

An Evening With Paul Gambaccini

By *Alexander Baron* - Oct 31, 2015



Paul Gambaccini

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Paul Gambaccini may be a DJ, radio presenter and noted musicologist, but when he turned up at the Law Society Hall in London's Chancery Lane on Thursday night, the last thing on his mind was entertainment. With him on the stage was Christopher Jefferies, and sitting between them was Owen Bowcott, Legal Affairs Correspondent of the *Guardian* newspaper.

If the name Chris Jefferies is not familiar to you, he was in the news five years ago for all the wrong reasons. The retired teacher owns several properties in the Bristol area, and when one of his tenants was found murdered, he was an obvious suspect; families, friends and acquaintances along with any enemies of the victim always are. It was not unreasonable that he was arrested, but for reasons that need not concern us here he was subjected to considerable vilification by the tabloids which would clearly have prejudiced his trial had he been charged.

After he was released on police bail, another suspect came to light. Vincent Tabak would eventually be convicted of the murder of Joanna Yeates, and there is no uncertainty about his guilt.

While Mr Jefferies was accused of a real crime, Paul Gambaccini was accused of an entirely imaginary one, and although it was a far less serious allegation, it would still have destroyed his life had it stuck. The word that best describes Gambaccini is magnanimous, because he says he does not and clearly does not bear any ill-will toward his accuser. That being said, both men are understandably less inclined to be so charitable to their official persecutors.

Although they come from different worlds, the two men have many things in common; both are scholars – Gambaccini read Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Oxford – neither had ever before experienced the business end of policing; and both have exhibited grace under pressure. Gambaccini was one of the celebrities who saw his name dragged through the mud in the witch-hunts (plural) that followed the allegations against the late Jimmy Savile.

The subject of the meeting was *How our justice system can wreck lives*, and it was organised by the London Criminal Courts Solicitors' Association. Held in the Common Room with around a hundred in the audience – including your intrepid correspondent – it was concerned primarily with the police abuse of continually rebailing suspects, however weak the case against them. It was a question and answer format, Bowcott asking the questions, with questions from the audience at the end.

Gambaccini understands how an accusation against him might have arisen. He was the first public person to speak out against Jimmy Savile even before the seriously flawed documentary *The Other Side Of Jimmy Savile* was broadcast.

Gambaccini's photograph was subsequently juxtaposed against that of Savile on the front pages of the tabloids on two separate days. When the Metropolitan Police opened a dedicated website and phone line inviting members of the public to accuse celebrities telling them "You will be believed", he felt there was an even money chance someone

would accuse him. When he was arrested, bearing in mind that he had never met the two people cited as accusers, he calculated the chances of his serving hard time were 7%, a figure he found “upsetting but not traumatising”.

His arrest came two years to the day before this meeting, October 29, 2013 – an unhappy coincidence. Chris Jefferies was kept on police bail long after the arrest of Vincent Tabak; likewise Gambaccini was bailed and rebailed seemingly endlessly.

If *Operation Yewtree* had been a football team, he said, it would have been relegated. A better analogy is if it had been a dog, it would have been put down.

Paul Gambaccini had been accused of an act of sexual impropriety by an anonymous individual, a man, and apart from this act being of a homosexual nature, we know nothing of it. Although he is an out homosexual, unlike the odious **Peter Tatchell**, Gambaccini has never been one of these in-your-face *gays*, and at the time of his arrest I wondered if he had been accused by a woman or two. That was not the case, but the reality was just as ludicrous, because like Elton John (who married Renate Blauel in 1984), Gambaccini has not been homosexual all his life, and at the time he was supposed to have been doing unspeakable things to underage boys, he had a girlfriend. Now this is where it gets really sordid, realising they’d been played, had, or had simply slipped up, the police tried to corroborate this claim by finding (ie pressurising) another individual into backing up the first accuser. As Gambaccini said, now if they can find two people to make basically the same allegation, that is considered to show a pattern.

He was also clearly angry at the scandalous way the police have gone about trying to **provoke allegations against Cliff Richard**, though it is noticeable that not everyone he knew showed such loyalty to him. In every single celebrity case, he said, the police had leaked the name of the arrested person either shortly before or shortly after, as they had done with him, in particular his brother, who lives in New York, was approached by the American representative of the *Daily Mirror* before the story broke.

In reply to a question, Gambaccini said one way to tackle this problem would be to recruit police officers from university, in effect an officer class. Jefferies agreed. They would both

like to see suspects given anonymity before being charged.



Christopher Jefferies

Both men also agreed that the further up the tree you go, the dumber the police get; the younger ones are interested in justice; the senior ones are interested in results. This was an incredibly naïve thing for them to say, especially in view of what they said about their names and the names of other suspects being leaked. As someone who has had considerable experience of the evil machinations of junior officers, I can tell them they could not be more wrong. And occasionally the police themselves **will admit this candidly**.

Gambaccini wants a 28 day limit on bail; in connection with the historical sexual abuse witch-hunts he said the police had learned from their mistakes, to the detriment of those accused, which accounts for their behaviour regarding the Cliff Richard allegations.

Another issue here was the reduction of Legal Aid under the current programme of austerity, ie austerity for those at the bottom of the food chain: the unemployed, **the unemployable**, and the working poor. There was no right to compensation for those falsely accused, and Gambaccini had resigned himself to the loss of around £200,000 of income, though hopefully **his latest book** will become a bestseller, and there will be invitations to speak on this and related subjects that pay well. Chris Jefferies had received some compensation, but purely for the police ransacking of two of his flats. On the other hand, he did take the tabloids to the cleaners with his no-win, no-fee libel actions, so he is not

out of pocket, but other victims of especially *Operation Yewtree* cannot make the same claim.

As their presentation came to a close, Gambaccini made what may turn out to be a prophecy; after asking the audience if we knew who **Harry Styles** is – which resulted in most of us raising our hands – he said that tonight there will be maybe three hundred girls going to sleep dreaming about Harry Styles. Thirty years from now, two or three of those dreams may have morphed into something more sinister.

When the floor was opened for questions, I was the first to jump in, raising the issue of statutes of limitations. I also pointed out that the September issue of *Inside Time* contained no fewer than **three advertisements** by law firms trawling for victims, and suggested that legal professionals begin by cleaning out their own Augean stables. You might guess this didn't go down too well. As an American, Gambaccini is familiar with statutes of limitations, and has some idea of **the reasons for them**.

One final point, and not an insignificant one, as he pointed out, some police officers had been clocking up a fair number of air miles in their pursuit of what, phantoms? Some had been to New York and California; in another case they had travelled even further afield.

Gambaccini has also testified to the Home Affairs Select Committee during which he made out most of the arguments he presented here.

One point that should be made, although he has been quick to denounce Jimmy Savile, one has to wonder how much of the folklore about the late DJ he actually believes. Although the public perception and the propaganda spewed out by both the police and the CPS is that Savile was a prolific serial paedophile, a critical examination of **the actual evidence against him** – such as it is – is tenuous in the extreme, and indeed many of the more outrageous allegations discredit themselves.

Although Gambaccini is now back at work, Christopher Jefferies is not sitting back and enjoying his retirement either; this was not the first such meeting he has attended, nor will it be the last. Admirable though the attitudes of both men may be, clearly we need a

statute of limitations to stop the sort of madness to which Gambaccini was subjected, we need to reign in those law firms that are plundering the public purse with these ludicrous historical abuse claims, indeed some would say we need to dismantle the entire abuse industry, including the NSPCC. And heads must roll. Don't hold your breath waiting for any of that to happen.

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