

The Wine Bar from Hell Gig!

When he was younger and still living in Canada, Chuck Micallef played live on a circuit of coffee houses and more genteel clubs.

Nothing had really prepared him for the “wine bar from hell” gig that he landed when he settled in England for a few years though.

By now, we were firm friends, and I often did the driving to and from gigs.

This was partly because I had a company car and mainly because I didn’t drink, a considerable advantage in the chauffeuring game.

“Hey Pete, I’ve landed a gig at a wine bar in XXXX” (I won’t reveal the name or location for reasons that may become obvious!) says Chuck one day, “are you up for a spot of driving?”

“Sure Chuck, no problem”

So we arrived in the High Street of a very well to do, Middle England village, where expectations were high and property prices even higher.

We lugged the sound equipment over to the front door of said wine bar, and met the first problem. Chuck had to set up at the very top end of an L-shaped room. He was competing with tables of dinners in one section, bar drinkers in another and finally a selection of snack eaters/drinkers.

This was going to be hard work, I thought. The dinners wanted to focus on their meals and the drinkers wanted a noisy night out. Canadian country/folk singers weren’t really on the menu, for either set of revellers. That, and the fact Chuck was trying in effect to sing around a corner did not bode well.

Amazingly, it worked out quite well. Mine-hosts were genial enough, with free drinks and free food. Chuck was not over happy from a musical point of view, but he was rebooked there and then, so a few weeks later, we were back.

This time, Chuck squeezed into a different place, so he could play out to both crowds. Now beer and a determination to enjoy a good singsong do not lend themselves to Chuck’s usual repertoire. Thus, an excellent version of “The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald” went down faster than the ship in the title. Chuck was then forced into things like “Twist and Shout” and “La Bamba”, sung with a venom that would have had rattlesnakes in awe.

Every cloud has a silver lining though. Unbeknown to either of us, a BBC radio presenter was in the audience one night. He invited Chuck into BBC Pebble Mill for an interview and songs session, in much quieter surroundings with a much bigger audience.

Like the saying goes, you never know what’s around the corner, even in odd-shaped wine bars!

~Peter Crowther~

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