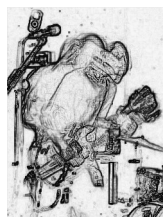


Confessions of a Gig Goer – Volume One - 15th November 2003

By Daniel Parsons



As I made my way down towards the local gig venue, I decided to get some cans of beer from a nearby off licence. I never liked the idea of turning up at a place sober; it always made me feel uneasy. For years I realised that if you walked into a pub or bar sober, people could spot you a mile off and would generally look down on you for not being like them.

Even worse than this is being in a club when everyone around you is intoxicated, polluted by alcohol and acting like complete twats. My theory in this situation is if you can't beat them; join them. Not that I wanted to beat them, I wanted to join them. I wanted to be one of those twats shouting and slurring my words, just waiting for someone to spill my pint so that I could start a fight with them. I liked this feeling, the feeling of being like everybody else.

I opened my first can and realised that it was beginning to rain. 'Fuck', I thought to myself, I still had a good fifteen minute walk ahead of me and no doubt I would end up drenched by the time I got to the venue. I raised the hood on my jacket, took another sip from my can and continued on my way. It had been raining earlier on in the day so it did not take long until the path was filled with puddles. I looked down at the ground and the ends of my jeans were soaking. With every step I took the damper I became. Then as I was waiting at the traffic lights for the green man to appear the inevitable happened. Some rude boy cunt in a done up 205 sped past me making sure the puddle left the road and ended up all over me. I was not only physically damp but my whole spirits for the evening ahead were beginning to get dampened too.

I eventually turned up at the venue around 8.15pm. The doors had opened at 8'o'clock; I decided that it was best to get there early in case there was a queue. There was not! I thought that they must have got everyone inside quickly due to the rain, which was now coming down heavier than I had seen it all week.

I had read about the band I was going to see in this week's property magazine of all places. It amazed me that not only could estate agents sell houses but also found time to recommend what gigs and clubs to go to during the week. The article explained how it was a night not to be missed and would without a doubt sell out quickly. The bouncers gave me the nod of approval and I walked into the building. I took a quick look around. It was empty!

There was a small table in front of me where I had to pay. I remarked on the emptiness of the place. The guy at the desk informed me that it was indeed almost sold out; most people had already brought tickets and would be turning up later.

"How much?" I asked.

"Well that depends" he said.

"Depends on what?" I replied.

"On if you have any concessions?"

"Concessions?"

"Yeah Concessions, you know Student, OAP"

I began to realise he was now just taking the piss out of me, I was certainly not a student and would they really give my Gran a £1 discount if she turned up? I doubted it. But still the idea of ringing her and asking her to come along did now seem like a good idea. At least I'd have some one to talk to.

The venue was tiny; before I had a chance to look around the ticket man suggested that I go and check out some weird arty live act who were jamming in a corner of the room. By arty I mean they were wearing white plastic bags on their heads and by jamming I mean that they were playing with kids plastic musical instruments. I imagine they were made by Fisher Price in the mid eighty's and they reminded me of a toy builders kit I had as a child. They were the kind of things parents would give to children to make them believe that they were an adult. I walked up to the group and what I believe to be a female member handed me a tambourine, she nodded her bagged head at me to indicate that I should join in with their jamming session. I did not want to offend her so began playing, the other members of the group seemed to approve and for three minutes we jammed on an impromptu piece. Our jam seemed to end on its own accord; I got the feeling that under their bags they were all smiling and had been impressed with my contribution. I handed the tambourine back to the female and made my way to the bar.

The bar was not busy; this made a pleasant change, as usually when I went out I would spend half the time waiting to get served. I don't think I will ever work out how people behind the bar actually serve their customers. Some seem to have a system where they make their way from one end to the other serving customers as they go. Others will tend to wait in the same place and only ever serve customers who end up in front of them. Others will serve one customer and then serve who ever manages to shout at them the loudest.

Anyway, for now I was the only person waiting and there were three members of staff behind the bar. A girl asked me what I wanted and I decided to have a pint of bitter, she began pouring my pint into a flimsy glass.

"I think that's £2.30," she said.

"Do you want to check the price?" I suggested.

"Yeah, good idea."

She went off and spoke to one of her colleges before coming back to me. As she returned she told me that the price was actually £2.20. I'm glad she checked it.

"I've been away a while and the price has changed since I last worked here," she said.

"Oh I see. How long ago was that?" I enquired.

"Ten minutes ago."

