

'Arkansas, wind and straw'

THE SOUTHERN TENANT FOLK UNION
at the Platform Tavern, Southampton,
Thursday, June 19th, 2008

Last night a band with the intriguing moniker Southern Tenant Folk Union were playing the Platform Tavern. I rarely keep up with music save by word of mouth and a quick google of whoever happens to be playing at the Platform and similar small bars.

Last night was worth coming out for, a six piece band who list amongst their heroes The Stanley Brothers, The Louvin Brothers, Townes Van Zandt and Dillard and Clark. That's me in for starters. Also I'd heard Pat McGarvey play banjo and sing with the Coal Porters so was pretty sure this would be a bit special.

It looked like it was going to be a big crowd for the band but the three tables booked with good views of the performance were in fact for a gathering of Spanish students. No matter they seemed to enjoy the songs and McGarvey quipped on the break that the band had saved the reggae and hip hop for the second set.

The first set had really wet my whistle, that classic blend of Bible belt rural American music sung by a band consisting of a couple of Irishmen, a couple of Englishmen, a Scotsman, and an Australian. It reminded me of a recent Tom T. Hall classic One of Those Days When I Miss Lester Flatt.

Five of the six piece band huddled around a brace of vocal microphones



plugged into the house pa, the clarity of the instruments and the edge to the harmonies was under pinned beautifully by the bass fiddle behind them. The songs were self penned classics taking their inspiration from bluegrass, country and Buck Owens, Bakersfield and much more.

As the band took their break, Pete Gow the Scottish guitarist asked how it sounded. I quipped "the bass is low and the treble clear . . ." He knew it was Townes instantly and asked if I'd seen him play which I had. "I call him God," he told me.

The second half continued in the same class as the second chock full of songs strung full of diamond playing and mission hall harmonies. Pat McGarvey told how this was Ollie Talkes home coming

Top: Pete Gow gtr;
Oliver Talkes gtr;
Pat McGarvey bjo.

Above:
Eamon Flynn
mandolin;
Pete Gow harp;
Frances Vaux
fiddle (hidden Matt
Lloyd bass fiddle)

Far left: Eamon
Flynn mandolin.

and that his friends and family had come out tonight and I hope they'll come again and play here and down South again when they can.

McGarvey made special mention of the influence of Gene Clark and also the pairing of Doug Dillard and Gene Clark, on the Fantastic Adventures of Dillard and Clark album. The song that followed might have easily been an outtake from that classic album. With your eyes shut we might have been holed up in Los Angeles in the late sixties, early seventies, when Dillard and Clark were hanging out in back bars making music.

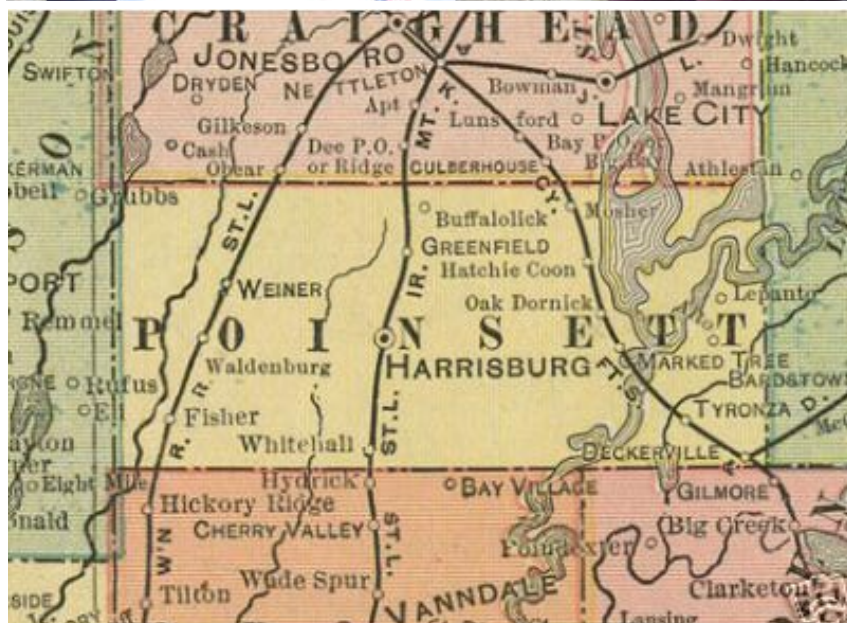
It was getting on for closing time with the audience shouting out for an encore and it was a memorable end in that Pat McGarvey led the band out into the audience "because we want to play the music acoustic, the way it should be heard, the way it used to be played . . ." Then they ripped into Uncle Pen Played The Fiddle and topped that with I'm Using My Bible As A Road Map whipping the audience up to sing along till the Platform was rent full of a mission hall gospel fever. Cracking stuff.

Ragamuffin Mike

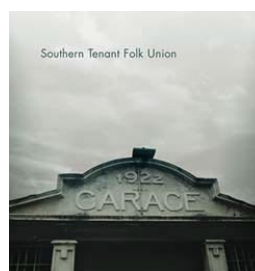
FOOTNOTE

The notion of a Southern Tenant Folk Union in 1930s Poinsett, Arkansas lead me to find this fascinating slice of history which I wouldn't have found without the storytelling songwriters who continue to beat the dry as dust intellectual johnnies into a cocked hat:

<http://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=35>



Top: Matt Lloyd bass fiddle; Eamon Flynn mandolin; Frances Vaux fiddle.



Above: map of Poinsett, Arkansas the area where the 1930s Southern Tenant Folk Union began.

Left: Albums one and two of the Southern Tenant Union.

**Revivals, Rituals
& Union Songs**

Far Left: Cracking encores at the Platform Tavern.

Southern Tenant Folk Union