

CONNIE ALLFREY

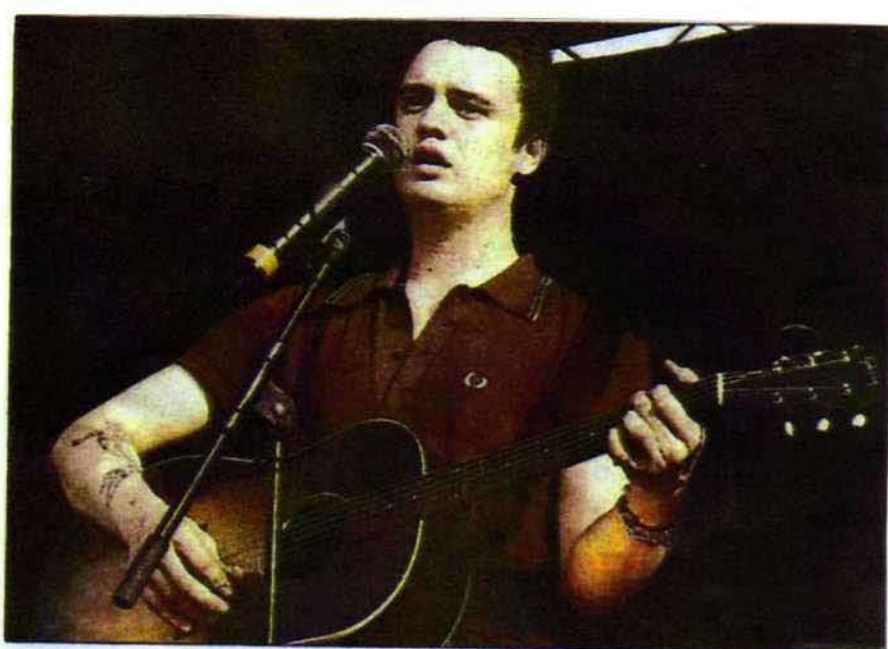


I AM ADDICTED to Eggs Florentine at the Troubadour Café in Earl's Court. But its unassuming eggs and questionably gendered clientele are actually a front for a poetry underworld. It's true that bands have played downstairs at the Troubadour — from Bob Dylan to Babushambles — but it's every other Monday that the Poetry Club meets across from the unisex loos, where I once washed hands with Orlando Bloom.

"Monday" and "poetry" may not be a classic recipe for a night out, but the mix is remarkably rewarding, not least because the woman on the door assumes that everyone under 50 is a student. I nearly kissed her.

Admittedly, the poetry set-up is not as cool as the café front suggests it might be — the lectern lighting looks set to receive Torvill and Dean, there's a single vase of Tequila Sunrise tulips behind it and you're slightly out of place if you don't have a bow-tie and a brushover. But the host introduced the event as a "global gathering", which seemed expansive. And the poets ranged from the established to first-time writers, men in those fluid arty shirts and young New York women in brown logos that you imagine must mean something profound.

The trick to a poetry evening is not to panic; it's all right to drift off a bit — everyone does, I think. Just nod knowingly like you're at a Tom Stoppard play, and let the voices send away those Monday moons. Every now and then you'll hear a phrase such as: "There's a woman in a ticket booth who lives in my left ventricle", and feel thrilled with your catch. Plus a bit of culture wholly redeems that red wine,



Not exactly poets' corner: Pete Doherty's Babushambles have played the Troubadour

which is a relief; abstention *and* poetry might be a bit much, even for a Monday.

I felt totally removed from London's hurly-burly in this boho bunker, with the street rocketing over my head, a wall and yet a world away. An accordion played in the interval, while poets caught their breath. Charmed, I decided poetry night is like Glastonbury. The poetry is there just as the music is, but the essence of both is floating somewhere in between — and I'm not talking about Kate Moss in wellies.

There's definitely an appeal to this enigmatic Live Poetry Society, whatever "live" means exactly — it's probably just a backlash against that film where the poets were all dead. It's a good evening, and if you arrive early you can catch happy hour upstairs where it seems that the price of each Woo Woo cocktail is doubled in order to be flogged as two for one. They taste great, though, and the old farming instruments stuck on the wall provide amusing vehicles for thought. Perhaps they're an ode to Heaney, who had a bit of a penchant for turnip snedders and harrow pins.

The only blight on my night was that my companion has recently grown a suspicious ginger beard (why are beards always ginger?), which he defends as "literary". The lady next to him kept prodding him to stand up, convinced he was a poet, and he has not taken the smirk off his face since.

I think I've found my big Monday night out: drifting off in a boho bunker to the sound of verse

Poetry,

28.03.07

a new

rock'n'roll



TROUBADOUR