I picked up my pint and found an area of wall to lean against. I always found that leaning up against the wall made you less conspicuous than just standing in the middle of an area. In many ways leaning against a wall was the next best thing to having a chair to sit on. I began to look around the venue, to the right of me was a DJ on the decks, in front of me was the bar from which I had just come and to the left of me was the entrance. The plastic bag group were still jamming in the far corner just beyond the bar, there were now quite a few more people starting to come in. Every time the door opened I glanced across to see who had just arrived, I was beginning to get scared. Most of the people walking through the door were, to put it nicely, odd looking.

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Standing in a darkened corner next to me were a couple that up until now I had not really noticed but when I looked across at the door they were always in my line of vision. They were staring at me and had been for the last five minutes. Ignoring them seemed like the best option. I tried to look everywhere except at them but every time the door opened I could not help but to be drawn towards them.

After a while I decided that rather than keep ignoring them I should just smile back to acknowledge them, as I did they suddenly began getting off in front of me, virtually eating each other's faces but still looking at me. The female winked at me and then more worrying the male also did. I turned away and began looking across to where the dj was mixing, but I could still feel their eyes looking towards me; I must say it made me feel somewhat uneasy.

Were they doing it because they wanted me to join in or was it a rather sick attempt to highlight the fact that I was alone in what was beginning to seem like a very weird place.

My pint of bitter was now finished; I had rushed it in order to move away from where I was standing. I did not want to move away without a reason, I thought this would have looked obvious and I did not want to give the couple the satisfaction that I moved because of them. So I made my way back to the bar, by now it was slightly busier and I actually had to wait to get served. I managed to catch the eye of the woman who had served me before and asked for another pint of bitter.

"That's £2.60," she said after handing me the pint.

"Really, it was £2.20 five minutes ago" I said.

"I'll go check" and she went to check the price.

She came back to me and confirmed that the price was indeed £2.60; apparently she had got in wrong before and reluctantly I handed over the money.

It would soon be time for the support band to come on so I decided that I might as well move round to the back of the bar where the stage was. The standing area was very small and probably had enough room for about 100 people; so far it was filling up from the back. I always found this very strange. Whenever I went to watch a band in a small pub-like venue the crowd always seemed scared to venture forward out of the darkness and be near the stage.

This was the complete opposite of when you went to see a well know band; in these cases people would always rush and push to get as close to the band as possible. But tonight the crowd were standing at the back of the venue and dancing to the music that the dj had been playing. I must say that the music so far had been very strange, adding to the overall oddity of the evening. The current tune sounded like a jazz band stuck in an airless vacuum with The Prodigy, but the crowd seemed to be enjoying it.

A bloke who was standing next to me turned round to his mate and told him that he needed to go and sit down, he made his way towards the front of the stage and sat down cross legged. I asked his mate if he was ok and he told me that he just needed to go find a peaceful place to rest, 'fair enough' I thought to myself and began to roll a cigarette. I had been trying to give up for a while but tonight everyone around me was smoking and the urges were too great. I was foolish because although I had been trying to give up I still carried a pouch of tobacco and Rizla's around with me. My

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theory was that it would be less expensive to carry around some tobacco and just smoke when I felt desperate rather than buying a whole new pack of cigarettes. But this strategy for giving up was not working.

By now the band had finished setting up their equipment on stage and signalled to the sound engineer at the back of the venue that they were ready to begin. The dj faded out the song he was playing; the crowd however continued to keep nodding for a while as if the music was still playing. A wave of nodding heads but no music, very strange!

There were three members in the band; one was sat down on a small table with a laptop, another was standing next to him with a guitar and the other member was lying face down and looked as though he was in charge of the drum machine and keyboards. They began playing with no introduction or communication to the crowd.

Their set started with a slight humming which seemed to build up to a melody before the beats came in. The guitar followed offering some diverse sound effects and ghostly delay. The band took no notice of the crowd the whole way through their set and looked as if they were playing in their front room. They even had a standing lamp on the stage with them; all that was lacking was the TV set and comfy sofa. Most of the songs merged into one big long tune. It was a fairly mellow set that just seemed to float along and basically passed me by. It gave me the opportunity to look around at the crowd and my mind began to wander.

After thirty minutes or so they band broke their silence. “This is our last song and it’s dedicated to Alison”, I did not know who Alison was but she received a large round of applause from the crowd. The tune that followed started with thumping drum beats from the man who was still lying down on the floor; I had actually thought that he had fallen asleep at some points. If he had this was certainly his wake up call. The beats began pounding through the speakers and all of a sudden the band transformed from an ambient lounge act into a dark twisted dancing devil. The crowd had up until now been standing still but within seconds everyone around me began dancing like rabid monkeys.

