

ANTHONY JOHN CLARKE AT THE PARKGATE FOLK CLUB  
THURSDAY 28<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2013

Eddie Morris was particularly welcoming to Anthony John on his return to the Wirral and in his introduction to the audience emphasised that they were not only in for an evening to savour but that it would be far better than any flyer or advertising that brought them to the Boathouse in Parkgate had promised.

Anthony John's choice of set, performed in two halves, connected instantly with the audience and illustrated exactly why those who go to his live performances come away delighted that they've had the opportunity to sing along with songs five times louder than the person sitting next to them even though the lyrics were unknown to some before they went. They heard lyrics and melodies of songs from AJ's prolific and extensive repertoire but most of all enjoyed the company of a most engaging and likeable personality that is AJ himself. With support from his wife Julie, both from the audience and on the stage, we were made to feel at home and relaxed in their company.

AJ delivered on all counts at the Boathouse that night and his gentle jibbing humour and asides encouraged participation in his instantly recognised songs as well a number of new numbers now available on his new CD's.

In the first half 'Gloria' the story of a life on the streets and 'Seven in Ireland' and 'Broken Years' transporting us onto the streets of Northern Ireland and memories of AJ's childhood captivated the audience, now listening intently to AJ's lyrics, but joining in the chorus of both 'Gloria' and 'Broken Years' when invited.

His performance of 'Between Midnight and Blue' a love song with haunting lyrics transfixed both those dedicated and new followers alike

'As Good as it Gets' was a song that gave us food for thought and allowed us to reflect ruefully during its performance of how things are or may become.

Others have observed that within seconds an audience at an AJ gig are singing along with songs they'd never heard before but anybody could not mistake the effect a performance of his signature song 'Tuesday Night is always Karaoke' has on any audience. I can personally vouch that, even as an AJ aficionado, the lady in the seat next to me, a confessed novice at an AJ gig, whooped and sang with such enthusiasm that I was unable to sing a single word louder than her! I did advise her that it was hard to laugh out loud and sing at the same time as drinking wine but she insisted on succeeding!

The audience was left in anticipation of the second half.

The second half started with 'Pitlochry' a song that took us into Scotland and a gentle invitation to join in the chorus.

Anthony John went on to perform a number of covers and a selection of songs to be found on his '2 CD's in a Fancy Box' and his latest 'Laughing at Clowns' CD's

'My Good old Days' reflections of the days gone by, promoted nostalgia amongst us 60's and 70's children in the audience.

'Blue' reflected on songs that are written and loves that are lost while 'The High Road' is of the passing years that we cannot get back. Both performed with a true understanding of feelings that are light and shade.

'Carolina' from the 'Laughing CD' was a 'longing by letter' love song that had many in the audience with a tear in their eye and a lump in their throats. Well at least one!

'A Cold Reminder' a song of the power of the Sea brought us to the closing song on a night we hoped could continue such had been the enjoyment provided by Anthony John. We had been well and truly hooked and in the palm of his hand.

The treat of the evening was when Julie his wife finally joined him on stage to play keyboard on 'Afternoon in August' which proved to be a fitting finale to a truly enjoyable evening for those of us packed into the upper room at the Boathouse.

I bought the '2 CD's in a fancy box' CD on the night and it has been in my Car CD Player ever since. The 'Laughing with Clowns' CD has AJ's latest songs and his website enables you to sample the tracks before buying. I did buy the following day and so it has also been in and out of my Car CD Player ever since.

This night, for me as a confessed Anthony John fan, was not to be missed and if the comments of the two couples sitting next to me are to be believed AJ continues to extend his fan base by the pure quality and warmth of any live performance we are fortunate to catch.

Anthony John is of course now a well-travelled performer but will next return to the Wirral to play the Hungry Horse Folk Club on Thursday the 10<sup>th</sup> October 2013. Don't miss it.

Tell your friends that if they fancy a night out singing five times louder than the person next to them, to songs they've only just heard, then a night in the company of Anthony John Clarke is one to savour and book your tickets early.

Paul Robertson