

ATTILA THE STOCKBROKER | DIARY



The Bard, happily press ganged by pirates, tunes up for Christmas

AMAZING time last week. Thanks to Glastonwick stars East Town Pirates for organising a brilliant, packed gig at The Steamboat Tavern in Ipswich last Friday night.

It started off with a blast of good old-fashioned ranting poetry from James Domestic – a fine thing in someone half my age – I did half an hour of new poems and stories, the Pirates plundered an hour of home-grown punk sea shanties, and then myself and my band Barnstormer 1649 finished things off with our early music punk. If you've got any kind of pirate or nautical-themed event in mind, and you like your punk rock, book ESP. You won't be disappointed!

And the following day was equally good in a completely

different way. The Locks Inn Community Pub, more or less completely surrounded by water at the end of the River Waveney navigation canal near Bungay in Norfolk, is a truly magical, unique place.

We arrived by the only single-track road, had an lovely gig fuelled by fine beer to an equally fine crowd and then went to our digs by boat, underneath a clear, starry sky looking at Venus and Mars. I have never lost sight of what an incredible privilege it is to earn my living doing this for the past 43 years and last Saturday was just perfect. Thank you so much to Graham and Nicky and everyone involved.

And then back to reality. How many different ways can I say the same thing? Here's an early carol of despair.

Away in the rubble
A brick for a bed
The little Lord Jesus
Laid down his sore head
The bombs from the night sky
Rained down where he lay
His mother was weeping
The rest passed away

The Romans, the exile, the pogroms, the fear
The Bundists "stand fast now"
And Herzl's "not here"
Sykes-Picot, the Nazis, the Nakba, the wall
The little Lord Jesus
Despaired at them all.

And as for here – national politics is bollocks. All of it. Everywhere.

The Tories have now managed to desecrate by mistake the utterly clueless idiot most of them wanted to lead the party, leaving them the choice between two individuals whose only achievement is appearing even more batshit than Liz Truss,



Cartoon by Jeff Perks

which takes some doing. It's Fawley Towers run by compulsive vivisectionists.

Labour are even more boring than Alan Durban's 1981 Stoke City side, desperately trying to show off to the bullies from the banks and the right-wing press, which only increases the latter's contempt for them, while slowly grinding the final vestiges of hope out of those of us who had any to begin with.

Reform are a deranged surrealist golf club for Mosley tribute acts, the Lib Dems a constipated circus troupe and the Greens ... are beige. And the varying bits of what passes for the "radical left" are as always absolutely determined to make sure the 10 per cent they don't agree about with each other means that the 90 per cent they do agree about is irrelevant and so they loathe each other's guts and "prefer the Tories, cos at least they're honest about it."

So this is England. But we

could be in Gaza or Lebanon.

Embrace your families. Cherish your friends. Surround yourselves with love, if you can, celebrate the countless good people out there (we're the majority, never forget that!) and do the best you can to support those around you who need it. And have a LAUGH.

This week I was in Northampton, and Leeds Thursday and Friday, tonight I'm at the indomitable Red Shed in Wakefield doing my Early Music Show with ace Edinburgh songwriter Calum Baird and tomorrow (19pm) the same show at the Town Festival in Halifax, a fine initiative set up by local indie venue Grayston Unity. Tomorrow's the last day: check it out if you can! All details as ever from my social media pages.

For further info please visit <https://www.facebook.com/attilathestockbroker> and/or <https://attilathestockbroker.bandcamp.com/merch>

OPINION

Dr Strangelove and the Seven Dwarves of Armageddon

MATTHEW ALFORD questions the establishment-pleasing politics that underlie so-called 'political satire'

IS ARMANDO IANNUCCI a national treasure? He should be. But for entertainment – not political satire.

In a West End stage adaptation of Armando Iannucci and Sean Foley's *Dr Strangelove*, an insane US commander orders a nuclear strike on Russia. Both sides flounder to prevent apocalypse.

The original film was Stanley Kubrick's masterpiece, skewering Cold War archetypes from subservient RAF pilot to drunk Russian premier. Iannucci's adaptation, also set in the '60s, has the Russian dictator modelled on Vladimir Putin, labelled in a punchline as "cold-blooded, neurotic – and short!"