I was now feeling quite drunk and merry but I began to realise that I was feeling like the odd one out, all the people around me were totally fucked on various narcotics. I had been in situations like this before but never in such a confined place and never on my own. I began to get the feeling that everyone here was beginning to stare at me and talk about me. Or were they? Was I just being paranoid? I really couldn’t decide. I half wanted to fit in, be like every body else, but the other half of me was being conservative and wanted to stay sane.

By now I needed to visit the toilets, I had not been looking forward to this as I had a feeling that they would be as diverse and worrying as the evening so far. I did not actually know where the toilets were so I asked the girl at the bar who pointed at a door at the back of the venue. I made my way through and followed the corridor towards two doors. There was no way of distinguishing the gents and the ladies, I had been in this situation before and last time I had chosen the wrong door and ended up walking into the ladies, I did not want to make this mistake again.

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I decided that I should wait until someone either came out or went into one of the doors, that way I would be able to make sure that I ended up in the gents.

After waiting outside for an awkward minute the woman who was part of the couple staring at me earlier made her way out of one of the doors. She gave me a rather disconcerting look; I just smiled and made my way into the door that she didn't come out of. I had just walked into the ladies.

There were three girls in there looking into the mirror, one of them turned around and asked me what I was doing. I explained what had happened and they just laughed. "They were probably just having a quick screw," said one of the girls. 'Fucking typical' I thought to myself. The girls said that they did not mind me being in there and suggested that I stay in there with them. I declined and made my way into the gents. As I was walking in the male half of the couple was coming out of the door, he winked at me again, I just smirked at him and barged my way past.

The toilets were empty; this was a relief as I was half expecting to see various fucked up weirdo's standing around and discussing the wrongs of the world. There were three urinals in the room, one of them was blocked up with piss and had a bucket underneath it. So I decided to use one of the other two. Whilst I was pissing I looked at the tiles in front of me that were covered in graffiti and stickers with band web addresses and slogans on them. There were the usual 'for sex call....' and 'so and so are shite' slogans written on the wall.

I began to get lost looking at the various writings on the wall, taking in all the random release, tour dates and websites that I knew in the morning I would not remember. Then suddenly someone came in, I quickly came out of my wall glancing trance and tried focusing on what I was doing. If you can focus on taking a piss that is.

"Alright mate" the stranger said to me.

"Hello" I replied reluctantly.

"Hows it going?" he asked.

"Yeah not too bad" I said; half hoping that this would be the end of the conversation. I always found it a bit weird when blokes started chatting to each other in the bogs and preferred to keep myself to myself.

"You look a bit tense" he said to me.

I tried to shrug off this comment but I began to realise that I was tense, I felt out of place and somewhat uneasy. I eventually started chatting to him about the band that was about to come on stage and whether or not he had jammed with the plastic bag band. By now I had finished my piss and was ready to leave, just before I did the stranger said one last thing to me; "Oi, mate...do you fancy a trip"

"What do you mean?" I replied with a slight curiosity.

"You know.... A trip. Some acid!"

Suddenly I realised what he was on about, he was offering me some LSD. The last time I had done acid was a few years ago at a music festival and I ended up stripping naked, running across the site and getting arrested. Half of the night was fun until the overwhelming fear and paranoia set in, I also remembered how bad I felt for a few months afterwards.

"No, I'm alright, thanks anyway" I said.

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“Go on” he said, “I’m not charging, to be honest I think you could do with some, liven up a bit.”

Suddenly I was put in a place I did not want to be in, I was being offered free drugs. A few years ago this would probably have been a dream come true, but not now, not tonight.

“I dunno”, I said to him, by now he could hear that I was unsure.

It did not take much more convincing before I caved in.

“☺k” I said and took it, the man smiled at me and left the toilets.

Then I was alone, I looked into the mirror and realised the consequences of what I had just done. Shit. Fuck. Bollocks. The rest of the night was going to be messy.

I left the toilets and said to myself to forget about what I had just done and wait until I started coming up. If I did not worry about it then I would have a good trip, it would probably be fun, probably. Don’t worry Mr Manwairing!

The main headline band was not on for another ten minutes so I decided to go and watch the plastic bag band again. They had attracted a large crowd around them. I turned round to the bloke next to me and told them that I played with them when they were less popular. This was sort of true. An hour ago nobody was here and I had jammed with them. I started to think a bit more about them and if they always wore plastic bags on their heads or if it was only when they were playing live. Did they always use the same bag or did they change it each night, perhaps they had their favourites. What was I thinking? Why the fuck was I questioning their plastic bag wearing? I was beginning to feel quite odd.

