



## Glastonbury Diary

# Best of fun

Couldn't make it? Couldn't face it? Can't remember it? Stewart Lee, self-proclaimed the UK's third funniest stand-up, brings you the sights, the sounds and, more pertinently, the smells...



**TUESDAY NIGHT.** I've been home a day. If I run my hands over my red shoulders, hundreds of tiny sun-blisters burst and moisten my grubby fingers. I lick them clean. It's a hot night, the Bonanza off-limits on Balham High Road is closed, and my weeping skin makes for a mildly refreshing

drink. Four days in a field has taught me to be inventive. They should move SAS training courses from the Brecon Beacons to the Glastonbury Festival. Surviving Glastonbury is a greater test of endurance...

**WE ENTER THE** festival at 8am on Friday morning—me, Rich Herring and Kevin Eldon from off of TV's *Fist Of Fun*, and my friend Simon from Balham—and then drive through to the cabaret performers' camping field to pitch up. All the old faces are there, presided over by South London's King Of Comedy, Malcolm Hardee, a natural clown who in any decent country would be a national institution. He has one great Glastonbury joke, which he repeats to everyone he meets: "I remember when this was all fields."

Cabaret is a loose term. The old hippies that run the cabaret tent wear their ignorance of current mainstream/alternative comedy trends as a perverse badge of honour, and mix and match great comedy acts like Harry Hill or Dylan Moran with useless Euro-circus shite like The Dustbins, who no one likes and who ruin any sense of momentum that has been established. There's a place for Euro-circus shite here, but not on the same stage as anything genuinely entertaining. Rich and I weren't supposed to be on—we asked for too much money and a decent slot—but someone dropped out of a 1.30am Sunday show at the last minute, so we were in, unlisted and unknown. Great. I love Glastonbury.

After I've made my anal list of who to see and when, I drag a crowd of friends off to see Japanese noiseniks The Boredoms at the *NME* stage. They are amazing, as usual—double drumming, weird oriental chord progressions, prog-rock time changes, chanting, kung-fu leaping, loads of brilliant shouting and a trumpet. The Boredoms provoke astonishment and ridicule in equal measures, as all great art music. Even Rich, who only likes Ice-T and Paul Simon, is impressed. The Boredoms' tiny, screaming female drummer is the most beautiful human being seen so far at Glastonbury.

While walking away from the stage, I bump into an old acquaintance, Crazy Iain of West Norwood. Iain, who once attacked my friend's brother with a spoon, is an example of "care in the community". He drives an unlicensed cab around South London in his green woolly hat and sleeps in car parks.

"Glastonbury is a government mind-experiment," he shouts. "Michael Eavis is in the pay of the Tories to show them how, as a dairy farmer, he understands the best way to control huge herds of people for minimal cost."

"Yeah, yeah..." I say dismissively.

"You'll see," says Iain, waving a stick.

Walking away from Iain, we all end up in the Green Field, which is like a giant local crafts fair, but instead of being run by nice old C Of E ladies, it is run by mutant cyber-warriors from the post-nuclear apocalypse future and their skinny, bra-less wives. We get chatting with a blacksmith who is making swords and mediaeval-style helmets. He seems a pleasant enough bloke, except for indignant fury at the DSS's inability to find him any regular blacksmith's work. I think about explaining that these days iron's role as a staple ingredient of many household and industrial items has been usurped by plastics and other more modern materials, and that no one really needs knights'

"I remember when this was all fields"

helmets any more, and that hand-to-hand combat has all but died out in 20th-century Britain. But why be rude? It's Glastonbury.

**I CAN'T MAKE** Chuck Prophet's reconstructed country-blues sound attractive to my friends, so I head over to the Acoustic Tent on my own. All cheekbones and quicksilver licks, Chuck's drop-dead country cool is only spoiled by the fact that one of his trouser legs is slightly turned up in his cowboy boot heel. Nevertheless, he and accordionist Stephanie Finch enter my Top Three of Glastonbury sex creatures, just after the Boredoms woman.

Back at the main stage, I find myself actually enjoying Sinéad O'Connor. Next are childhood faves Soul Asylum, but these ex-Hüsker Dü protégés have completely lost the plot. It's Bon Jovi with bad hair. I've got tickets to see them in London on Monday, too. Disappointed, we head off after 20 minutes to check out Sleeper.

