

From the Back Verandah

Remember the Mexican Wave from *Bikwil's* first issue? Well, my news for you today does not have the linguistic emphasis of that article, but instead brings you the surging truth about that other Aussie one-day cricket wave.

Usually it occurs when Oz is fielding. From the front rows comes the sound of male voices bawling, "Hey, *name*, give us a wave!" (where for *name* you can substitute "Warnie" or "Ponting", etc.). It's not just the fielders near the fence who are hailed so mellifluously; it's also those further inland, wind conditions permitting.

Aussie players are happy to respond, except when they have to concentrate. Before he became captain, for example, Steve Waugh used to give an especially amiable,

discreet behind-the-back wavelet. The idea has been also tried with fielding international players, though with mixed success.

This choral cricket shouting reminds me of the Last Night at the Proms, though the open-air acoustics of a cricket ground are nothing like those of the Royal Albert Hall, of course. There seems to be a problem with the reverberation in that august cultural rotundity because London's music lovers yell quite slowly and precisely. Not so measured are the worse-for-wear Aussies, who roar their message at a normal pace. No doubt both groups rehearse their line, but there's not much to practise at the cricket — just agree on your target, and you're off and bellowing.

— Fizzgig

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BIKWIL

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"Resigned to the Wide World"

For some time I have been investigating how best to distribute *Bikwil* on the World Wide Web, and can now announce that, all being well, we should go on-line with the next issue (No. 19, May 2000).

Let me set your minds at rest, though. The printed *Bikwil* will not cease publication. On the contrary: the on-line form of our mag will serve more as a supplement to the paper version than as a substitute.

Unfortunately, on top of Aussie postage increases in 1999, the new venture will add to my expenses, and therefore to subscription prices. I have therefore taken several steps to offset this rise in costs to you.

1. It's only fair that you readers who have kept the faith all these months will be able to maintain your current subscription fee a little longer.

2. As from the date of the price change (May 2000) *Bikwil* will be enlarged from 16 to 20 pages.

3. Even when your subscription is due to rise, those with Internet access will be able to receive *Bikwil* in an electronic form at no cost.

Existing subscribers will find fuller details of these matters set out on the enclosed sheet.

(The above cyberspatial quote is from Jonathan Swift's *Tale of a Tub*.)

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A Word in Your Pink Shell-like

I, for one, was more than pleased to read in *Bikwil No. 4* (Nov. 1997) this Quintessential Quirky Quote of English musician/broadcaster Steve Race:

In order to enjoy an ingenious pun one has only to stop groaning like a schoolboy and enjoy the thing like a man.

This is a line from Race's *My Music*, a rollicking book also quoted from by E. Roy Strong in *Bikwil's* mammoth Wagner issue (No. 10). Most of the puns in Race's book are of course by Frank Muir and Denis Norden, who extended the device into an art form, not only in the radio show *My Music*, but in its fore-runner and model *My Word*.

Fizzgig (Issue 5, January 1998) has quoted from Frank Muir, too, from his *Oxford Book of Humorous Prose*, which I commend to you for some audacious (and atrocious) Muir and Norden word plays. Muir also lists a few (quite genuine) punning food-store and restaurant names in America, like "Barnum and Bagel", "Jonathan Livingstone Seafood", and my favourite (a pie shop) "3.14159".

One more from Muir's book, this time a headline from *The Tatler* about singer Tina Turner:

Don't Thigh for Me, Ardent Tina.

Not that the above Steve Race line has been the only punster's delight in *Bikwil*, the best of which was undoubtedly Dorothy Parker's marvellous "horticulture" pun in *QQQ No. 3*. Hopefully there'll be many more equally horrendous.

If you like puns as much as I do, you will be interested in a diminutive yet thorough volume on the subject (and an Aussie one to boot) which I recently picked up for five dollars in a bookshop remainder sale. It's Paul Clarke and Joan Sauers' *Pundemonium: The Step-by-Schlep Guide to Humour's Lowest Form*; its ISBN is 0 85561 694 6. Two hundred and sixty pages, quite scholarly in places, devoted to the history and use of and attitudes to the pun in everyday life and literature.

