

## From the Back Verandah

Remember listening to those four magical jazz discs from the late 50s and early 60s which Miles Davis recorded with orchestras conducted by Gil Evans — *Miles Ahead*, *Porgy and Bess*, *Sketches of Spain* and *Quiet Nights*? You know, tracks like *Maids of Cadiz*, *Summertime*, *Concierto de Aranjuez*, *Song No. 2*.

Well, Columbia have recently re-released them.

Not before time, either. My LP versions are worn out, especially *Porgy and Spain*. So instead of replacing them on individual CDs, I can now revisit them in context.

And what a context. For now we get, not only the music together with the original liner notes, but also full track-by-track itemised

credits, out-takes, session photos and a long article by Columbia executive George Avakian. Best of all, though, there are rehearsal discussions, where Gil Evans is explaining to the band what he can already hear in his mind's ear, and how they might perform it.

It's hard to credit it, but *Miles Ahead* is forty years old this year, but it still sounds as startlingly new as it did back then.

Interestingly, the re-release is available in two media — on 6 CDs or 11 LPs. According to *Keyboard* magazine, the photos are better in the larger format that LPs allow, but I'll settle for the six-pack. First to find the \$160.

— Fizzgig

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We welcome PC disk submissions (Word 2/6/7/97, TXT formats).

# BIKWIL

*The Newsletter of Quiet Enthusiasms*

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## And Now, with a Modest Flourish of Cornets and Sackbuts . . .

Welcome to the first issue of *Bikwil*, an irregular newsletter for fun and no profit. When I say "irregular", I do so in case I fail in my intention to bring out an issue every couple of months.

Of course, one way of obviating that eventuality is to get contributions from you the readers. So how about it? Send them in. Each piece of work will remain the property of its author; *Bikwil* is but a temporary vehicle. (By the same token, we won't pay you.)

We can be as diverse as we choose; there'll be no exclusions at all on subject matter. The arts, computing, cooking, cricket, education, the environment, films, gardening, history, language, literature, the media, philosophy, psychology, puzzles, science, sociology . . . all are fair game. The one restriction we place on your contributions is that they be mainly "positive towards", "in praise of", "quietly enthusiastic about". There's enough negativity in print already.

### What's Inside?

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## Go, Little Bikwil

Chaucer, with humility,  
 in another age  
 sent forth his “litel bok”,  
 “litel myn tragedye”  
 into the world.  
 Now, may our little book  
 likewise engage  
 and be understood.

Go, little Bikwil,  
 your own tale tell.  
 Come among friends.  
 Incline hearts and minds  
 of all who read you  
 to positive ends.

Go, little Bikwil,  
 do your work well.

— Bet Briggs

## Postal Fever

Occasionally you come across a generous organisation that is willing to send you every issue of its magazine for virtually nothing. What we are talking about here are periodicals in the true sense of the word, where the emphasis is on information — and not on potential sales (as with catalogues posing as “bulletins” or “reviews”).

We know of course that a lot of sites on the Internet function as “free” magazines, and no doubt *Bikwil* will be referring to some of these in our *Web Line* column as time goes on. But with *Postal Fever* we want to concentrate on paper-and-ink mags.

Sadly though, there aren’t too many examples of such complimentary reading matter, which means that this is one column where we could really use your input. So help spread the good word on (near-) free subscriptions.

Here’s a free one to start us off.

*Heritage NSW* is the official newsletter of the Heritage Council of NSW, and appears 3 times a year. The format is 8 A4 pages, mainly text but also with a few black-and-white photos.

Its ISSN is 1321-1099.

You can get on the mailing list by ringing (02) 9391-2060 or writing to:

Heritage NSW  
 Heritage Office  
 Governor Macquarie Tower  
 1 Farrer Place  
 Sydney 2000.

At the time I write this, the most recent issue is that of December 1996 (vol. 3 No. 3). Its contents include:

- ◇ New members of the Heritage Council, including the new Chair, Hazel Hawke
- ◇ Monitoring the quality of infill development in the historic town centre of Bathurst
- ◇ Recent progress under the State’s new heritage policy
- ◇ Retrospective by Howard Tanner, outgoing Chairman
- ◇ News of a course on the assessment of development applications for work on heritage items
- ◇ How to clean masonry walls
- ◇ New publications (6 of them free), including order form
- ◇ 8-page supplement covering all 344 1996/97 NSW Heritage Assistance Programs Approved Projects.

