a visa if your band is just going over to do a showcase. However you do need be careful that you stick to the conditions because if the US immigration department catch you doing something naughty – like taking a paid booking when you're supposed to be showcasing then it's an instant five year ban with no appeal.

Anyhow, back in the 'real' world; Andy Sizmur tells me that the second transit gig taking place on Luton turf will be at The Hightown Club in Oxen Road tomorrow night (Thursday). The headliner will be one of the area's top local indie / electronica bands - **Akiva** (who were formerly known as Hush) supported by **Suddenly Vince** (London), **Daze One** (Brighton) and Andy's band **The Occasion** who are opening the set. I'm sure **Akiva** will be promoting their most recent album (Can't Buy Revolutions) which you can hear (and buy!) on-line at www.hush.org.uk. The doors open at 7.30pm, the music kicks off at 8pm and entry is just £3.

A little bit further ahead; next Friday (March 11) top ceilidh band **Stömp** will be playing the next Tyre Kickers's Ceilidh at St Mary's Church Social Club in West Street, Dunstable with caller Andrew Swain. The band is one of the UK's top e-ceilidh bands so it's quite a scoop to get them playing locally. Tickets cost £6, or £3 for under 16s and concessions while under 12s are free!. For more information call 01525-371248 or you can check out the web at www.stompceilidh.co.uk. To find out more about e-ceilidh check out www.e-ceilidh.com

9/Mar/2005 The Scene (Luton News/Dunstable Gazette)

The Brian Heywood Column

The Luck of the Irish

I know some nationalist nuts complain about the fuss that's made about the celebration of an Irish saint's day. But as Saint Patrick was actually British, probably from what is now the north of England, while Saint George was from what is now eastern Turkey, you can draw your own conclusions as to the relevance of the celebration. Anyway you shouldn't let a mere geographical anomaly get in the way of a good party!

The Cork and Bull in Luton will be hosting its usual St Patrick's Day celebrations next week (March 17) with a mix of traditional Irish food, dancing, sing-song and top quality live entertainment. In the afternoon Irish old time legend **Jimmy McGill** will be performing his usual slot supported by son Kev on drums and Cliff Mulwinney on bass. In the evening you can catch a spectacular 'one off' live performance by some of the UK's top session musicians. **The Colaborates** will be playing a mixture of old time classics and Irish rock songs including covers by band such as the Eagles and U2. The band is led by front-man **Paul Riley**, who's taking a break from his role as lead singer with the Illegal Eagles. By all accounts his electrifying vocals and massive stage presence when he played with the band on St Patrick's Day in 2003 has meant that he has been in demand ever since.

The rest of the band are pretty impressive as well; lead guitarist Keith Attack, who's another member of the Illegal Eagles, has been playing for over 30 years with some of the top acts from the seventies through to the present day. In fact he's regularly seen on Top of the Pops supporting some of today's big names. Cliff Mulwinney is on bass guitar, he's a regular on the local live circuit with his band Trick, at least when not working the London circuit sessioning with some top acts. Keyboard player, Andy is another member of Trick, but you may also know him from Honest Joe and Emerald Dogs. Drummer Kev McGill is just about to start another tour with 70s legends Les Mckeowns' Bay City Rollers and plays locally with acts such as the Wellington Bootles and Trick or even in some of Luton's schools teaching up-and-coming young drummers!

Incidentally, the Cork & Bull is launching another Battle of the Bands competition on Sunday (Mar 13) with contestants **Elements of Refusal** and **Red Letter Week**. The competition runs every Sunday through till the end of April, with the winners picking up a first prize of £500 cash. Admission is free so urge everyone to get along and support some of Bedfordshire's up-and-coming acts. For further information or if you would like to enter future events then please contact Brian on 01582-729586

16/Mar/2005 The Scene (Luton News/Dunstable Gazette)

The Brian Heywood Column

A Wild Night at the Norman King

I've heard since writing last week's column that Rick from local band "Sons of the Soil" is starting up a new weekly acoustic 'open mike' night at the Norman King in Church Street, Dunstable (opposite the Priory Church) from tonight (Wednesday). The sessions will be hosted by none other than **Wild Willie Barrett** the almost legendary sidekick of John Otway and highly accomplished multi-instrumentalist in his own right). Willie, who's act includes sawing up an acoustic guitar live on stage, is encouraging anyone who plays a portable acoustic instrument of any denomination (so I guess that means grand pianos are out) to take the stage, or just come down and listen, everyone's welcome.

The Norman King is the ideal venue to host this venture as the acoustic music sessions there during the Dunstable Folk weekend have shown. The ancient wooden beams and uneven walls produce an excellent acoustic, while the Jed and Mel who own the pub produce excellent beer, food and hospitality! For more information you can call Rick on 01582 758880 or the pub direct on 01582 661603. The session will take place every Wednesday with the music starting at 8:30pm and goes onto closing time. Make sure you put it your diary.

Talking about live music in pubs, Arts Minister Estelle Morris has announced that she will be asking the music industry to say what it thinks the Government should be doing to nurture and promote live music. This is the first time that we've been asked directly to give our opinion on what can be done to strengthen live music in the UK. The whole shebang is being led by the Live Music Forum - a group, chaired by former Undertones' front man Feargal Sharkey - which was set up at the beginning of 2004 to ensure live music thrives. Over the next few months the Forum will be seeking the views of everyone from major record companies to jobbing musicians.