(Literature includes everything from Shakespeare to the Marx Brothers to James Joyce to Mel Brooks to Noam Chomsky to the

The Feral Joke Collector



In Clumsy Pursuit of the welfare State

- ◇ Please find out if my husband is dead as the man I am now living with won't do anything until he is sure.
- ◇ In reply to your letter, I have already co-habited with your officer, so far nothing has happened.
- ◇ In accordance with your instructions, I have given birth to twins in the enclosed envelope.
- ◇ Please send some money as I have fallen into errors with my landlord.
- ◇ I am writing to tell you that my baby was born two years ago and he is two years old. When do I get relief?
- ◇ I can't get sick pay. I have nine children. Can you tell me why this is?
- ◇ Sir, I am forwarding my marriage certificate and my two children, one is a mistake as you can see.
- ◇ I am annoyed to find out that you branded my children illiterate. Oh! the shame of it! – it is a dirty trick as I married their father a week before they were born.
- ◇ Unless I get my husband's money soon, I will be forced to lead an immortal life.
- ◇ I want my money as quick as I can get it. I have been in bed with the doctor for two weeks and he doesn't seem to be doing me any good. If things don't improve, I will send for another doctor.

Such ideas were an insult to secure theories of astronomy, geology and biology (not to mention science heroes like Newton and Darwin), but at first criticism was ineffective in providing a thorough, convincing refutation. Carl Sagan's thoughtful denunciation came in 1974 in his *Venus and Dr. Velikovsky*, a chapter in his book *Broca's Brain*.

Of course, to his disciples such an attack was typical of the conspiracy to discredit Velikovsky's contribution to human knowledge. (Another co-conspirator is supposed to be evolutionary biologist Stephen. J. Gould.) After all, say Velikovskians, haven't many of the master's predictions come true — like the temperature of Venus?

The disputation rumbles on.

I first read *Worlds in Collision* about 35 years ago and loved it, hooked by the wealth of anthropology, mythology, philology and downright ingenious imagination. In any event it is far more satisfying a read, for all its flagrant faults, than that other egregious volume of pseudo-scientific speculations — Erich von Däniken's 1968 *Chariots of the Gods*.

So there you have it. Your virtual visits to various venturesome

visionaries and virtuosi are done, and you are home safely again. As far-ranging as it has been, however, this selective excursion through space and time has denied me the opportunity to answer several absorbing questions.

Interested readers are invited to explore the following engaging queries for themselves:

- ◇ did Virgil ever suffer from inordinate shyness or disabling indigestion?
- ◇ as the years pass, is Mt. Everest growing or shrinking?
- ◇ how long has Jan Morris been able to speak Welsh?
- ◇ what was Wendy Carlos doing in West Pennant Hills, Sydney, in October 1976?
- ◇ what, if anything, did Glenn Gould have in common with composer John Cage?
- ◇ which was the photo NASA banned from the Voyager record?
- ◇ which establishment scientist had a copy of *Worlds in Collision* open on his desk when he died?

— TR

Carry On gang to Victor Hugo to Spike Milligan to Carl Jung to Alan Alda to Cicero to Roy Rene.)

And bloody funny too, of course: hundreds of puns in all their ghastly splendour, including lots for frivolous children and plenty of ripe examples for the dirty-minded. Dare I risk a few, or will this ruin a future *QQQ* page? No, the world's full of puns, and there are plenty to go round.

(Note how cleverly I avoided saying “All the world's a stooge.”)

Completely at random, then, this *Pundemonium* handful:

Absinthe makes the heart grow fonder

Bad cooking: the pot thickens

Cool people are scene and not herd

A critic is a man who pans for gold

Dead men don't get laid

Flabbery will get you no wear

The masochist cowered when he saw the domatrix's whip, and she told him, "That's the leash of your worries"

Occasionally gymnasts fall on deaf ears

One of the advantages of nuclear war is that all men are cremated equal

A sycophant is a person who stoops to concur.

