

Hello and a happy Easter to you all,

I hope you're managing to get by during this difficult time.

I'm sure that you must be missing going to concerts and we all hope that one day things will go back to normal but I don't think they'll be quite like this one though and perhaps more's the pity:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CbSAo0xPCI&list=RDDP1J4pObRIE&index=21>

A couple of years ago, Welsh rugby was a little different from today. In the pre-Ospreys era, clubs such as Neath (the Blacks), Swansea (the Whites), Aberafon (the Wizards) and Lanelli (Scarlets) etc. were in their prime. The commercial manager of Swansea was American and he wanted to have more "pazzaz" on match days in St. Helen's - very much like the baseball games in the USA. It was a great idea and realising that music was an important ingredient in furthering his plan, he booked a band to play on the pitch before the game and to play in the stand at half time and whenever Swansea scored. I was lucky enough to be in that band and we had a lot of fun. However, I'll never forget standing in the 'tunnel' as the teams ran out onto the pitch. They were very obviously 'psyched up' and you could sense and see they were going out there to win. Now these were big, powerful sportsmen at the peak of their fitness and standing there tootling away as they ran past, put me in awe (tinged, I'm not afraid to say, with more than just a little fear) of these gladiators. If I was a rugby player lying on the pitch - limbs akimbo and holding the ball whilst these men were pounding towards me intent on wrestling and grappling it from my grasp - I'd say "Gentlemen, please be my guest and do have the ball". I'd hand it over and get out of their way - a bit sharpish!

Staying with sport and here comes the link with Beethoven. One of the Gower Festival's committee members - John Sims is keen cricket follower and he certainly thinks it a shame that the 'snick' of leather against willow, the ripple of polite applause from the 'Balconeurs' and the gentlemanly banter betwixt deckchair seated fans, will be missing from St. Helen's this year. I'm sure John would agree that there must be few ordeals more terrifying than facing a fast bowler hurling a rock-hard object at you from less than 20 metres and at a speed of ninety-plus miles an hour. At the receiving end, the batsman has precious little time during the bowler's run

up to say his prayers whilst steeling himself for a possible injury, or for being bowled out, or for being made to look ridiculous, or for lashing out and hopefully getting a few runs. From the moment the ball leaves the bowler's hand, the batsman has a fraction of a second to decide what to do.

The 1981 series between England and Australia was a brutal encounter between two old rivals. England lost one Test and looked to be heading for a thrashing when Mike Brearley was appointed captain and everything changed. He devised a strategy for dealing with murderous fast bowling and it was this: whilst the bowler was taking his position, Brearley would gather his thoughts and steel himself by humming the opening cello solo of Beethoven's first Razumovsky Quartet, opus 59. Why this particular phrase he never explained but it worked for the England captain and it could work for you - try it!!.

The quartets, commissioned by the Russian ambassador in Vienna, Count Andreas Razumovsky are Beethoven's 6th, 7th and 8th quartets and each of them has a buried Russian tune. They were written when dear old Ludwig seemed to have resolved something in his troubled life. He no longer hid his deafness. "Let the world know", he wrote, "what a musician must suffer for his art". Asked by a friend what he was trying to convey in these works he is supposed to have said, 'Oh, they are not for you but for a future age.' Now there's food for thought - '*ars longa, vita brevis*'

There are interesting links with the nobility and music - always have been. One person who enjoyed exploiting such for his and our amusement was W.S. Gilbert (of G&S fame). In London in 1871 an audience gathered in the newly-finished Royal Albert Hall to attend the first-ever concert to be performed there. This occurred a month BEFORE the official opening of this famous Victorian edifice, as a special thank-you for the workers who constructed the building. The orchestra that played that concert was famous in its day - though now totally forgotten. It was called 'The Wandering Minstrels' and its players were all British aristocrats - Lords, Right Honourables and senior military etc. - who played exclusively for charity events. One strict rule of membership was that only AMATEUR musicians were allowed. If you earned even one penny as a professional, you were out. That happened to one member, the composer Frederick Clay, who had to leave 'The Wandering Minstrels' when music he wrote for the stage started to pull in a few bob. Clay occasionally even collaborated with W.S. Gilbert, who himself sometimes performed as a guest with The Wandering

Minstrels and yes, it's likely that the Gilbert & Sullivan song *A Wandering Minstrel I* from *The Mikado* was an in-joke reference to the aristocratic orchestra, as it's sung by Nanki-Poo, who was (after all), a nobleman in disguise.

H.M.S. Pinafore aka 'The Lass That Loved a Sailor', the comic opera in two acts by G&S opened in London, in May 1878. Gilbert imbued the plot with mirth and silliness and in the song *When I was a lad I served a term*, he describes The Rt. Hon. Sir Joseph Porter, KCB. (First Lord of the Admiralty) and his meteoric rise to fame and fortune. He became the "ruler of the Queen's Navy" having first "successfully cleaned windows, swept floors, served writs, copied letters, worn clean collars and a brand-new suit, participated in a junior partnership and worked in Parliament—always voting his party's call without thinking for himself at all". Sir Joseph's career mirrored that of W. H. Smith, who rose up from a middle class background and became the actual First Lord of the Admiralty about the time that *H.M.S. Pinafore* debuted. W. H. Smith began working as a newspaper boy and eventually set up the chain of shops that bear his name and are still on the high streets of Britain to this day. His controversial rise to fame and his appointment as Lord High Admiral of Queen Victoria's Navy was so similar to the character of Sir Joseph that even the Prime Minister began referring to W. H. Smith as "Pinafore Smith". The next time you pop into Smith's for a paper - whistle the tune and see if anyone notices!!

As I mentioned earlier - don't you just miss a live show? In April 1871, at Broadway's Minstrel Hall, twenty star performers from Satsuma's Japanese Circus Troupe offered a 'varied and interesting' entertainment including the amazing Mr. Yadunochi, who first smoked a pipe, then ate it, then smoked WITHOUT his pipe whilst playing the flute and expelling smoke from that instrument and for his grand finale, concluded by reproducing, as the Times put it:- "the original pipe whole and unsullied." Now, THAT'S entertainment!

Do you recall in my last *Mumbling* I wrote about collective nouns for musicians? Well, my thanks to one reader who has come up with the following - a 'turbulence' of tuba players, a 'pounding' of percussionists. I really like those. Any more would be gratefully received, send them through.

And now wash your hands please.

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