

Joseph gets his groove back

MOVE It! That's what dear Cliff Richard used to adolescently snarl at us, and damn well too, more than 50 bleeding years ago (Lord above, can you believe it, how time does fly, etc, etc). He was moody and broody back in those days – curled lip, oily quiff and no smiling whatever: every teenage girly's pin-up dreamboat, yet still managing somehow to look more like a grumpy though amply-nourished woman from the Punjab. Anyway – Move It! That's what I yearned to bellow at the slow-moving drifts of people who, like my wife and myself, had finally made it to the National Portrait Gallery on the very last day of a rather terrific exhibition of photographs and memorabilia entitled *Beatles to Bowie: The 60s Exposed*. You can't go to it now because it's over and done with: sorry. Though the title, of course, was always somewhat catchpenny because on display were quite a few chaps rather earlier than that – not just St Cliff of Richard (a living doll, then as now) but also such oddnesses as Marty Wilde, Billy Fury, John Leyton, Helen Shapiro, Frank Ifield and (oddest of them all) Adam Faith. How he became so big a star, if briefly, is one of the abiding mysteries of pop. His head was larger than the rest of his body put together, his features on a par with those monoliths on Easter Island, albeit with the garnish of acne. He didn't move and he couldn't sing and was therefore incapable of delivering full justice to lyrics the like of which we might never be able to thrill to again: 'What do you want if you don't want money? What do you want if you don't want gold? Say what you want and I'll give it to you, darling – wish you wanted my love, Bay-bee!'. Art, eh? You can't knock it.

So there they all were, laid out before us, our erstwhile Pantheon of the Gods. One meandered through the years, gazing at

Novelist reviewer **Joseph Connolly** was beginning to feel his age among the bright young things at the National Portrait Gallery's 60s exhibition – until a visit to its restaurant got him hippy, hippy, shakin' once again



Paperback writer ... Joseph Connolly revisits the 60s.

unfamiliar images of every group and solo artist you could ever remember loving, and dozens more you had very nearly forgotten. The only ones I failed to spot were Herman's Hermits and The Honeycombs – a fascinatingly dreadful combo whose one big hit, *Have I The Right?* featured a painted woman on drums, her hair set hard into ebony, banging away grimly like the Duracell bunny. Everyone else was here, though – the chicks such as Lulu, Marianne Faithfull and Twinkle seeming as if they should still be at home playing

with their dollies (not Dusty, though – she always looked like she was fronting a brothel) while the lads – so thin, and skiving off their O-levels. Relevant wafts of music overlaid the scene, and it was amazing to watch everyone get back into the mindless thump of Wild Thing, or nodding along with vigour to Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick and Titch ... some of the punters were so very young, like 60s dolly birds themselves, or art students ... the others, though, were all old in Easycare Polyester slacks, silly quilted coats, and their shoes like

FACTFILE

PORTRAIT RESTAURANT

The National Portrait Gallery Trafalgar Square
 □ Open: Breakfast: Monday to Sunday 10am to 11.30am. Brunch: weekends 11.30am to 2.45pm. Lunch: Monday to Friday 11.45am to 3pm. Tea: Monday to Sunday 3.30pm to 5pm. Dinner: Thursday and Friday 5.30pm to 8.30pm.
 □ Food: ★★★★★☆☆☆
 □ Service: ★★★★★☆☆☆ (would have been more if they hadn't kept on asking)
 □ Cost: About £75 for two-course lunch for two, with a drink or so.

custard creams (men and women – didn't seem to make a difference). Why would old people want to look at pictures of pop stars, I wondered, before of course registering with shock and not inconsiderable pain that I too was just another piece of debris in this nostalgic and wide-eyed flotsam of grey: Tame Things.

Anyway, there was so much to see that we broke off in the middle in need of food from the top floor restaurant, Portrait. Searcy is the caterer which has the concession – a company whose reputation has waxed and waned since its heyday in the (guess?) 60s when they catered for such as society weddings, gymkhanas and boardrooms. Well they seem to be on a roll at the moment, if Portrait is typical – a slick operation and very good (if overpriced) food in a light and stylish long and narrow space where the view is just everything: you simply must get a table by the window, or else you'll feel cheated and be craning your neck like a tourist. One gapes across the multiple roofs of the National Gallery itself and then onward to

Nelson on his column, from an elevation and perspective that you've never seen before ... then Big Ben, the London Eye ... it looks like the faked-up backdrop to a US-financed feel-good rom-com scripted by Richard Curtis in which a down-home hockey mom from Illinois is dazzled by her TV quiz show prize to visit good old London Town, and winds up marrying Prince William.

The tables are grey Formica (oh dear) but the napkins are proper white linen and the huge Schott wine glasses made even the reasonably humble Barbera d'Asti were drinking taste and feel very special indeed. I kicked off with Monmouthshire air-dried ham – beautifully dry and light, though with a good and piggy taste – with a remoulade of crunchy celeriac, its creaminess and texture setting off the ham just so. There were also a few mildly pickled onions and cornichons, neither of which I like – so my wife more than happily fell upon those while enjoying her salad of leaves made more interesting by wafer thin slices of Conference pear and a not very generous crumbling of Colston Bassett Stilton: she loved the dressing which was apparently both tangy and sweet, with an undertone of honey.