Legend has all the old punk bands seeing the Sex Pistols and thinking: "I could do that.

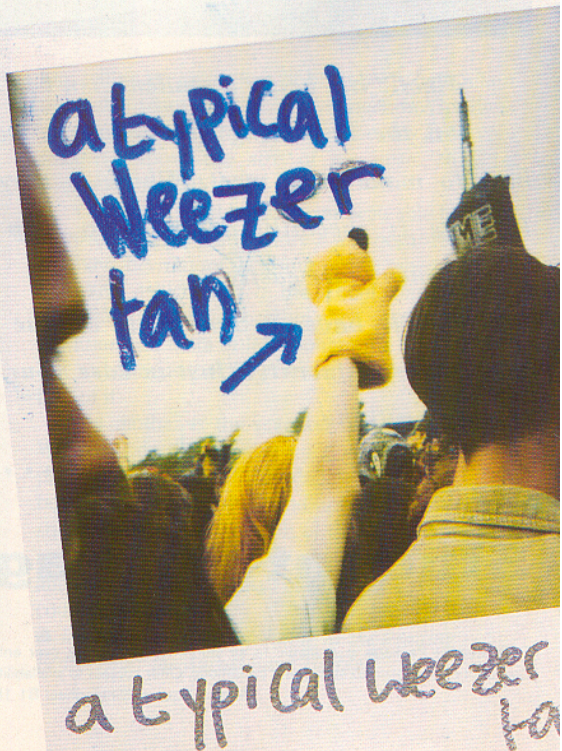
And I will." Watching Sleeper, you think: I could do that, but why would I want to? They're a shambles, but all the leaping children at the front who don't know any better love it and we just feel old.

Weezer are a mess the next day, too, although a small, orange glove-puppet in front of me clearly thinks they were brilliant.

Let down by music, we go to the nutters' area to find the "real" festival. In the Green Field some ten people are watching a man in a dress with a TV aerial strapped to his head read idiot savant poetry over the sound of musical children's toys. A drunk stands up and shouts: "This is shit! Can't you see. You're all just sitting there listening to it and it's shit!"

Where was this insightful visionary when we needed him, down at the front at Sleeper?

**AS DARKNESS** falls, I hear some familiar Merseybeat jangles drifting across the fields. It appears the Bootleg Beatles have been moved from Sunday afternoon to headlining Friday night. Perhaps the Cabaret tent organisers



By Stewart Lee



a giant bald  
Man's  
face



a giant "Frankenstein"