It strikes me that both Putin and his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky are the same height – 5'7". Indeed, Starmer, Sunak, Macron, Kim Jong Un, and Scholz are all within an inch of them. So, if you are going to do a (non-PC) joke about short people becoming insecure world leaders, why not commit to the bit?

Isn't it funny that we're being dragged into Armageddon by the seven f-ing dwarfs – and we're all too polite to mention it?

Iannucci calls his play "horrendously relevant" and that it "feeds off" the "Orbans, Musks and Zuckerbergs." But the Hungarian president and the head of X advocate negotiations with Russia. Zuckerberg stays schtum.



The problem is: you do a dissection of the orthodox elite and lo and behold you get slapped on the back by the orthodox elite who say 'Jolly good! Can you do us another?'

So, what is Armando Iannucci, CBE – Britain's leading satirist – actually saying? I think he's just name-dropping scary-sounding names to sell a politically safe play.

Similarly, in *The Thick of It*, Iannucci's portrayal of spin was sharp, but reinforced a comfortable worldview – politicians are benign idiots. In *In the Loop*, the film's critique of the Iraq War assumed the cause of the WMD debacle was buffoons rather than vested interests and ideologues.

Iannucci has always been brilliant at exposing absurdity, as in

the hilarious *The Death of Stalin*, but it feels like the absurdity is an end in itself, rather than a means to interrogate power. Releasing a watered-down play about nuclear war precisely when "the stretched twig of peace is at melting point" (as *The Day Today* memorably put it), is perverse.

Iannucci: "Our tale of nuclear annihilation seemed rather pertinent, but more as a dramatic metaphor for the various collapses of faith in political discourse [climate disaster, conspiracy theories, and Trump's 'lie']..."

Eh? Isn't nuclear annihilation "pertinent" enough right now, without using it as a metaphor for, what...? The perils of Instagram?

So, could *Dr Strangelove* have been set contemporaneously? "The Russians are stupid but they're clever with it," insists the revamped General Ripper. "They think that they're smarter than us but they're not but they look like they are – that's how you spot them!" Ironic lines like these surely speak to the now. The media asks us to believe, for instance, that Putin is a ruthless threat to the "rules-based international order" while also a cowardly paper tiger. Similarly, when General Buck Turgidson says we must "pre-taliate," it could be an embryonic point about Western strategy to "de-escalate through escalation."

But Iannucci's real-world view directly echoes the West-



Pic: Mamei Harlan

Steve Coogan in Sean Foley and Armando Iannucci's *Dr Strangelove* (2024)

ern establishment. "It's not just about Ukraine versus Russia," he says. "It's about freedom and democracy against authoritarianism and military rule... [autocracies mustn't] get away with it." Jeez. Seen the latest US democracy rating, military budget, or arms trade market share?

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ern establishment. "It's not just about Ukraine versus Russia," he says. "It's about freedom and democracy against authoritarianism and military rule... [autocracies mustn't] get away with it." Jeez. Seen the latest US democracy rating, military budget, or arms trade market share?

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I see no reference in any "satirical" work to laughable claims by the Wall Street Journal that the Nord Stream gas pipeline was destroyed by half-a-dozen drunken vigilantes (no way it could have been the CIA!)

Is anyone still buying the supposed election-altering flood of Russian "disinformation" (ie a few cack-handed memes our own governments use as pretexts to shut down free speech)? And could there be anything more Strangelovian than the US air-dropping aid packages into Gaza, which crush their recipients to death?

Heigh-ho, heigh-ho, into ze mines ve go... "Satire is a lesson, parody is a game," said novelist Vladimir Nabokov – it requires a deeper moral and social critique. Where is this, exactly, on our screens and stages?

In 2019, Iannucci's savage colleague Chris Morris was promoting *The Day Shall Come* – a satire about the FBI's infiltration of terror cells – when he commented: "The problem is... you do a nice dissection of the way things are in the orthodox elite and lo and behold you get slapped on the back by the orthodox elite who say 'Jolly good! Can you do us another one?'"

Was this Morris's gentle rebuke? Because it's exactly what Iannucci has done – and what they have done for Iannucci.

