

Waking up without the Wogan wit



Comment

Lynne Mortimer

NO longer will I Wake Up to Wogan. The man with the vocal equivalent of a warming glass of Baileys will no longer be gently stroking my aural sensors with his velvet Irish brogue as I slither reluctantly from my bed to the shower each weekday morning.

He is, of course, a National Treasure – an accolade most often granted to those who have ceased to be, or who have never been, sex kittens.

While Sir Tel may dispute this, there is no doubt in my mind that he would not have appreciated vast numbers nubile young women throwing themselves at him, offering him their bodies (check this, Ed).

But old broadcasters never disappear, they simply get shuffled off to Sunday slots. And so it is with Sir Terry Wogan whose new show will go out on St Valentine's Day, Sunday February 14.

Roses are red, violets are blue
Terry is back... er, Terry who?
Oh yes, the public can be fickle – but I, for one, will wait for you, Terry.

For decades our Tel's radio show has enjoyed the highest ratings on British radio but in a world where all good things come to an end - unlike a lot of the bad ones - the day had to come when the alarm went off and you woke up knowing it would never be Wogan again.

I am already missing his self-deprecating humour, his mischievousness and that wheeze of a laugh that occasionally renders him incapable of speech when one of his Togs (Terry's old geezers/gals or similar) makes a naughty but nice joke. Or those silent moments during the reading of a Janet and John story when he attempts to regain his composure.

He has described the J&Js as "masterpieces of double entendre, and disgusting in their own homespun way".

Wogan's gift of the gab is reinforced by a quiet intelligence that shows no sign of diminishing. And you can't help but be impressed by a 71-year-old who knows what happened yesterday and remembers the names of the people he is speaking to.

He is an inspiration all of us who feverishly complete crosswords and Sudoku in the hope of keep-ing our brains alert.

It would be good to think that it is the frequent exercise of gentle irony that has keeps him in such fine fettle.

This was nowhere more evident than in his Eurovision commentary. While most of us would have been on the second bottle of vodka and throwing things at the presenters by the time the last Balkan country had cast its top vote for a neighbour, Wogan would utter a mild: "And there's a surprise."

Some might say he is the reason the UK doesn't take the song contest seriously and, if that's the case, we have every reason to thank him.

So now my morning moves temporarily from Irish cream to Scottish malt as Johnny Walker caretake the morning show until the new year when Chris Evans moves in for good on January 11.

Wogan is a tough act to follow but if anyone can pull it off Evans can... ginger wine, anybody?

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THE JOY OF ESSEX



Martin Newell

Joys of Christmas and the rock and roll lifestyle

"It's a mighty long way down rock'n'roll" – Mott the Hoople (1973)

During the mid-1970s, Keith Christmas's dad owned an optician's shop on North Hill, opposite the present Sixth form College. Your young correspondent, at this time, was working in the restaurant next door as a part-time scullion. Whenever the outside drain overflowed I would be sent out to sluice the pavement down, while Mr Christmas Snr. stood over me growling about the mess. One day, he said to me: "I understand you sing in a pop group of some sort?" I nodded. The optician told me that he had a son, Keith, who was in the business and perhaps I might have heard of him?

I had indeed heard of him. Like so many of our first wave of popular musicians, acoustic guitar legend, Keith Christmas grew up in an England left threadbare by war. He was born at Myrtle Villa, in Wivenhoe High Street in the autumn of 1946.

He went to school at Wivenhoe Primary: "A dear old battleaxe used to keep us in check. We used to run to the railings to see the old steam trains go past from Brightlingsea – 'Brittlesea' as we used to say it. We'd play out on the Rec all day (the present King V playing field) which seemed like a national park then but looks tiny to me now.

My mother – as they all did then – stayed at home, cleaned, cooked, mended and fought battles with the greengrocer's scales." Keith attended Colchester Royal Grammar School and briefly, played drums in a local pop group. Being an excellent acoustic guitar player, however, he soon gravitated towards the folk scene. He pitched up in London, in the late 1960s. It was good timing.

Keith Christmas featured on David Bowie's debut album *A Space Oddity*: "I played acoustic guitar on his first album, as a result of being a regular guest at his club (Bowie's now-famous Arts Lab) in Beckenham."

Keith also played the first-ever Glastonbury Festival in 1970. During the early 1970s he toured with or supported The Who, The Kinks, Roxy Music, King Crimson, Ten Years After, Frank Zappa and, unbelievably, Captain Beeheart. When I badger him for stories, he is frustratingly tactful: "Lots of memories – many of which are entirely unprintable, for legal reasons. Suffice it to say that what I can remember of it all was a lot of fun!"

Refer to Keith's discography and you'll find the likes of Cat Stevens, Rod Argent and half of King Crimson guesting on



LEGEND: David Bowie, who had Keith Christmas fly out to New York to try out as electric guitarist on the 1974 *Diamond Dogs* tour. "Since I didn't know one end of an electric guitar from the other, it was doomed, he said.

his solo albums. In retrospect, it does sound extraordinary. Forty years ago, though, in the more egalitarian days of the rock underground, it wasn't an unusual thing.

Singer-songwriters such as Keith Christmas, or his contemporary, Al Stewart, might have found anyone from Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page to Rod Stewart helping out on recording sessions. He now recalls "There was a genuine family of musicians then – and given the precarious nature of the life of a musician or songwriter, it was a great comfort and support."

Keith's Bowie connection endured a while longer. "He also flew me to New York to try out for electric guitarist on his 1974 *Diamond Dogs* tour but since I didn't know one end of an electric guitar from the other, it was doomed from the start.

"I had a great time in New York, though, and met lots of fascinating people. I also did some jamming with him on a late-night session in London in the late 70s, which is supposed to be part of some legendary long-lost tape. But MP3 samples I have been sent don't ring any bells," says a bemused Keith.

It wasn't until the 1980s that disaster struck. "I got ripped

off for some vital royalties, was completely broke and could see no way out of it," he said.

"So I started labouring on building sites for £20 a day. I retrained as a teacher after some years – then I settled down in Bristol and it was there, in the 90s that I wrote and produced the blues album *Weatherman*, an instrumental CD, *Acoustica* and the solo CD *Light of the Dawn*."

Currently working on a new CD, Keith is circumspect, both about the music industry and his own career. "It has become a formulaic business whose only purpose is to churn out money-making dross.

That said, there is still some great music being written and produced. It just doesn't have the backing of the mainstream music business."

Long resident in the West Country, Keith Christmas recently visited his birthplace for the first time in years. His recollections of 1950s Wivenhoe are refreshingly at odds with those who believe that all change has been for the worse.

"I was very pleased to see all the new development down along the waterside.

"I always thought that it was a depressing area with all those rotting buildings and wasted space. It's so different from when I was growing up there.

"Then, it was a fishing and cargo port – and of course, a ship-building centre – more than a little cut off from the world. It seemed a poor place then, with some very dour inhabitants. I have no idea what they'd make of the waterfront tables and art galleries now."

Keith Christmas, something of an acoustic guitarist's acoustic guitarist, now rekindled his music career to a manageable size, which, when you study the casualty list of the era which spawned him, is quite a neat trick.



MUSICIAN: Keith Christmas