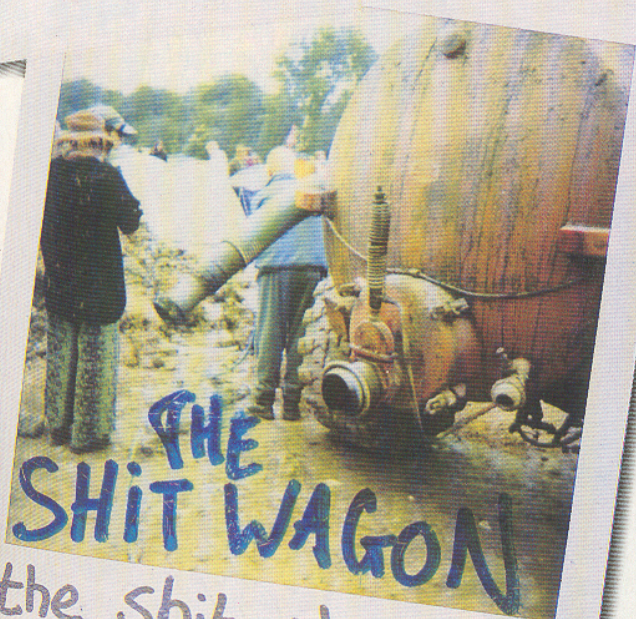
MAD  
ous drugs



Performers' toilets  
Saturday



a typical Glasto-van



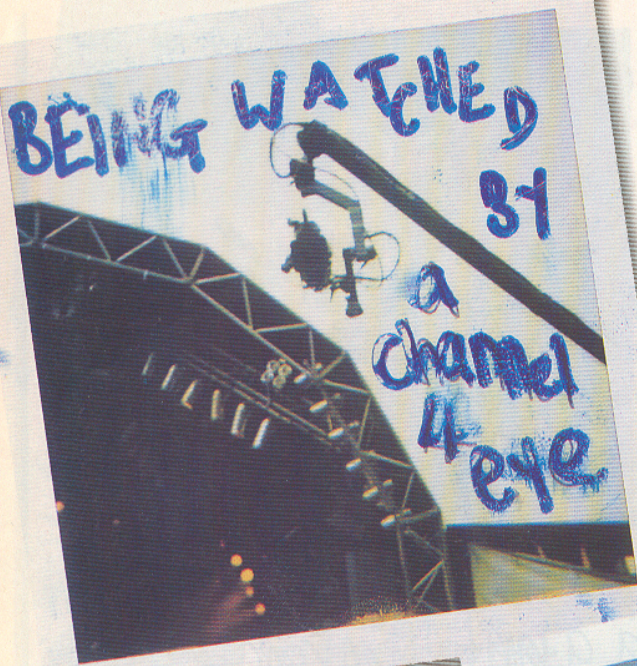
THE  
SHIT WAGON  
the shit-wagon



Me enjoying the  
boredoms

Rich, bored  
by the  
boredoms





see two girls dancing together in perfect time in the counter window of their falafel van. They seem so innocent and happy compared with the raw Satanism of The Prodigy that I stand and watch them for about a quarter of an hour. They enter my Glasto Sexy People chart at Number Four.

Saturday is a grey-skied respite. I try to rouse everyone I know to go see Jeff Buckley. The pathways are heaving. Someone says that 20,000 have breached the perimeter wall. In the darkness, such an excess of people becomes scary, and in slippery wet weather it would be potentially lethal. They ought to secure the fence, not out of breadhead greed, just out of safety. How hard can it be? The East Germans managed it for 40-odd

years; Eavis only has to manage a week. It might help if people weren't taking £20 bungs for a leg-up. I remember what crazy Iain said: "We're just livestock, maaan. Nobody cares."

We navigate the crowds by following in the path of a mini-tanker truck full of stinking human excrement, and a drunk crusty family who pretend their dirty baby is ill. Both seem to clear the way. Buckley steps out on to the main stage and starts howling. He is beautiful, charming and talented, and to make matters worse he is rumoured to be dating Courtney Love, the world's fourth most gorgeous woman. Men are jealous. Girls swoon. Helicopters buzz over during the quiet bits, and it reminds me of the rotor noise interrupting The Doors at the start of *Apocalypse Now*.

Under a giant video screen image of a shrill ball man (The Boo Radleys are on) I meet my friend Andy. He says he has seen a message for me on the NME field notice board. I hurry off. Sure enough: "Stu Lee: where are you? Meet 12pm (Sun) Meeting Place. Trim. Suz." I don't know Trim or Suz. Perhaps they are bisexual half sisters I never knew I had. I day-dream of incestuous three-way festival drug-sex, in some soil, and wait for Urge Overkill.

**IT'S A BRILLIANT** half-hour from the immaculately attired rock ironists who Steve Albini once said would end their days "sucking cocks behind the bus station for loose change". Someone has sabotaged their equipment and the drummer goes off in a huff providing a much-needed bit of drama to an all-too-good-natured festival. Perhaps it was Steve Albini. They have a second go at the single and even play some great old stuff. The Channel 4 camera swoops down over our heads. I hold my Polaroid up to