As funny and informative as his much-missed Channel 4 documentaries, Thomas's act lurches through a range of themes – the vast acreage of land consumed by golf, an airport runway delay, anxieties about the Starmer government and an appearance at a

literary festival in Lewes, in the slot before Andrea Leadsom. This last item prompts a salacious one-liner on the origin of the East Sussex town, and cues some in-ye-face outrage at the notion of being Leadsom's warm-up act. It's digressive, but strangely seamless and very funny.

Imran Yusuf's act is a softly spoken confrontation with the audience. Building rapport through his self-deprecating asides, he riffs on cultural identity, intolerance, religious bigotry and fear of the "other."

There's a mix of observation, affable ridicule and fantasy. Yusuf closes with a bizarre scenario in which kosher and halal diets foster a new world order. It builds to an outrageous but irresistible pun.

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INTERVIEW

Italian two-tone on tour

TIM LEZARD and DOINA CORNELL meet a band whose passion for politics is matched only by the power of their music

FOR Los Fastidios, touring in the UK is like coming home.

The Verona-based ska punks, who recently celebrated 30 years on the road, were inspired by the UK's two-tone movement.

"All the music we like was born in the UK," says founder and frontman Enrico. "Every town we play in, there is a story about music. For us, it's fantastic to play in towns like Coventry where bands started."

"The attitude of the two-tone scene is important," says Enrico. "It showed my generation that music can unite and break a lot of barriers. For the first time they try to connect black and white people."

"We're very lucky," says singer, Elisa Dixon, "because we can go on stage anywhere in the world and spread our messages and values, like anti-racism, anti-sexism, against homophobia, transphobia, for animal liberation, for human rights."

"At the end of the '70s, beginning of the '80s, racism was a really big problem in the world," says Enrico. "Today the far right is doing the same for gender prejudice, which is why we fly the rainbow flag at our gigs."

"The young generation today is growing up with open minds, which is why fascists are opening to new ideas. When they talk about homosexual weddings or

involve immigrants in their party, it is not true. It is a joke because they know the future doesn't belong to them.

"But we are just musicians. We are not politicians. I decided to give my life to music because, for me, music is fun, first of all, but at the same time is an excellent way to spread our messages."

The band is best known for their football anthem Antifa Hooligans which is played at clubs around the world, most famously during half time at Hamburg hipster club FC St Pauli.

But beyond this they have an impressive back catalogue of 18 albums and singalong singles

such as *Take a Stand* ("Everybody side by side and stick together, everybody shouting loud 'We're anti-racist!') and *Skankin' Town*.

But wearing their politics on their sleeves has, Enrico believes, held them back, especially in their home country.

"Italy is the country of culture, but it is the culture of the past," he says. "Today, if you want to be in a band, you have to be a business but we want to remain independent."

"We thought of moving the band to Berlin because in Germany, the artist, the music is really respected. We have a lot of fans and support in Germany. But we decided 'No' because leaving Verona would be to lose. Verona is one of the most fascist, racist towns in Italy, so it was important for us that we are here."

Enrico founded KOB Records in 1998, an independent label exclusively devoted to punk, oil and ska sounds, promoting street music which is often ignored by the mainstream music industry. Other bands on the label share Los Fastidios's anti-fascist and anti-racist values, celebrated every year with the one-day Kobfest festival in Verona.

"If you live in Verona it is not nice because every day you have to fight against the right wing," Elisa says. "But at the same time it's a reason more to fight every



Pic: Niccolò Caranti/CC

ANTI-FASCIST TROUBADOURS: Los Fastidios playing at Centro Sociale Bruno in Trento, 2009

day. In one part it is sad, but in the other part you feel stronger. It is important we hold Kobfest here in this city, to be visible."

Have things got worse under new right-wing Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni?

Elisa shakes her head. "Nothing changes, even though the government has changed. It was terrible before Meloni and it's terrible now."

And in a view that has parallels in the UK, Enrico adds: "Sometimes it is better to have a right-wing government because you know where they stand and you can criticise them."

"To have a left-wing government can be difficult because maybe they are doing the same thing as the right-wing."

Like many activists in England, Los Fastidios have

stepped away from party politics, preferring instead to engage on a community level, focusing on supporting refugees when they arrive in Verona. People arriving on boats across the Mediterranean have found friendship, work and homes in the city thanks to the support of Los Fastidios and other local organisations.

