

Recording ***A Slightly Fictionalised Vignette***

“Good morning ladies and gentleman, boy and girls” says the Leader of the U3A Recorder Group cheerfully to the assembling players who are preparing themselves for two hours of serious music making. One is raking through a lifetime’s assorted detritus in her voluminous bag searching for her glasses but will never find them because they are perched on her forehead; another is seeking a nice chocolate wafer with which to fortify herself, together with a clean handkerchief with which to remove the anticipated aftermath from her instrument’s mouthpiece. Sadly the two items have already met in the jumbled depths of her bag on this warm day and are presently engaged in a messy intercourse. A third is making her friends queasy with the gory details of her most recent ‘procedure’. Her friends are secretly thinking she must be a human caterpillar judging by the number of knee operations she seems to have had. A fourth is regaling anyone who will listen about the latest Garden Group coach trip when Vera had fallen asleep and broken wind loudly causing poor old Chas to soil himself in shock. Dan, the only male in the group, sits observing quietly, surreptitiously making notes as material for a satirical book he is writing.

“Good morning” announces the Leader a little more forcefully. There is a momentary silence as everyone recalls with a slight sense of disappointment that they are at the Recorder Group and not at the Pains, Potions, and Pills Coffee and Chat Morning. “May I kindly remind you that we are here to Work, not to have Fun. Can we start with *Che Farò Senza Euridice* by Gluck”. “Did she say which book?” whispers Sharon to her neighbour. “No, Gluck. Gluck!” comes the reply.

“All together now. A one, two, three, four, one, two, three ...”
Janet: “Blast, I’ve brought the wrong music. Could we play some folk tunes instead?”
Leader: “I don’t think we need sink quite that low. Could you share with Lesley next to you. Now, a one, two, three, four, one, two, three ...”
Sian: “I can’t get my music stand up”.
Leader: “Dan, would you mind helping Sian out”.
Dan: “Yup, no problem, bent stands, stuck joints, seized embouchures, twisted knickers, I’m your man ladies”. A titter of polite laughter. Yeah, what a wag that Dan is eh?
Leader: “Now then, a one, two, three, four, one, two, three ...”
Lesley: “I can’t fit my recorder together”.
Leader sighs: “Let me show you. You do it like this” and starts to demonstrate.
Lesley: “You don’t understand. I can’t put my recorder together because I’ve left it at home”.
Leader sighs again, more resignedly. “Oh dear. Does anyone have a spare with them?”
Dan pipes up “She can blow mine”. A ripple of feigned disgust runs through the room. Freda starts a guffaw but hastily snorts it back upon observing the severe look on the face of her best friend Rosemary. Looking slightly hurt Dan brings out a Von Huene Boxwood Rippert descant recorder, the most expensive money can buy at a tad under £1600, and patiently explains that he was going to let others try it as part of their musical education, but he couldn’t be responsible for the vulgar turn of some people’s minds and if that was their attitude they could all just carry on with their £8 plastic Yamahas.

Leader: "A one, two, three, four, one, two, three ..."

Catherine "Which page are we on?"

Leader: "One two three".

"Oh please don't start without me, which page are we on?"

Leader: "I just told you – it's on pages one, two and three. Now then. A one, two, three, four, one, two, three ..."

Catherine "Are we starting from the beginning?"

"Yes, from the top. A one, two, three, four, one, two, three ..."

"Is that from the top of page one, page two or page three?"

Leader's voice is by now sounding just a little ragged but she keeps her composure.

"Page one. The very beginning. Capo. Bar 1. Note 1 on line 1".

Catherine "What about repeats?"

A vocal tremor now becomes audible. "Play all repeats. As written. A one, two, three, four, one, two, three ...".

"Is that all repeats on all pages or just the repeats on page 1"?

At last music begins to emanate from the group. Or does it? There is a curious dissonance, a series of mediaeval fourths that don't appear to be written into the music. Leader stops the playing.

"Is everyone playing the same tune?". Murmurs of assent.

"Is everyone playing the right instrument?".

"Oops, I'd better put my ocarina away" jokes Dan, waving his descant recorder to demonstrate to a thickening atmosphere that he is indeed joking.

"Oh blast, I've just realised I'm playing my treble instead of my descant" announces Brenda. "It's because I don't have the right glasses on. If I'd had the right glasses on I'd have noticed that I'd picked up the wrong instrument". Brenda, who happens to be exceedingly well read in popular science, continues "Actually, according to the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle there are an infinite number of combinations of glasses, instrument, music and notes and, like Schrodinger's cat, the end result can't be known until a listener actually hears the performance".

"Well, I listened and all I heard was a bloody racket" stage whispers Dan sardonically.

Just then the door starts to inch open slowly, hesitantly. The room falls silent as everyone waits on tenterhooks to see who it is, wincing with each painful creak of the door hinge. Dan knows. He's ostentatiously poised to set his watch by this regular twice-monthly phenomenon. A hand appears around the edge of the door, then a head peeps. Andrea creeps into the room, shoulders hunched, pantomime-tiptoeing in the exaggerated manner of those people who are regularly late. Leader is about to count in again when there is a dreadful crash as Andrea blunders, like the back end of a pantomime horse, into Janet's music-stand-cum-shopping-bag-hanger sending everything – recorders, music, a cabbage, half a dozen eggs, a soggy bag of frozen peas and a custard apple – flying in all directions.

Leader: "I think now will be a good time to break for coffee but first let's try to make just a few moments of nice music". She inserts a CD into a machine and the heavenly sound of world class recorder player Michala Petri fills the room.