The Live Music Forum recently released research showing that there have been 1.7m live music events throughout England and Wales in the past year which averages out at over 4,500 events every day of the year. This looks pretty healthy but there are fears that the new Public Entertainment Licensing (PEL) laws will put a damper on the scene, since every music event will need to have a licence issued by a local authority. The recent decision by Sam Smiths to ban live music from their pubs has also raised concern. The consultation will last for twelve weeks until 10 June 2005 with people from all areas of the music industry giving their views. To get in touch with the Forum to request a meeting or to send in your views, email LiveMusicForum@culture.gsi.gov.uk

23/Mar/2005 The Scene (Luton News/Dunstable Gazette)

The Brian Heywood Column

Folk Like Us Like Folk

There has been some interesting, if somewhat heated, discussion recently in the local press about folk music kicked off by a local promoter describing folk music as songs "... about dead miners and bringing in the wheat.". This kind of ill-informed attack on a thriving music genre is depressingly common in the UK media, usually by people who seem to be unable to separate reality from 'Little England' style parody. To paraphrase Mark Twain's famous quote – the report of the death of folk is an exaggeration. This can be seen in the thriving live folk music scene – albeit outside of Luton. Folk Clubs do vary in size and popularity, from large ones like the Hitchin Folk Club now entering its fortieth year to smaller operations like The Cricketer's down in Redbourn.

Maybe the lack of folk music in Luton has more to do with the lack of decent promoters and suitable venues than the actual music itself. After all, the long running Wild Ogre folk club was actually shut down by Luton Borough Council when they closed the Guildford Street 33 Arts' Centre back when the current Hat Factory venue – then called the Artezium – was opened. Looking at the listings for local gigs from Luton's very own folk magazine the Unicorn over the next week;

- Local talent tonight (Wednesday) with **Wild Willie Barrett** and the Sons of the Soil down at their 'open mic' night at the Norman King in Dunstable.
- Tomorrow (Thurs) at Redbourn (The Cricketer's just off the green) and Bedford (Fox & Hounds, Goldington Road, 01525-404513) there are singers' nights.
- On Friday (Mar 25) you can dance to **Laughing Gravy** with caller Mick Brooks at Hitchin Town Hall (01582-733113/724261).
- Also on Friday you can see the prize winning singer/songwriter **Ronan Boyle** at the Baldock and Letchworth Folk Club (Caffeine, Station Road, Letchworth, 08451232656).
- Saturday (Mar 26) sees "The most exciting and entertaining traditional Irish band in England" (Irish Music Magazine) playing at the Queens Park Arts Centre in Aylesbury (01296-431272)
- On Sunday (Mar 27) you can catch singer/songwriter Vicky Clayton on Sunday (Mar 27) at Hitchin Folk Club (Sun Hotel, 01462-812391).
- On Easter Monday you can have a night off as many venues are closed, although you could test your tonsils at a singaround in Watham Abbey (call 01279-413665 for directions) or you could go to the New Inn in New Bradwell, Milton Keynes for a music session (01908-315050).
- Tuesday you can get some more local talent at the Ampthill Acoustic Club at the Queens Head on Woburn Street (www.acousticclub.org.uk).

So you can get a week's worth of good folk music with not a dead miner in sight if you so choose. The only thing that these have in common is that they are not in Luton. Perhaps we need to get Luton an Arts Centre... To tap into the local folk scene you can pick up copies of Unicorn magazine at most of the above gigs, from Octave Music in Dunstable or direct from the publisher on 01582-733113.

30/Mar/2005 The Scene (Luton News/Dunstable Gazette)

The Brian Heywood Column

Drifting for Charity

Next Friday (April 8), local band **Long Shore Drift** will be playing one of Dunstable's largest venues - the Methodist Church in Ashton Square - in support of the Lake Victoria Children's Home. The four piece band is made up of former Queensbury students Jonny Fever (vocals & guitar), James Lee (lead guitar), Tom Windsor (drums) and Tom McKeand (bass). They first performed together in 2001 while still at school and have since played all the major local venues. Last year they won the Luton based 'Battle of the Bands' coming out ahead of bands already signed to record labels. The band members write the music and they have a self-produced CD which showcases six of their original tracks, which I daresay will be available at the Dunstable gig.



Tickets cost just £2 on the door and there will only be 650 available for this concert which is being heavily promoted to local schools clubs and organisations in the local area. You can get details from the band's website www.longshoredrift.tk or via email from longshoredrift@hotmail.com. The band is also playing at the Esquires Battle of the Bands on this Friday (April 1) in Bedford. There will be a minibus available, details via email. Apart from the outdoor festival concerts in September, it's not very often that we get big gigs in Dunstable since the Queensway Hall was sold off. When the new Grove Theatre venue is up and running then there may be more scope for this kind of thing, but Luton's experience with their Hat Factory doesn't bode well as they have a reputation for cancelling gigs at short notice and generally thrashing about in their music programming. The other big venue in Dunstable – Jumping Jaks! – doesn't seem to 'do' live music so the Methodist Church is the only space large enough for this kind of gig.

Also on Friday singer/songwriter **Harvey Andrews** is gigging in Milton Keynes at The Song Loft which takes place at the Cock Hotel, High St, Stony Stratford in Milton Keynes. The music kicks off at 8p.m and tickets are £6.00 and are available from 01908-611074. Harvey is one of the best kept secrets in the folk/acoustic world and he performs his own material that keeps you spell bound throughout the entire show. Perhaps best known for his song 'Soldier' he has produced 15 albums of his own songs, many of which have been recorded by other artists. You can check out his website at www.harveyandrews.com

I hear that local band **The Dead on Holiday** have had to postpone all their future gigs due to loss of their van and touring gear. I haven't got anymore details about this yet but if you keep an eye on their website (www.deadhols.com) more information may be forthcoming.

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 <http://www.lutonscene.com>