

Martin Belmont & The Guest List, Dingwalls Dancehall 15/9/2009



A seriously rainy night in Camden and as I seek shelter under the awning of one of those emporiums of high fashion that line the main drag the shop owner tries to move me on and out into the deluge, explaining that I'm blocking his window display from the view of passing fashionistas. I don't feel he's missing too much passing trade and in the minutes that pass as the heavens dump a months rain on us and we discuss the issue I decide life's too short so make a dash for the juice bar and vegetarian restaurant. Eventually the rain abates and I complete the 100 yard dash to The Hawley Arms favoured haunt of the rock glitterati such as La Winehouse.

The young bartender in her casually off the shoulder vest gives me a suitably rock n roll sneer but the beer's good and the soundtrack is suitable. Trouble is cos of the weather and the traffic light failures I'm fully 90 minutes late and Mike didn't give me his mobile number so I could call ahead and warn him.

Mike did though tell me he was meeting 'a few friends' and as he also mentioned he'd have the planned Chilli Willi DVD with him I start looking for a cluster ex-Willis ... and an excited American.

There are no obvious candidates so I sit and ponder and screw up the sudoku ... again.

Time passes and its time to make my other planned rendezvous, this time back at the tube station, and sorry Mike but she's much prettier than you.

The rain toys with us on the way back to Camden Lock, drizzle to deluge and back again so we're somewhat bedraggled and wet through as the doorman welcomes us in to a vastly altered Dingwalls, mind you it has been some years since I was last there I have to admit.

At the bar we meet a Reg Meuross fan who only wants a glass of wine but is being questioned by the very efficient bar person who obviously realises there's more to 'a glass of wine' than the usual 'red or white?' 'sweet or dry?' Trouble is our new friend really just wants a glass of wine which turns out to be virtually a half pint tumbler at a remarkably impressive price of only £3 – shame I'm driving but a mental note is duly made. Seems our new friend saw Reg recently at a Folk Festival and has a beaten a path to North London in anticipation although what she'll make of this gathering of Pub Rocks great and good is a matter to ponder.

For, indeed, tonight we are gathered to mark the release of *The Guest List*, the new album on Goldtop Records by the ever genial Martin Belmont, guitarist to Johnny Cash, Carlene Carter, Nick Lowe and so many many more. The album features "all *new recordings*", the record label is keen to point out, with guest singers "Paul Carrack, Nick Lowe, Carlene Carter, Graham Parker, Sean Tyla, Geraint Watkins, Hank Wangford, Johnny Nicky, Barbara Marsh & Reg Meuross" and many of them are due to be here tonight to celebrate.

As the pre gig blurb says – it truly is destined to be "a special one-off live event".

Its almost 15 years since the release of Big Guitar and Martin can now be found gigging regularly with Los Pistoleros, The Johnny Nicky Band, Hank Wangford & The Lost Cowboys, and the newly re energised Ducks Deluxe but tonight is Martins night and Dingwalls is slowly filling as the video screen, which will later play an important and integral part in the proceedings, flicks through some back pages with the OGWT clip of The Ducks storming through Coast to Coast, Bees Make Honey cracking out Caledonia at The Nags Head and promo videos for Half A Man and Half a Boy as well as a couple of Graham Parker & The Rumour classics.

Dingwalls is filling nicely as The House Band ease onto stage with no trace of ceremony or pomp and after Martin offers a brief hello we're, maybe not too surprisingly, into a toe tapper of an instrumental. As you'd expect it's a great sound and Kevin Fosters bass comes booming across. When the first guest vocalist of the evening, Johnny Nicky, takes to the stage for a strut through Time To Rise the vocals are sweet as a nut and it becomes obvious why Martin Belmont considers Johnny Nicky "Britain's best kept secret" as his Otis influences become all too apparent and in no way out of place.

Johnny may be one of Martins current stage partners but next up is "the first man I ever played music with professionally", nearly 40 years on, ladeez and gennelmen, Sean Tyla who straps on his guitar and takes the band into a stonking version of Johnny Too Bad.



Ducks Deluxe themselves have released their own new CD, A Box of Frogs, not long since and there's no time like the present so, with the temporary substitution of drummer Jim Russell, the current Ducks line duly up tears up a storm across the stage with Mr Tyla in fine form.

Dingwalls continues to fill slowly as The House Band make the stage their own and a relaxed but never less than spot on evening grooves along with smiles on faces wall to wall.

Geraint Watkins' introduction gets a suitably big cheer as he re- states his Untidy credibilities and tumbles headlong into The Springfield's "Island of Dreams" and as early as the end of the first line I'm awash with nostalgia for black and white TV and trolley buses; what a masterstroke and whereas, up till now, Martin Belmont has been the ring leader for tonight's activities, this time all eyes are on Geraint as the groove extends and the left hand rolls splendidly, what a genuine masterstroke.

