

25/Jan/2012 The Scene (Luton News/Dunstable Gazette) – talking MUSIC

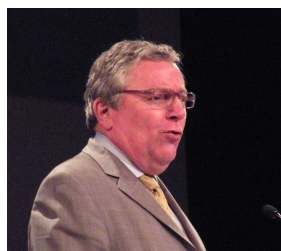
The Brian Heywood Column

New Dawn for Grass Roots Music

Last week I was feeling pretty down about the prospect of the Live Music bill being kicked into touch by the arcane parliamentary procedures for private members Bills. The bill is designed to take live music in small venues out from under the heavy hand of local government bureaucracy. In fact the decline of small gigs in pubs coincided with reform of entertainment licensing in 1982 and in 2003 the government made even having a pub piano or schools providing instruments for concerts became a potential criminal offence unless licensed. The new Live Music Bill does away with that requirement. By the way, the law doesn't apply to Scotland as they never went down this road of bureaucratic madness.



Well, much to my surprise (and just about everyone else's) the bill sailed through in the last minute of play. The rules are that the business had to finish by 2.30pm and when end time arrived and MPs were still involved in the tedious filibustering on amendments to the Daylight Saving Bill. At this point, most people watching thought the Live Music Bill had been lost. But then, as one observer in the public gallery put it, "something weird happened". According to the bill's sponsor, the Lib-Dem Lord Clement-Jones; "I was sitting there and I was absolutely, completely confounded. I had no idea what was happening when the Daylight Saving Bill was up." But a couple of minutes later the bill had passed its final hurdle and was on the way to becoming law.



According to Jo Dipple from UK Music; "The Live Music Bill will make a real and positive difference to lives of musicians" and Musicians Union General Secretary John Smith added: "the number of gigs available to young musicians who are still perfecting their craft has gone down. This is primarily due to a reduction in the number of smaller venues which traditionally offered this level of gig, and is directly linked to the Licensing Act." On the local scene; former Jazz musician, broadcaster and Luton North MP Kelvin Hopkins who has a history for campaigning against unnecessary curbs on our natural music culture told me; "Luton has a wonderful musical culture and pubs and clubs should be allowed to put on live music".



So it looks like that soon, if you want to put on a gig - be it a fund raising barn dance in a friendly farmer's barn, to debut your ska/punk/folk/swing ensemble at your local pub, or even just put on a school or church concert – you will no longer be under threat of six months in the clink or a £20,000 fine if you don't get a licence or even just make a mistake on the 2,640 word application for one. And what's more, it won't cost you a thing.

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Send gig information to "Talking Music", PO Box 649, Dunstable, Beds, LU5 4XD or email details of gigs, gossip, web sites or anything else to info@lutonscene.com. A search-able archive of the column is available on the web at <http://www.lutonscene.com> and you can follow me on twitter as @Brian8ch.