—TR

*More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly.*

*Woody Allen*

*My name is only an anagram of toilets.*

*T. S. Eliot*

## Quintessential Quirky Quotes

*Western Civilisation? I think it would be a very good idea.*

*Mohandas Gandhi*

*What contemptible scoundrel stole the cork from my lunch?*

*W. C. Fields*

*There was an old maid of Duluth  
Who wept when she thought of her youth,  
And the glorious chances  
She'd missed at school dances  
And once in a telephone booth.*

*Anonymous*

## Bats in John Bull's Belfry

The young composer William Walton arrived at Oxford University in 1918, aged 16, and not long after was taken under the wing of the Sitwell clan (Edith, Osbert and Sacheverell), who adopted him as an honorary brother. The Sitwells were perhaps the most famous literary family of the time, though certainly not popular with everyone. F.R. Leavis, for example, that tireless campaigner against what he saw as literary dilettantism, characterised them as belonging to “the history of publicity rather than of poetry”.

One legacy for us today from this period of Walton's music is his *Façade*, a satiric suite composed to accompany recitations of some poems by Edith Sitwell.

First performed in 1923, it received an instant and stormy fame, though over time it came to be seen as a bit inconsequential and no match for maturer Walton works such as the viola concerto, the symphonies and *Belshazzar's Feast*. Walton later arranged the work for large orchestra as *Façade Suite Nos. 1 & 2*.

The musical appeal of *Façade* lies in its wit, parody and jazz-influenced rhythms, and in the original version these features perfectly complement Sitwell's outrageous poetry. Just imagine that first performance. There was the 39-year-old author herself, unseen by the audience, declaiming her poems through a megaphone protruding from the mouth of a huge head painted on a curtain, which also concealed the seven band members.

What a marvellous thing to hear Sitwell's highbrow voice intoning, say, “Lily O'Grady, silly and shady” to that soft-shoe shuffling sax obligato.

All her life Edith Sitwell was notorious for her provocative eccentricities, in her dress as well as her writing. She was no *poseuse*, however, Leavis notwithstanding, always remaining true to herself. If she was interested in things odd, she used them either to express herself or else as subjects for amused reflection just because they pleased her. Luckily for us, the results of her efforts are infectious, and we are the beneficiaries of not only the nonsense poetry of *Façade* but also the wry commentary she attaches to her narratives in *English Eccentrics*.

Originally (1931) the work was called *The English Eccentrics*. Since then there have been at least five other editions, including a Penguin one in 1971, those from 1958 having additional chapters, and no definite article in the title. In 1964 the work inspired an opera in two acts by expatriate Australian composer Malcolm Williamson, with a libretto by Geoffrey Dunn.

Knowing little about Sitwell's book when I first picked it up, I have to confess I was anticipating yarns about contemporaries of hers. But it was not to be. What delights her interest, and appeals enormously to my own evil sense of humour, is a series of maverick vignettes from much earlier times.

Let's cast an exploratory glance in their lunatic direction.

At Squire John Mytton (b. 1796), for instance, who tried to scare off his hiccups by setting fire to his nightshirt. Successful? Yes. Appallingly burnt? Yes. Luckily he only tried this on the one occasion, unlike his equestrian stunts, where he was regularly a rampant menace not only to his horses, but to his friends and acquaintances too, especially if they were rash enough to ride in his carriage. Not surprisingly, he didn't make it past the age of 38.

Then there were the bizarre goings-on with the century-old coffin of poet John Milton. Here Sitwell quotes in full from a contemporary source — *A Narrative of the Disinterment of Milton's coffin . . . and the Treatment of the Corpse . . .*

And what about Monsieur Grin? He was a Swiss adventurer of the late nineteenth century who passed himself off in London as Louis de Rougement, a one-time cannibal chief from northern Australia. Fantastic and preposterous though they are, his Münchhausen-like exploits with turtles and alligators are nothing compared with his afternoon buffalo escapade.

This involved him, not only killing and ripping open the beast, but also crawling inside the still warm carcase in order to cure himself of a chill. He remained inside the intestines all night, and emerged next morning bloody all over, but "absolutely cured".

Sitwell devotes sustained thoroughness to the picturesque custom of the Ornamental Hermit. Apparently country squires in centuries past were so keen on the idea of having a hermit to grace their estates that that they used to advertise in the press, and even offered purpose-built retreats (the less comfortable the better) for

*Financial Review*. There are other Web links provided as well, by category (e.g. art, cinema, stage, sport, literature, science, travel).

Overall, the site tends to be text-based, with the occasional photo. Now and then, however, good use is made of audio and video clips.

Apart from the two exceptions noted above, *SMH Online* has fresh information every day except Sunday, uploaded about 1 am.

Naturally, all these goodies in no way substitute for the real thing — especially on Saturdays (*Spectrum*, *Good Weekend*, etc.).