So you see, far from being a despicable form of humour, a pun — or a least a good one — has a certain mellifluous dignity of its own. This form of improvisational mucking about with words, indeed, is loved and practised regularly by musicians worldwide (even if they're not also broadcasters). The reason, of course, isn't hard to find: musos have good ears. Theme and variations and all that.

An example of this musician's delight occurred early in the movie *Brassed Off*, where at rehearsal the brass-band conductor played by Pete Postlethwaite introduces Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* as “The Concerto de Orange Juice”.

When I heard that fruity jewel, my mind went back to my Uni days. A jazz group I followed was once requested (after many up-tempo numbers) to “play something pastoral”, and the pianist immediately called out, “Ok fellers, *There'll Never Be Another Ewe*”.

Below you'll find a few word-plays for your delectation, all relating to titles of musical compositions in various styles. Most are pretty self-evident, so no explanation is provided.

Now, I've heard that quite a few *Bikwil* readers are musicians, amateur or pro, so I'm optimistic that this list will soon get expanded. Ok you trombonists, don't let things slide. And all you fiddlers — you should be able to scrape up a few puns. Nor you bassoon players (I almost fagott you).

Hold that wailing a bit longer!

Just remember this. In addition to the clever puns created by the famous writers mentioned above, some really great men of letters have penned loving words about this form of humour, so if it was good enough for them it's good enough for *Bikwil*.

Edgar Allan Poe, for instance, who had the bravery to assert, "The goodness of your true pun is in direct ratio of its intolerability".

And Charles Lamb, who so beautifully wrote, "[A pun] . . . is a pistol let off at the ear; not a feather to tickle the intellect".

Even the great H.W. Fowler had some affection for a decent pun:

Puns are good, bad, and indifferent, and only those who lack the wit to make them are unaware of the fact.

Anyway, here are our puns on musical composition titles:

Balaclava Creek
 Bill Jazzer's Fist
 The Blight of the Humble Fee
 Butcher Arms around Me Honey,
 Hold Me — I'm Tight
 Buy Me Mr Sheen
 Clear the Saloon
 Eugene One Gin
 Every Baby Loves My Body
 Freezer
 The Girl with the Lines of a Horse
 Stompin' on the Saveloy
 Shake My Gland — I've Got
 Strange-looking Parasites
 The Unfurnished Symphony (in
 One Flat).

Incidentally, *Pundemonium* has a page devoted to musical puns, too (page 152, to be exact). Here's a couple of real moan provokers:

When the string section rose up and strangled the brass section for being out of tune, they called it wanton act of violins.

When a movie scorer is told to make it funnier, he has to farce the music.

By way of a bonus, here's a music-oriented pair from elsewhere in the same book:

Compulsive sound recordist: I never met a man I didn't mike

When musicians do it, it's called band on the pun.

Ok. Ok. I'll go.

— Harlish Goop

the inconsistency. According to him, certain dynasties appear twice in accepted schemes of Egyptian Middle Kingdom history, which he was happy to reconstruct for us. He called this research *Ages in Chaos*.

And that natural calamity?

Once he had found descriptions of similar events in the literature of ancient Mexico and had decided that the Biblical catastrophes were actually worldwide in scale, Velikovsky devoted the next ten years to tracing parallel stories of natural upheaval in many cultures.

For him a global cataclysm became the only explanation — and not just a global cataclysm, but one of cosmic origin. This investigation matured into his *Worlds in Collision*.

After rejection of both this book and *Ages in Chaos* by many publishers, Macmillan (US) finally chose to publish *Worlds in Collision* in 1950.

What has become known as the Velikovsky Affair had begun.

Even in manuscript form *Worlds in Collision* attracted controversy, mainly in the popular press, and upon its publication scientists and academics attempted to sabotage the book, its author and, if all else failed, its publisher.

As things transpired, by threatening to boycott Macmillan's educational division, Velikovsky's opponents so intimidated the firm that within a year the rights to his books were transferred to Doubleday, who did not publish textbooks.

