



Devotion to the history of *New Statesman*, fine; devotion to a jazz band, great. But devotion to Jesus? Well, frankly, Laurie Taylor could have more fun spending nine hours at a Dutch airport

● **At least Glastonbury got me out of the house last Friday.** I was so bored listening to stories about how Adrian walked into the shit pit while he was meditating and how Sarah had too many mushrooms and thought she was having a mutant baby and how Louise met one of the Oasis roadies and had transcendental sex on top of the speaker stack that I thought I'd drain a bottle of Safeway's excellent new Crozes Hermitage and search out a gig that would knock anything on the six stages at Glastonbury into a cocked hat.

I might never have found it without the *New Statesman*. Call me sentimental but whenever I walk to the West End I always make a point of strolling in an eastward direction so that I come out in Holborn, and turn down Great Turnstile, where the old *New Statesman* offices used to be before everyone packed up and set off for Perseverance Works. It's still quite a thrill to imagine the times when one could have strolled in and found a fresh-faced Tony Blair (not yet an MP) busily putting the final touches to one of his regular pieces on the law and civil liberties.

I must have stood there, a veritable prisoner of nostalgia for the best part of 30 minutes, before I moved on and found myself caught up in a stream of animated people, which only finally came to rest outside Conway Hall in Red Lion Square. There seemed nothing else to do but pay the £10 requested at the door and follow my new friends inside to find out what was causing all the excitement. There up on the stage under the familiar legend, "TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE", was the magnificent sight of a 13-piece big band tuning up for some heavy action. It was, though, no ordinary band. A simple leaflet told me that this was an evening to mark the 30th anniversary of the arrival in this country from South Africa of the legendary Blue Notes jazz group. Three of the key members of that group, pianist and leader, Chris McGregor, saxophonist Dudu Pukwana and bassist Johnny

Dyani were now dead, but up on stage in the revival band were such outstanding living talents as Harry Beckett on trumpet, trombonist Winston Rollins, and saxophonist Steve Williamson.

It was a sensational set. Mums and dads and kids of all sizes jumped up and down and shouted and cheered for more, as the band revelled in getting together once again. Chris McGregor and Dudu Pukwana and Johnny Dyani couldn't have asked for more. They'd have particularly enjoyed hearing the splendidly extrovert trumpeter Dave de Fries gently apologising for the inappropriately poignant nature of their fifth number. Its title was "Mayibuye" and it was intended as a tribute to the quiet resolution of one man: Nelson Mandela. Even the little kids noticed the special expression on their parents' faces and stood stock still until the last sad note.

Nobody looked more delighted to be involved with the whole affair than the fine young baritone player, Julian Nicholas, a student at York during my time there and who I used to follow around the place from one sad jazz haunt to another. When the band finally roared to a massive climax with Pinise Saul belting out the lyrics to "Sangena", I raced like a groupie to the side of the stage, grabbed at his trouser leg, and offered him a drink. He couldn't have been kinder. Not only did he let me carry his huge baritone sax case around the Val Wilmer photographic exhibition, but happily confessed that he'd only been recruited a few days earlier. Someone had rung and asked if he could play baritone. "Yes," he'd said immediately, even though he'd been faithful to alto and tenor for years. There were just two days of rehearsal and then down to Conway Hall for their triumphant evening.

● **Some of the riffs were still echoing in my head when I set off for Holland on Tuesday morning to address a group of American healthcare professionals who were apparently interested in promoting some variant of the Clinton reforms.** Their title, Adventist Healthcare, certainly suggested a new beginning and the man from Texas I spoke to on the phone had insisted that his group regarded healthcare as a responsibility that transcended the profit motive. But when I arrived at the Grand Hotel Huis Ter Duin in Noordwijk Aan Zee, I was met by an organiser who insisted on shaking my hand vigorously while he explained that it would be difficult to give me a precise time for my Wednesday morning talk because of the indeterminate period that the conference would be giving to "devotion".

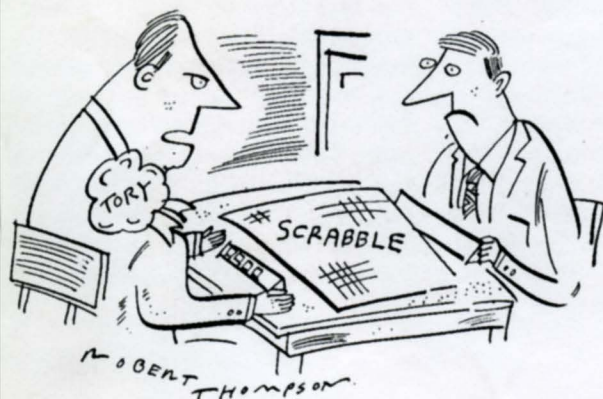
It wasn't, though, until I arrived for my seminar next morning and dutifully shook a modest proportion of the 50 or 60 hands extended to me that I realised I'd

wandered into a religious cult. I not only had to sit there while everyone around me cheerfully sang "What a friend We have in Jesus", but was also treated to a half-hour disquisition on the vexed question of whether the commandment that forbade the coveting of one's neighbour's wife also forbade the coveting by a woman of one's neighbour's husband. It seems that it did, although the speaker modestly refrained from extending the analysis to wives who coveted their neighbour's wives.

Not that this group of Seventh Day Adventists was anything but friendly. Adventists may not watch movies or television or ingest alcohol, caffeine or nicotine, but when I was finally ushered to the lectern they listened attentively and seemed completely able to share my horror at the news that although healthcare in America may be consuming 19 per cent of the country's GDP by the year 2000, nearly 40 million people—one-third of them children—would still be left without any cover at all.

I could have stayed on after my talk for another day by the slightly dreary Dutch seaside, but I became increasingly paranoid about the prospect of being discovered in a state of extreme sinfulness by a marauding Adventist. It had already been a close thing. On the night before my talk, I'd actually lain in bed in my room, with a pot of coffee at my elbow, a subtitled *Frasier* on the TV, a slim Henry Waterman in one hand and a bottle of Carlsberg in the other. Even in a life of relative licentiousness (you should have been me with my neighbour's wife back in the late 1960s), I've never knowingly managed to violate four fundamental religious precepts at any one single moment.

With an entire day left to fill, there was little else to do but risk more serious sin in Amsterdam or spend the best part of nine hours in Schiphol airport. I chose the airport and frankly it's a long time since I had such a fun-packed day. My morning began with a quick visit to the Casino and then with the 200 guilders won at blackjack bulging in my pocket it was straight down to the Sun Centre for 20 minutes under their admirable tanning machines followed by a quick "hydro-jet massage for the entire body", in which one is required to lie on a heated waterbed and direct internal jets to any part of the body that needs to be more thoroughly massaged than any other. Lunch was taken at Relais de l'Europe because of its special "shellfish festival", and then to complete the afternoon I popped into the Golfcentre Schiphol for a vigorous 18 holes on the simulator and spent a happy cultural hour wandering around the art gallery, which was showing some fascinating silk screen prints. All in all, a perfect trouble-free holiday. How to get there: Catch any plane to Amsterdam and then get off. ☐



"Loyalty? Rubbish!  
There's no such word."