*Deb and Jen's Land O' Useless Facts* reminds me of the ancient volumes of *Notes and Queries* beloved of librarians the world over, though *LOUF* exists on a vastly smaller scale. After all, as a goldmine of elusive information, *Notes and Queries* could be safely said to have had a head start, having been begun in 1849, whereas *LOUF* didn't appear till 1995.

That said, *LOUF* has much to recommend it. Its main appeal will be to those pursuers of freak bits of knowledge who are immediately attracted by the site's title,

like Trivial Pursuit devotees, people who make bets in pubs or indeed any D. Q. who has ever tilted at information windmills.

Here you'll find answers to momentous questions like these:

Which country in 1776 was the first to recognise the United States?

What will happen if you feed Alka-Seltzer to a seagull?

How long would a standard Slinky be if you stretched it out flat?

What is the infinity sign called?

What was Wilma Flintstone's maiden name?

There are links to other "Useless Fact Pages", too.

Just watch out for the unstructured way *LOUF* presents its contents. As yet, short of using your browser's Find button, there's no quick way to locate an answer you might be seeking. Hopefully an index or dedicated search tool will be developed in due course.

But say, doesn't this very lack of formality epitomise the Net and its fascinating value?

—TR

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### Internet sites referred to above:



<http://www.smh.com.au>

<http://www-leland.stanford.edu/~jenkg/useless>



## Web Line

(*Web Line* is intended to be the place where *Bikwil* readers can salute their favourite places on the Internet.)

For our first issue we turn our attention to two sites — *The Sydney Morning Herald Online* and *Land O' Useless Facts* — each quite illuminating in its own way, depending on the mood you're in.

Experienced Net users will be aware that you can point your browser to an initial site of your choice, so that whenever you log on you are automatically connected to that site. In my case it is *The Sydney Morning Herald*. This way I get the day's major news stories within a few seconds of launching my browser.

As to be expected from a paper with the *Herald's* pedigree, the daily news is comprehensive in its national and overseas coverage. And there's a nice bonus — the news archives. These provide *SMH Online* "back issues". At the moment the electronic archival material extends back about a year.

Not that *SMH Online* just gives you news; it offers much more. The editorial(s), for instance, and daily *Herald* features such as *Stay in Touch* and *Column 8*. Business

and sporting articles, too — usually at least half a dozen of each.

Real estate isn't forgotten either; nor are the classified motoring pages. The domestic real estate section is particularly strong, with a powerful search facility using clickable maps of Sydney (and Melbourne too, thanks to advertisements from *The Age*), plus categories like price, number of bedrooms, parking, pool, and so on.

There's a very large and useful employment classifieds page, which covers not only *Herald* ads, but also those of *The Australian Financial Review*, *The Age*, *The Sunday Age* and *The Sun-Herald*. Job ads are searchable by keyword.

The computer section is substantial, always with five or more articles. This is updated Tuesday mornings. Also updated once a week (Friday afternoons) is *Metro* — music, galleries, theatre, movies, other Sydney events, etc.

Then there's the email section, where you are invited to send your views on current controversial issues. If you prefer not to write, you can read the opinions of others. This section is additional to the *Letters* in the daily print version.

Clickable links are provided to the Web pages of sister publications *The Age* and *The Australian*

their bearded dodderers. Flowing white beards, of course, were essential attributes of a fashionable recluse, as were long finger- and toenails and absurd clothes.

Yet Horace Walpole, for one, disapproved of the whole thing, claiming that "it was ridiculous to set aside a quarter of one's garden to be melancholy in". Few took any heed, however, and some volunteers were even content to occupy a hermitage unpaid.

And on it goes with our English odd bods. There are inane follies galore to be enjoyed, not the least of which is the delightful gem that portrays the ludicrous medical aftermath of a failed amateur attempt at a remedy for flatulence.

A certain seventeenth century physician (one Sir Charles Hall) did find himself

"... the centre of a scene as animated as it was remarkable. The windows of every house in the village to which he had been called, the grass-grown streets, and especially the village green outside the house of Mr Thomas Gobsill, 'a lean man, aged about twenty-six or twenty-seven', were swarming with excited yokels, as Sir Charles, calling for a ladder, and setting this against Mr Gobsill's house, bound that gentleman head downwards upon the ladder, and shook it violently.