The main band was going to be playing imminently so I made my way towards the crowd. No longer was the front of the standing area so empty, the crowd had begun to fill up from the front towards the back. I did not want to push my way through the people. I hated it when people did this to me; there is nothing worse than standing waiting for a band with people barging past. So many times I had been pushed by someone and ended up spilling my pint. So I respected my fellow gig goers and stayed at the back of the crowd.

As I looked across at the crowd their heads were almost swaying in unison, nodding to the off time beats and fuzzy bass lines. I began to be drawn toward the eyes of the people in the crowd and realised that they were all totally dilated. They were all fucked and I was slowly beginning to realise that I too was fucked.

The band made their way onto the stage and the crowd started cheering, clapping and shouting; this sudden uproar changed the peaceful clam that I had been use to, I could feel tension rising. They started by introducing themselves and then launched into an almost comical sounding dance song called ‘How The Balls Bounce’. The actual music reminded me of the theme tune to a children’s programme that I used to watch as a young child and with that I started picturing the band as the characters from the show. The guitarist / lead singer was now turning into a furry six foot beaver, the bassist was starting to resemble a moose and the drummer looked more like a cuddly bear than the bald headed menacing thug he actually appeared to be.

The song ended and they launched into their current single, again sounding like a very upbeat and colourful tune. The acid was beginning to kick in big style and I was

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beginning to get drawn to the lights that were shining onto the stage. They were frantically scanning and seemed like a magical rainbow of illusion and intrigue. The music was now fading into the background and was becoming the soundtrack to my journey into the world of the ever-changing and trippy lightshow that was now engulfing me.

Most of the songs the band played were short and the evening was going well, I was feeling optimistic about the rest of it. I decided that I should go to the bar to get another pint. I was already at the back of the crowd and the bar was empty so it did not take long to catch the attention of the barmaid I had been served by earlier in the evening. The problem was that the music was so loud that it was impossible to speak to her without shouting.

“CAN I HAVE A PINT OF BITTER PLEASE?” I requested.

I don't think she heard me so I pointed towards the pump. Still she did not understand; she was staring at me with a blank look on her face. I was slowly beginning to get frustrated and I could feel my mood changing from the happy comical world I had just been in for the last fifteen minutes to a much darker one. Funny how even ordering a pint became what seemed the greatest struggle of the evening.

“CAN I HAVE A PINT OF BITTER, PLEASE?” I asked again as I continued to point at the pump. By now I was feeling very frustrated, I felt like I was losing all hope, but then out of nowhere she pointed at the bitter pump, I nodded and the pouring of the pint began. Relief ... for now at least.

I took my pint, handed over some money and made my way towards the back of the crowd to catch the rest of the set. It was now impossible to actually see the band; all I could see were the rows of heads in front of me.

The band still had a cartoon charm about them up until what they announced to be their penultimate song, from the opening chords it sounded dark and twisted, this was further enhanced by the change in the lighting. No longer was I watching cuddly furry animals from a cartoon, they had long gone and had been replaced by a pack of wolves from the darkened forest of evil.

I could not bare to look at the stage so I began looking around at the crowd. For some reason this current song seemed to be going on for a lifetime, I started getting agitated and scared that it might never end. The guitars were getting louder, the bass was pounding through my entire body and the drums were sounding like the totem call of evil. Then it stopped, the crowd cheered and I felt confused.

I knew that there was only one song to go, this was pleasing, as I really did not know how much more of this I could take. I was beginning to feel like the drugs were taking over my normal mind and that I was totally losing control over all my thoughts.

The band finished about 10.45pm, I was still holding a half drunk pint that I wanted to finish before I left for the evening. As I brought the pint glass up to my mouth I started staring at it, it was warping, the circular mouth of the glass was shifting into a square, then a triangle, I tried to focus on the task at hand. In the end I had to shut my eyes and take a sip. I felt everything was a lot calmer when my eyes were shut; I was able to control my thoughts, stop the weirdness from taking over. I stood still as the

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crowd began moving past me towards the exit. I was not ready to leave yet. I was not ready for what evils awaited me in the dark outside.