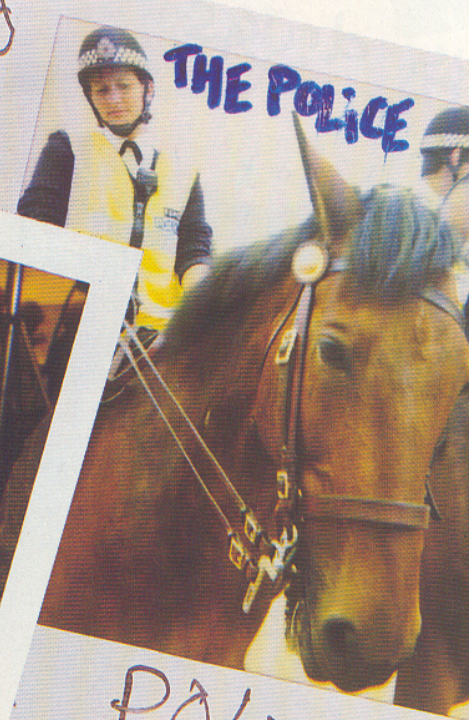
an American lad



sleeping man "Simple Minds" to



Urban Warrior



POLICE



the lens, snap it, and present the photo for its inspection. The camera scans in and out from the image, like an Industrial Light And Magic dinosaur bewildered by its own reflection. "UO + UK = OK," the band conclude.

I see Crazy Iain again at the back of the field. He's naturally suspicious of the cameras. "Loads of booze, a ready availability of soft drugs and lots of loud music and bright lights and we're like pigs in shit, look at us," he rambles. "Too dazed to realise how terrible the conditions we're being kept in really are. It's only Saturday, for Christ's sake, and already the toilets are backing up."

"So what?" I say. "What are you saying?"

"Imagine, imagine, Stu," whispers Iain, "imagine this on a national scale. The emasculation of a generation. Then they could do what they want."

Iain bums a fag and runs off, waving a branch.

Sadly, we miss PJ Harvey as we get our breath back for Orbital. They start off sounding like a techno version of Philip Glass's 'Koyaanisqatsi' accompanied by giant, speeded-up visuals stolen from the film of the same name, but just as I'm thinking: Great, we wait 20 years to have the avant garde bounced back at us as stadium-sized mass entertainment, they somehow come into their own. Orbital are the undisputed kings of the main stage.

The entire acoustic field is closed off for Portishead, which means not only do we miss them, we also miss the irresponsible crack-faced teen-idol that is Evan Dando being booed off, an event I would have paid £65 for alone. So it's Tricky, then, over at the Jazz Stage, and me and Simon end up giving shoulder seating to a small punky girl whose size belies the amount of damage her thighs can do to sunburned shoulders. Tricky is ace! The last drumbeat of 'Ponderosa' brings a gasp of delight from the crowd, and I pogo like a Weezer fan to 'Black Steel'. The beautiful feeling we're left with is only spoilt by running into the Fire Eaters' and Stiltwalkers' Celebratory Parade, which reminds you just how ugly life can be.

As if this isn't enough, back at the Cabaret Stage some twat called Ultravision, familiar from spoiling a thousand Megadogs, is juggling luminous things in the dark in a luminous suit and drawing astonished whoops from an audience of stoned losers. Luckily, compere Malcolm Hardee meets the challenge. He returns to the stage in darkness, bare-ass-buck-nekkid, with his cock, bum, balls and nipples painted different luminous colours. Malcolm jigs half-heartedly in front of the furious Ultravision die-hards and then leaves. Satire is not dead.

Harry Hill and Alan Parker Urban Warrior, their comedy work done, try to leave in the early hours of the morning. Harry's car gets caught in a crowd. Drunks try to roll it over and someone kicks in their headlights. If only they had been killed, then I would be the best stand-up in the country.

**ARRIVING AT THE NME stage** early Sunday, I see polite and efficient New Zealand rockers The Mutton Birds do their best song, 'Dominion Road', and then I hurry off for my mysterious meeting. I wait half an hour. Not a sausage, although someone gives me a strawberry. No three-way action today then, I guess. But I do get to see Morphine, who are brilliant, and have come a long way since they were called Treat Her Right, who I've got the album of and you never even knew existed before I just said they did then.

At the main stage an American lady friend of Simon's gives me two blue "herbal Es" during the dreary Bootleg Beatles (relax Mum, they're legal), and the next thing I know, somehow she's walked us all into the music backstage area. Loads of

industry people are stooging around getting drunk, instead of going off to see bands. No change there, then. I see Crazy Iain through the mesh that separates the elite from the stinking hordes. He beckons.

"How are you, maaan?"

"I'm feeling mellow," I reply. "I've had two herbal Es."

"Don't!" he shouts. "That's what he wants! So you won't notice. We're like cattle. Cattle, I tell you!"