Watkins stays for a truly wonderful rendition of "one of Martins favourites" 'A Fool Such as I' given more than a nod to Elvis' version with Reg Meuross and Barbara Marsh giving it their best Jordanaires.

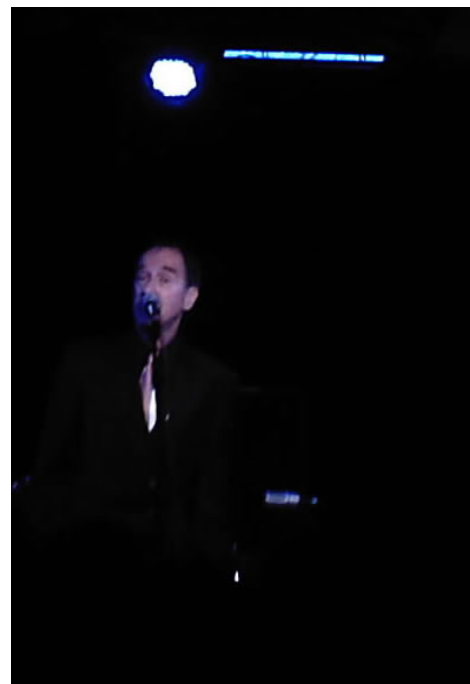


As you'd expect Reg is on top form throughout especially with his 'just so' backing vocals and harmonies but he does get a chance to step forward with Dylan's "Seven Curses" a song he suggests Dylan never recorded, a point clearly discussed and elaborated upon by Mr Belmont as the fan in him rises even further to the surface although, unfortunately, all this takes place 'off mic.' Barbara Marsh duly leads the House Band through 'Beyond the Blue Horizon' introduced by Martin as "one of the oldest songs we'll be playing tonight .. and that's saying something" and reminds us how truly splendid a song it is.

Yet another of Martins current stage collaborators, Hank Wangford, offers us 2 large slices of his usual misery with his 'track off the album' 'Waltzing with Sin' ironically causing great joy and merriment among those here gathered.

Then its time for that video screen once again as technology not even dreamed possible back in the day when Ducks Deluxe were earning £15 a night at The Tall Ho brought Graham Parker bang into the room. Seemingly interrupted from an appointment with a punch bag GP issues a hale and hearty welcome before strapping on an acoustic and a harmonica and firing into Midnight Hour with the House Band backing him several thousand miles away in Camden North London right before our very eyes.

As the man said "like those Elvis concerts but on a smaller scale".



Paul Carrack reportedly has flu and sends his apologies and when you think how long Messrs Carrack and Belmont have played together across the years it's a big miss but not to worry cos "instead we have an old mate of mine .. Nick Lowe .. well, not instead" to which the newly arrived on stage man himself responds "Instead? Instead!? I'll sue" only then serving to underscore the relaxed nature of the evening by asking, after much off mic laughter and chat, "right .. so .. what do you want to do?"



What they do is to ease effortlessly through 3 songs showing Nick Lowe in fine form and affording yet another “special one-off live event” as he calls Reg in to sing on a chorus.

Martin borrows Regs big acoustic, which suddenly doesn't seem quite so big, for a skip through Man in Love and its time for the closing finale as Johnny Nicky returns to centre stage. There's an offer from our genial host that if anyone wants to join them on stage for a closing song they're welcome, before realising he needs to clarify himself and tell the audience that that comment was actually aimed at the previous performers who were by now presumably gathered safely backstage. Geraint Watkins duly augments the house band as Johnny's sweet soul voice rounds the evening off and in my heady Pub Rock haze I'm reminded of Noel McCalla and Moon.

Obviously they didn't get away without an encore and certainly seemed more than happy to oblige with a smattering of Johnny Cash – ‘I like Johnny’ quote Mr B and so we got a funky Get Rhythm followed by the unmistakable guitar intro to Folsom Prison Blues and just as it had been all night long the Belmont guitar was tasteful and bang on the money. As the evening unwound and with the night still quite young a Ducks Deluxe 100 Club T-shirt shot past me and I'd finally found Mike who was buzzing fit to pop with excitement; which excitement only mounts as he recounts all his future plans. Let's just say you should keep your diaries flexible for late May 2010 and keep an eye on Big Untidy news pages.

By the time we're through chatting the stage is in an advanced state of dismantled and the evenings protagonists are among us, Geraint Watkins is especially chatty and sharing a drink and a laugh, how he'll be up for tomorrows flight to Sweden I dunno but he was! Noticeable by his absence among the chattering throng was Nick Lowe although he's seen scooting by in the background.

A few chats, a few handshakes – ‘I always thought Big Untidy was Welsh, why did I think Big Untidy was Welsh? I must be getting you confused with someone else’ – I tell him ‘Big Untidy is Global Martin, Global’ – and its out into the relative dry of a Camden evening, with the temptation of ‘going on’ but the realisation that it's still only Tuesday and the days of The Tally Ho and Hope & Anchor are a long way behind us but, yet, still very, very much with us.