The reason for this remarkable energy and enterprise, on the part of Sir

Charles, was that Mr Gobsill, who suffered from wind, had, for some time past, been in the habit — on the advice of 'a friend' — of swallowing round white pebbles, in order to quell this disorder. At first, the prescription acted admirably, and Mr Gobsill was, in the due course of nature, delivered of both pebbles and wind; but some time afterwards the wind returned to him, and Mr Gobsill returned to the pebbles, and both wind and pebbles clung to Mr Gobsill and would not be parted from him. Mr Gobsill concluded, very naturally, that the best plan would be to repeat the dose, and this he did, until, instead of the original dose of nine pebbles, he had swallowed two hundred. Mr Gobsill's two hundred pebbles had remained clamped in the inner recesses of his being for the space of two years and a half, when he noticed that his appetite had gone, and that he was suffering from indigestion. He therefore consulted Sir Charles who, on examining the patient, found that if Mr Gobsill were severely shaken, the stones could be heard rattling as if they were in a bag. When the scene which I have described was enacted, the stones made a slight, slow, noisy journey in the direction of Mr Gobsill's mouth, but immediately he was reversed, and placed upon his feet once more, the surrounding multitude were gratified by the sound of the two hundred stones falling, one after another, into their original resting-place.

I do not know what was his eventual fate, or if he went to an early grave, accompanied by these faithful minerals . . ."

## A Word in Your Pink Shell-like

(This is the first in a series on words and phrases, some old, some new, some borrowed and maybe some of that other kind.)

Provided you are not a die-hard Member of the Sydney Cricket Ground (or similar venerable institution), then if you're a one-day cricket fan who has actually attended an international game or two you will probably have some fondness for that audience participation diversion called the Mexican Wave – or the Wave, for short.

But how did the ritual arise? Mexico is no cricketing nation, so are we to assume it originated at a football match? And what's it for anyway?

According to the *Macquarie Dictionary of New Words* of 1990, it did indeed begin in Mexico City, at the 1986 World Cup finals.

The dictionary quotes two local references. The first, from the Brisbane *Telegraph* of 29 July 1986, asserts that the Wave “was designed to distract competitors” during those finals, and complains, “it has since been seen in test cricket matches in England”.

The other quote, from the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 1 February 1988, doesn't attempt to explain origins (assuming that by then we all knew?), but does give a reasonable definition of what it calls “the very latest fad”:

Basically it's a spontaneous action where one section of spectators stands up, arms waving, then sits as the next section does the same. The movement goes on and on around the ground, forming a spectacular rippling effect.

The *Oxford Dictionary of New Words* of 1991, while adhering to the 1986 World Cup bit, declares that it was originally called the “Human Wave” and was practised in the early 1980s by American football crowds. When it was done in '86 in Mexico, it was seen on TV and then copied world-wide under its new name.

By 1989 an extra ingredient had been added, or more accurately several thousand ingredients. The *Oxford* quotes from *The Times*, which on 12 June grumbled thus:

Play was first delayed when another rendition of the Mexican wave, that mental aberration which cricket should long have discouraged, was accompanied by a confetti storm of torn-up paper.

But what purpose, according to the *Oxford*, does all this community body rippling serve? The crowd, it would seem, thereby

“expresses appreciation of what is happening in the match”.

So, while you unruly Wavers are having a good time, if you really need self-justification you may take your lexical pick. You are either trying to distract the players, or else showing your appreciation of them.

Howzat?

Sorry, no. I'm afraid that neither of those desires motivates Australian cricket spectators. From personal observation at the SCG, I'd say that our mob do it simply out of boredom. You see, the Wave never begins during exciting play, and in fact can always be guaranteed to peter out if a wicket falls or a four is scored.

Meanwhile, it's as if the crowd is saying to its collective self, “We love our cricket, sure, but we also expect some slow moments, so when they occur, we'll provide our own fun.”

Alcohol helps, too.

As a rule at the SCG the Wave begins on the Hill. After a couple of false starts, it moves in a clockwise direction, first to the huge Clive Churchill/Brewongle stand, where it is welcomed by all tiers, then to the Ladies Stand. Here a few hardy souls brave the displeasure of their neighbours and join in,

grateful perhaps for the vulgar chance to stretch their legs.

Next door is the Members Stand, and on a good day the most you can expect to see here are one or two half-hearted pairs of arms, accompanied by raucous boos and catcalls from the rest of the ground.

But now it's the turn of the M.A. Noble Stand, where the undulation ever so slowly picks up again (half this stand is for Members). And now to the Bradman. Here enthusiasm fully returns, echoed with exhilaration in the Bill O'Reilly and finally in the Doug Walters, whence once more the Hill sends it on its rolling way.

Mind you, despite its reputation for rowdiness, the Hill doesn't claim exclusive right to Wave initiation. Usually in the latter stages of a match the countdown can just as easily start in the concourse area of the O'Reilly or Bradman Stands.

For years the SCG endeavoured in vain to discourage the disgraceful practice, even to the extent of flashing warnings on the electronic scoreboard. Recently it seems to have accepted the inevitable, however, and the Aussie Wave (its Central American origins utterly forgotten) continues to prosper.

—Harlish Goop