Doubleday went ahead with all Velikovsky's later works, despite the antagonism of the science community. *Ages in Chaos* appeared in 1952, followed by such titles as *Earth in Upheaval* (1955) and *Oedipus and Akhnaton* (1960).

Lack of space prohibits me from cataloguing all the claims made by Velikovsky that so incensed the scientific establishment, but how about these to be going on with?

- ◇ originally the orbits of our solar system's planets intersected, and collisions between the major planets occurred, causing the birth of comets
- ◇ around the time of Moses such a comet, thrown out from Jupiter, nearly collided with Earth
- ◇ this gave rise to a huge gravitational shift, great tides and electric discharges
- ◇ the manna which fed the Israelites came from carbohydrates in the comet's tail
- ◇ the comet collided with Mars, lost its tail, and was transformed into the planet Venus.

Seven's *Melancholy Blues*. (The latter was voted in against strong competition from a Miles Davis version of *Summertime*.)

Should the Voyager message ever reach intelligent life out there, this is statistically unlikely to happen for another ten billion years. Yet even with those remote odds the effort is an inspiring symbol of optimism and longing from Earth — the human soul of science. As Sagan puts it,

No one sends such a message on such a journey without a positive passion for the future. For all the possible vagaries of the message, any recipient could be sure that we were a species endowed with hope and perseverance, at a least a little intelligence, substantial generosity and a palpable zest to make contact with the cosmos.

Carl Sagan adored science with all his being, and if there was one thing he mistrusted more than anti-science it was pseudo-science. Hence his essay attacking the work of our final celebrity, Immanuel Velikovsky (1895-1979).

Velikovsky's academic qualifications were those of a G.P. and psychoanalyst. While in the United States in 1939 researching a book on Sigmund Freud's own dreams, together with a comparative study of the lives of Oedipus, Akhnaton and Moses (all three figures had been important in Freud's

thinking), a notion occurred to him that would keep him in America for the rest of his life and bring him international notoriety.

The idea was this.

Suppose it was a great natural cataclysm at the time of the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt which caused the plagues, the parting of the waters, the hurricane and the eruption of Mt. Sinai?

It would help, naturally, if an Egyptian record of a similar catastrophe existed. Fortunately for Velikovsky the confirmation he sought turned up in an obscure papyrus in which the Egyptian sage Ipuwer lamented the collapse of the social order during some natural calamity. Because of certain references in it, it was apparent that Ipuwer was bewailing the downfall of Egypt's Middle Kingdom. Velikovsky concluded that this document is a parallel to the Book of Exodus and describes the same catastrophe. But what event exactly?

First, however, Velikovsky had to solve a chronology problem. Conventionally the end of the Middle Kingdom has been assigned to about 1750 B.C., which is 500 years earlier than the Hebrew timetable. Velikovsky, already enthused with the synchronism idea, was soon able to find a reason for

Zulu Love Letter

During a visit in 1996 to Zululand (a province of The Republic of South Africa) I came across this lovely Zulu love letter entitled *iNcwadi* (pronounced "I—en—che -wadi").

I have turned pitch black as the rafters of the hut because I miss you,
If I were a dove I would fly to your home and pick up food at your door.
I have become thin like the sweet cane in a damp field
And green as the first shoots of trees because of my love for you.

According to folklore, this was a message given by a maiden to her lover, not in written form, but made from stringing coloured beads in a set pattern. In the past — i.e. pre European influence — seeds would have been used and painted with natural colours (clay, ochre, plant extract, etc.). Today coloured glass or plastic beads are used.

The story goes that each colour represents a different message. For example:

Black	I have turned pitch black . . .
Blue	If I were a dove . . .
Green	I have become thin . . .
Red	My heart bleeds and is full of love

The other colours are White, Yellow and Pink, each with its own particular meaning.

It's like déjà vu all over again.

