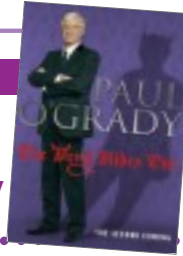


SCENE

Books
 Savage confessions from O'Grady

- P24



Motors
 Nissan latest at The O2

- P24



Billy's born again (...and his religion is the Blues)

Bluesman **Billy Jenkins'** latest album is his most personal to date. He talks candidly to Scene about its raw themes

BILLY Jenkins is depressed. At least you'd think as much from the lyrics on his new album.

But despite appearances, the jazz-and-bluesman whose career has spanned nearly forty years insists they have nothing to do with his current state of mind. In fact, the songs on **Born Again (And The Religion Is The Blues)** were written over a decade ago, during a period which Jenkins concedes was the darkest of his life. Blues has always taken themes of pain and anguish and made them uplifting and amusing - two facets encapsulated perfectly in the album's rousing finale, *I Took A Walk*.

It's a song about wanting to commit suicide, but as the singer contests, "it is positive at the end."

"*Still dark water, seems so attractive, if I walk right in I'll soon be inactive; If I carry rocks, it won't take long, I'll take a walk, to Bob's Pond,*" sings Jenkins.

Reflecting on the lyrics a decade later, Billy says: "I had quite a severe mental and physical collapse at the end of the nineties. It was a problem of being a band leader, trying to earn a living, support the kids. Their mother had to go back to work and I couldn't support them, and when they were 18 I just said farewell. "I was organising a tour for an album, and because I'd been touring ever since I as 16 my body clock was busted - I didn't know when to eat, I didn't know when to sleep. "I was pretty exhausted and a lot of the songs came out of that."

The track would be devastating were it not so funny - its humour bobs back to the surface in the following verse: "*There I'll be if I go missing, you will find me when you're fishing.*"

He was given medication for his condition at the time, but he recalls in typical style, it



The Blues is about addressing the bad things in life... whilst making others feel worse...

didn't help. "The doctor gave me three days of steroids. I said to him, 'I don't want to take them again', he said 'why?' I said 'for the first time in my life I've washed my car!'"

The knowing irony of the Blues - which started with Robert Johnson selling his soul - is in rude health on this record. "The Blues is about addressing the bad things in life whilst making others feel worse at the same time," Billy jokes. "Living in the western world we're spoilt for choice, but the pressures of the market place, fitting in, can

get to you. It can get too much. It did for me. In this digital 'click-click-click' age everything becomes trivial, and singing and playing the blues is very cathartic - spiritually rewarding."

It's not a depressing album by any stretch - it's called *Born Again* for a kick off, and the title track does what it promises, proclaiming "*The religion is the Blues*" with the zeal of an evangelist priest, aided by an organ which too, could have been transplanted from a deep south Baptist church. "I felt so guilty", Jenkins confesses on the song of the

same name, "*when I kissed my best friend's wife.*" And you believe him, to a degree. But the mischievous twang to the vocal and vibrant swagger of the BB King guitar betrays the sense that he might not feel *that* guilty...

The guitar playing across the work is exemplary, and amazingly his gravelly, Tom Waits vocal has changed little in the intervening decade which separates the recording of some of the tracks.

I Hate Dogs is a charming, one-take call-and-response with four-year-old Sam Pickering who renames the Bluesman 'Silly-Billy Jenkins', for his dismissal of the canines. Looking For Mr Happy laddles out another helping of parodic mirth, sung as it is in the most upbeat of jazz tones, set against an all-singing-and-dancing accompaniment.

So is he at his happiest on stage? "No," comes the blunt reply - "It tires me out. I hate social scenes. My spatial awareness is so attuned it makes me really tired. "I like solitude; I need solitude, just to reflect and recharge."

What does make him happy then? "Everything makes me happy - it's just it's too much - it's too rich. I'm a very happy person. They say you're lucky to live a thousand months, but that doesn't make it any easier to get out of bed sometimes."

The album - Billy's most commercial to date - has been well received and Jenkins' and his band have been invited to do a session for the Beeb. "It's called the BBC Big Band session - they've done Van Morrison, Amy Winehouse, Michael Buble - and now me! There's a 21-piece band and it's on November 21."

Rod Kitson

Born Again is released on Nov 8. Download from iTunes or order album and tickets for the BBC Big Band session through Billy's website www.billyjenkins.com

Taken to art

Young citizens get creative

THERE is some really smart art on display in Woolwich over half term. The works were done by young people from the area and are being exhibited at the Citizens' Gallery from Monday October 25 to Friday October 29.

Works at the gallery at 151 Powis Street include a six-foot canvas which was designed and painted by different groups of young people around the borough's parks last summer. 130 Plaster of Paris hand sculptures are also on display, painted in bright colours and each with their own unique patterns, along with photographs taken by young people at the borough's skate and bike parks.

Entry is free. For more information call 020 8855 3240 or visit www.greenwich.gov.uk and search 'galleries'

Cheeky chapel

THE ROSES OF WHITECHAPEL opens at the Greenwich Playhouse on November 2.

The five victims of Jack The Ripper get to tell their side of the story in the play which explores the series of murders that terrorised the East End of London during the autumn months of 1888. Writers Jonathan Kaufman and Martin Stiff spent months researching the facts of the case, and discovered that more is known about the women victims than the as yet unidentified killer himself. Tickets £12/£10 Box office: 020 8858 9256 or email boxoffice@galleontheatre.co.uk

WIN!WIN!WIN! TICKETS TO IMAX 3D SCREENINGS!

TO celebrate the launch one of the most anticipated films of the year, Scene has three pairs of tickets to the IMax 3D screen at The Odeon Greenwich to give away. Legend Of The Guardians is an animated spectacular with some very unlikely feathered heroes at its core. Owls are at the centre of the fantasy adventure based on Guardians of Ga'Hoole, the series of books by Kathryn Lasky.

To be in with chance of winning answer this question: **Which of the following is NOT a real owl:**
 a) Barn Owl
 b) Snowy Owl
 c) Teet Owl

Comp ends Oct 26. Email answer, (and your address and phone no.) to competitions@greenwich.gov.uk or send a postcard marked 'IMAX Comp' to Woolwich Town Hall, Wellington Street, SE18 6PW