"Is everything all right?" asked a waitress. "Yes, thank you," I merrily replied. Before the mains arrived a more senior lady came along. "Everything all right for you?" "Uh-huh. Thanks," I nodded. And just as I glimpsed our mains sailing towards us, a man in a suit beat them to the post: "Everything good, is it? Yes? Enjoying everything?" "Mm. Mm." So while my wife attacked a good, though slightly overcooked, breast of guinea fowl with a pleasingly cubic cake of parsnip and potato gratin, Savoy cabbage and apple, I had most of a sheep. Well with lamb shank, it always seems that way – it really

is a most satisfyingly greedy thing to order and to eat: the great and ugly bone sticking out, and then layers and layers of soft and oozing meat – you keep on discovering more, which if you are hoggish is a very good thing. It was slightly muttoney, in the best sense possible – rather more mature than the lamb one is used to these days, and made excellent by the superbly glossy and reduced rosemary-infused jus, which was happily absorbed by a barleytwist of garlic mash – not over-assertive, as it can be; chunks of carrot and parsnip were glowing like copper and gold.

"Everything all right for you, is it?" chirruped a fourth bloody person. I sort of smiled. We couldn't go a pudding after that lot, so while awaiting the bill – high at £72, with just the two courses and a couple of glasses of wine – there was just enough time for the initial trilogy of well-wishers to come round yet again, one at a time, in order to make trebly positive that everything had been more than all right and that I was the happiest person alive. I think I might have muttered Jesus ...!

So back to the exhibition again, which seemed even more of a blast, now that my inner man had ceased to beat me up. And more so again when The Swinging Blue Jeans launched excitedly into the Hippy Hippy Shake ... and oh God look: they can't stand still! Old people – twisting. A whole new meaning for the Swinging Sixties. Maybe giving all those hippy hippy replacements a good and thorough workout (making sure they are still in the groove).

□ Joseph Connolly's latest novel is *Jack The Lad and Bloody Mary (Faber and Faber: £8.99)*. All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website www.josephconnolly.co.uk.

IF MUSIC be the food of love, what should you drink with it? As the old conventions are forgotten – red wine with fish no longer shocks, for example – happy food and wine matching depends very much on personal taste. And, without rules, linking the "right" wine to music is even more individual. Or is it? Give it a try with friends and you might find, as I did, that it was such fun that the investigation can spread into a second evening, with several bottles rather than just the two originally intended.

Main focus was on a very classy Italian red, Dolcetto d'Alba 2008 from the Giovanni Rossi estate, now run by son Davide (£13), which Berry Bros and Rudd had suggested after telling me of its own staff members' musical wine lists (see www.bbr.com/wine-club/wineandmusic).

Silkily elegant as the Dolcetto proved, it didn't seem quite the wine to start the evening. So we popped open a bottle of Lanson Black Label. The champagne house is currently celebrating its 250th



anniversary with the release of a new pocket guide to all things champenoise, *The Little Black Book of Champagne* (free if you apply on www.lansonslittleblackbook.co.uk), as well as making quite a fuss about the crispness of its wines, which have no malolactic fermentation to mellow the natural high acidity.

The Black Label (widely available, including at Majestic and Waitrose, at about £27.50) had a particularly joyful swirl of fine bubbles, which danced along delightfully with the 16th century rondeau/ballade which opens the Martin Best Consort CD (Nimbus Records) of *Forgotten Provence*. Equally good with it were the more toe-tapping tunes from Tielman Susato's *Dansereye*, music for one of the richest Flemish courts of the same period (Philip Pickett and the New London Consort, L'Oiseau-Lyre).

Of course, it all depends on mood, though I couldn't image champagne and Wagner...

But to return to the Dolcetto, whose scent a friend imaginatively described as recalling old leather bookbindings. I found the classic hint of sour cherries, followed by flavours which were savoury as well as fruity. It's a restrained, very enjoyable wine, long and with a crunchiness which makes it easy to drink as well as admire.

We agreed that that the light, varied themes of Vivaldi's lute and mandolin concertos (on a genuine vinyl recording) complemented the bright complexity of the wine perfectly. You can see in which period my musical tastes lie...

While it doesn't do to take the idea of music and wine matching too seriously, as a theme for a convivial evening – or two – I strongly recommend it.

Continuing on the Berry Bros Italian theme, the merchant organised an intriguing seminar recently to discuss the potential advantages of introducing the "en primeur" system in selling top reds from Piedmont and Tuscany. Among the growers there – and, from the evidence of the tasting afterwards, they were certainly responsible for some very top wines – there were quite opposing opinions.

As a mere outsider, I suspect that if en primeur does spread to Italy, there won't be a great deal of advantage for most of the wine lovers who buy to drink rather than invest. Instead, let Italian buyer David Berry Green and his colleagues lead you through what's easily available now (see www.bbr.com) and enjoy.

LIZ SAGUES

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