"Everywhere in Europe people don't trust politicians," states Enrico. "The people who vote is 50 per cent, sometimes less. It means the right wing won the election but not that the country is right wing."

"For example, in France's elections this year, when there was a risk the right wing would get into power, it was a calling to people. They went to vote. The right were sure to win but then

"Boom, f*ck off," they lost."

Los Fastidios are a hard-working band – more than 100 gigs this year already – and their dynamic live shows re-energise and reconnect people disillusioned by Establishment politics.

Elisa says: "People say to us they want us to play in their town because they need us."

"If you don't work in a positive way, we are finished," concludes Enrico. "I am a dreamer. For me it's important to follow my dream. If you don't have dreams in your life, then what do you do? Nothing."

Don't do nothing. See Los Fastidios and let their passion reset your politics.

Los Fastidios are on tour in the UK in November and next year. For more information see: lofastidios.net

CABARET REVIEW | FAIR PLAY CABARET

★★★★★ | QUORN GRANGE HOTEL, LEICESTERSHIRE (GFTU EDUCATION TRUST)

ANDY HEDGECOCK applauds a new initiative by Equity that gives free rein to working class talent

DRIVING across the Leicestershire Wolds to Quorn, I narrowly avoid a deer caught in my headlights. It's fitting that an evening of exhilarating chaos begins with an adrenaline rush.

Fair Play Cabaret opens with a set by compere Mark Thomas. Warming up a small and slightly inhibited audience takes considerable confidence and 40 years' experience of stagecraft. Thomas breaks the fourth wall, talks about "workshopping" an apparently underappreciated punchline and urges us to rearrange the seating to make performers feel "embraced." It works brilliantly.

As funny and informative as his much-missed Channel 4 documentaries, Thomas's act lurches through a range of themes – the vast acreage of land consumed by golf, an airport runway delay, anxieties about the Starmer government and an appearance at a

literary festival in Lewes, in the slot before Andrea Leadsom.

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In contrast, Kate Smurthwaite's delivery is louder and faster – perfect for her scatter-

shot observations on contrived and anaemic chat-show confrontations, fashions in public styling, charity show goody bags containing sex aids and the connection between Covid, bats and hideous sexual proclivities. A fine set.

The show closes with a musical performance of charm, virtuosity and emotional clout. Rory McLeod, an accomplished guitarist with an impressive vocal range, is in his fifth decade as a performer and recording artist. His storytelling, in and between his songs, is compelling, and he has a flair for vividly empathic depictions of vulnerable people.

Themes include the inflexibility of the education system (Pauline's Song), gun control (No Use for a Gun), the alienation of migrants (A Foreigner Forever) and the cruel absurdities of capitalism (Farewell Welfare). There are instrumentals too



Pic: Neil McFarlane

STAR LINE-UP: Imran Yusuf, Mark Thomas, Kate Smurthwaite, Rory McLeod and Equity's Mark Kelly

– a harmonica piece with bravura effects and Miner's Picket Dance, which involves harmonica, spoons, tap-shoes and stomp board. McLeod's music includes hints of Cajun, Celtic folk, calypso, blues and Americana – a treasure trove of the people's music.

McLeod deserves a much wider audience – and so does Fair Play Cabaret. A cultural campaign to reclaim the performing arts as a space for working-class performers and audiences, it is the brainchild of Mark Kelly, who has secured the backing of Equity.

"The aim is to reinvigorate working-class culture by creating places of solidarity where people feel strong rather than isolated," says Kelly. "These places existed when I was young, as an important part of working-class culture – working men's clubs, union halls, workers' education institutes. It's very depressing that they have gone."

The Quorn event – at the GFTU's headquarters, hotel and training centre, with general secretary Gawain Little at the sound desk – provides a blueprint for a wide-ranging strategy. Shows will feature comedy,

music, spoken word and theatre; everyone associated will be a union member; venues will be union-owned or, at least, employ a unionised workforce; there will be concessionary rates for unwaged people; and all the work showcased will reflect the values of the labour movement.

Fair Play Cabaret is an antidote to social isolation and cultural industries dominated by nepotism and privilege – an ambitious undertaking that deserves our support.

For more information see: equity.org.uk