I watch Drugstore out front and fall in love with that crazy old wrinkly wine-drinking chain-smoking Brazilian elf-granny that fronts them. They swallow their pride and play The Archies' 'Sugar Sugar' and the crowd love it. Elf-granny is charmingly insane and enters the sex chart, leaping up and down on other people's guitars.

After they've finished, I walk up to the top of the Green Field and think about what Crazy Iain said. People stretch out beneath me—like livestock, tightly packed—and occasional gusts of wind blow

### Three Glastonbury Facts!

- Enough human excrement is produced over the three days of the festival proper to enable a fist-sized clump of it to be stuffed into the mouth of Simple Minds' Jim Kerr, on the hour, every hour, for the next 200 years.
- Enough scrumpy cider is consumed over the three days of the festival to keep The Beautiful South's Paul Heaton drunk for almost one week.
- During the festival, farmer Michael Eavis's cows are moved to a special secret place. They do exist, though. He is a farmer. Really. Not just a promoter. You can see a picture of the cows if you want. Honest.

the smell of excrement skyward. They seem happy enough—drunk, drugged or distracted—but how long could this go on before they demanded proper sanitation? I dunno. The cows never complain.

**ON MY WAY** back to the NME stage, I spy a drunk man asleep where he fell sporting a tiny, one-colour Simple Minds tattoo on his forearm. This is the only evidence I see all weekend that anyone is even the slightest bit interested in their presence.

Meanwhile, The Verve are on at the NME stage. I wrongfully had them pinned as part of the new wave of boring English yobbo groups, but they're grrrrreat. Their wah-wah heavy, bluesy psychedelia combined with the hot sun in my face makes me feel like I'm attending the 1972 Bickersfield Blues, Jazz, Jazz-Blues Festival. Or something.

Before Menswear come on, John Peel plays 'Children Of The Sun' by The Misunderstood, which steals their thunder a bit for me, so I wander off and leave them, their ties flapping uselessly in the wind. Me and Simon drink Somerset cider and end up in the midst of a crowd of Classic Rock Trainspotters for Page And Plant. I know I should like them, but I just can't; and, anyway, I've had an idea. I write a note asking John Peel, who I know



a typical Glastonbury news piece photo

liked *Fist Of Fun*, if he'll mention from the stage that me and Rich are on tonight, not listed, and then maybe we'll get some fans along to ease the 1.30am nightmare slot. "He won't read this out," says the Security Man I hand it to.

"Please try," I say. He nods, puts the paper in his pocket and 20 minutes later is still just standing there. I take it back, jump the fence, and walk up a gangway to a security man six feet from the DJ box.

"Can you give this to John Peel."

"He won't read it out."

I have to stand and stare the guy out until he turns and hands it in. John Peel reads it out. There's a weak cheer.

I try to watch Veruca Salt but the sun and the cider has got to me, and they are to be my last band of the festival as I go to get my head together for our show. At the gate of the cabaret performers' area, Crazy Iain is waiting for me.

"Look!" he says. It's a leather briefcase, monogrammed "ME", and clicking it open he shows me pages of charts and documents, graphs of the profit yield of one festival-goer plotted against the profit yield of one cow. Underneath them are maps of all of the UK, each area marked with sites and the most basic latrines possible, and a signed photo of John Major.

"Do you see what they're doing?" he says.

I don't have the time to even think about what he's implying and head off to rehearse some mindless popular entertainment.

1.30am comes and goes. We're OK. Some drunk men shout, but I can't hear them properly. There's only one act that can storm a post-midnight cabaret stoner crowd, and it's Woody Bob Muddy's Record Graveyard, an inspired Dadaist conceit of democratically smashed vinyl and flying soft toys, and luckily he's on next. The festival ends for me with a sense of anti-climax.

**THE NEXT DAY** it takes four hours to get off the site, and six more to get home. I'm too late, thankfully, to see Soul Asylum at Shepherds Bush Empire. Just outside the perimeter fence we see Crazy Iain being bundled into a police van. Two officers take his briefcase and empty the contents into a burning oil drum.

Michael Eavis has five more Glastonburys planned before the end of the millennium. Never trust anyone over 30.

VOX