I was not ready but it seemed like I had no choice in my decision to stay. Before I knew it one of the bouncers was herding everyone away from the stage area towards the bar and ultimately the exit area. I looked at the bouncer who was going up to groups of people giving them a forceful push towards the exit. The more I looked at him the more I started to get freaked out by what I was seeing. His round evil looking face was beginning to look like the face of a nazi warlord. The large black puffa jacket emphasised his authority, for all that it was worth. But the closer I looked at his face the more I could sense the underlying evil in his job. He was no longer a guardian of the peace but a nasty piece of work hell-bent on causing distress and misfortune to us, the innocent. After pushing and ushering people towards the door he began to grin, but this was a grin like no other, his smile reached beyond cheek to cheek and looked as though it was taking over his whole face. The red outline of his lips began to engulf his whole lower jaw and the white teeth became deceased warriors of the dead waiting to catch the eye of the innocent gig goer.

I kept myself hidden away in the shadows, hopefully I thought that he would ignore me and I would be able to finish my drink in peace before being hunted down and eventually evacuated. I realised that this was no longer the end of a gig but the fight for my right to stay in the venue, to finish my drink. I felt like someone who was hiding from the devil as he was scouring the remains of the battlefield to see whom he could take to hell with him. If I did not move maybe he would not see me. I faded further into the shadows; surely he could not see me beyond the dark veil that was now surrounding me.

The bouncer left the stage area and I began to feel slightly safer, I had brought myself some time, the hiding had worked, but I knew it would not be long until he came back, most probably with reinforcements. I had to be quick if I wanted to finish my pint and escape from the darkness and find a safe passage towards the exit without bumping into the bouncer, the disruptor of the peace, the devils sidekick.

I could see the exit; the journey there was short but it was going to be difficult. I was now feeling more paranoid than I had done all night. Yes I was soon going to be leaving but I did not know what the outside world had in store for me. I realised that I was safe in the venue, I was with people who felt the same way, they would not judge me like the people out there would. I began thinking about everything that might happen to me, there was an overwhelming sense of fear beginning to build.

Then it happened, the house lights were turned on and I was unable to hide in the darkness. The sudden change from dark to light seemed to screw with my vision and also my emotions. The whole venue had completely changed, I felt uneasy, as though I had suddenly been transported into a different universe. I had adjusted and felt quite safe in the dark venue but now there was this new place, no way of hiding and no time for adjustment.

The bouncer spotted me and began walking towards me. I could see his ferocious grin, his teeth were chattering like a wolf waiting to attack an innocent lamb.

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As I looked into his eyes I could almost see hell, the devil was closing in. He appeared more like a gorilla than a bouncer.

“Right, time to leave” he said to me.

“I’m still drinking” I replied, I decided that I would stand up for myself.

“Well either down it or leave it here” he said.

He lunged towards me. I shifted out of the way and noticed that I was one of the only people still in the building.

I could not down it; I just nodded at the gorilla and made my way towards the door with my pint glass in hand. I despised the principle of being made to rush my drink, I had paid for it and surely I should be given the right to drink it in peace, but no, that’s not the way it worked. So I decided that I would put it in my coat pocket and take it outside with me.

As I approached the exit I was confronted with the prospect of a further two gorillas guarding the door to my freedom. I had no real reason to fear the bouncers but I no longer had control over my rational thoughts, I was getting freaked out by the slightest thing. I took a deep breath and walked towards them, one of them smiled at me and opened the door.

“Have a good evening,” he said to me.

I stepped out of the building and realised I was free; I had escaped the building and survived the weirdness, now I was in for a whole new journey.

I took my pint glass out of my pocket and took a sip, it was a relief to know that I had beaten the bouncers and managed to smuggle my drink outside with me. I was just about to take a sip when I felt someone’s hand on my shoulder.

“You’re not allowed drinks out here” they said.

I turned around and it was one of the doormen, I felt foolish as I realised I should have waited until I was out of their sight before I began drinking.

“I was not allowed to finish it inside” I pleaded.

“Well you’re not allowed it out here either” he said.

Again the fear was rising, the confrontation was making me feel anxious and paranoid.

“Can I finish it inside?” I asked.

“No”

If I was not allowed to finish it inside and I was not allowed to take it outside then what the fuck was I allowed to do with it? I don’t know what came over me but as I looked at the bouncer and his twisted smile I realised there was only one thing I could do. So I held out my pint glass and threw the contents of it over him. Mistake.

I knew as I was doing it that it was the wrong thing to have done. As he went to grab me I turned around and began running away. I ran faster than I ever had, knowing that if he managed to catch me I would be beaten to a pulp.

After a while I stopped running, I needed to catch my breath. As I looked at the pavement, it began warping and twisting below me. I began to feel sick. I used to enjoy the feeling of being like everybody else, feeling that I fitted in. But not tonight, not anymore. I wondered if I would ever get home and if so what adventures would I find on my way? Well, that’s another story.