Yogi Berra

*There's a wonderful family called Stein,
There's Gertrude, there's Epp and there's Ein;
Gert's poems are bunk,
Epp's statues are junk,
And no one can understand Ein.*

Anonymous

Quintessential Quirky Quotes

*I never forget a face, but I'll make an exception
in your case.*

Groucho Marx

*Like the poetry of Mallarmé, a bi-bat
is one symbol on top of another.*

Denis Norden

*I know two things about the horse
And one of them is rather coarse.*

Naomi Royde-Smith

greetings from the President of the United States (Jimmy Carter)

Congressional list

greetings from the Secretary General of the United Nations (Kurt Waldheim)

greetings in 54 languages (spoken, in the main, by native speakers; included are ancient Sumerian and Hittite, Latin, Vietnamese, Burmese, Punjabi, Welsh, Nguni, Wu)

UN greetings

whale greetings (humpbacks)

the sounds of earth (including those of a 1971 Australian earthquake, wind, rain, surf, crickets, frogs, footsteps, heartbeats, laughter, a kiss, a pulsar)

music (three quarters of the whole record — almost 90 minutes).

Let's concentrate on the music, since that's where Glenn Gould at last comes in — or is going out, if you get my cosmic drift.

As you might expect, there were many opinions, passionately expressed, as to what to include and exclude, and some western composers inevitably had to lose out, such as Debussy, Haydn, Puccini, Tchaikovsky and Wagner.

Who won? Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Stravinsky.

It is J.S. Bach who is represented most often — three times, one item performed by Gould, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book 2, Prelude and Fugue in C, No. 1 (track 17). One reply to the

question of what music humanity should send to other civilisations in space was expressed as follows, by biologist Lewis Thomas: “I would send the complete works of Johann Sebastian Bach . . . but that would be boasting.”

Non-European music occupies half the music section of the record, and includes a Javanese court gamelan, Senegalese percussion, a Zairean pygmy girls' initiation song, two Australian Aboriginal songs, Japanese shakuhachi music, Azerbaijan bagpipes and a Peruvian wedding song.

Occasionally a piece was easy to choose, but hard to locate, such as the thrilling Indian raga performance, Surshri Kesar Bai Kerkar's *Jaat Kahan Ho*, (track 25), which had been fervently recommended by Robert E. Brown of the Center for World Music in Berkeley. It was out of print, and unavailable in record stores. After many frantic phone calls a copy in good condition was finally tracked down in an appliance store run by an Indian family in New York, in a carton under a card table.

“Popular” music is represented, too. Included are a Mexican mariachi band, Chuck Berry's *Johnny B. Goode*, Blind Willie Johnson performing *Dark Was the Night* and Louis Armstrong and the Hot

From Virgil to Velikovsky

[*Stepping Stones* No. 1]

(This is the third and final part of an essay which to date has been looking at the intriguing connections between five well-known people — Virgil, Edmund Hillary, Jan Morris, Wendy Carlos and Glenn Gould.)

Before we depart for outer space, here are a couple of Glenn Gould quotes for you to ponder on:

Orlando Gibbons is my favourite composer. Always has been.

I have always felt that Mozart should have died sooner rather than later.

Outer space?

In 1977 NASA launched two spacecraft called Voyager. Their joint mission was first to explore our outer solar system and then in 1986 to leave its realm to pursue a slow drifting pilgrimage into the Milky Way and beyond towards the vast unknown of other galaxies. Because many scientists believe that life may exist elsewhere in the universe, it was decided that each Voyager would carry a communication from the people of Earth to potentially intelligent extraterrestrial beings.

In the year following the Voyager launch, astronomer Carl

Sagan (1934-1996) published a book with the marvellously evocative title *Murmurs of Earth* which describes the genesis, form and content of that hopeful message. Sagan is the sixth person we are visiting.

Sagan had been involved with similar communications sent on Pioneer 10 and Pioneer 11 (1971-2) and the Laser Geodynamic Satellite (1974), and when the Voyager missions were being planned in late 1976 he was asked to direct the effort to design an appropriate message for these two vehicles. After months of discussions with many people he and his team decided on a long-playing phonograph disk made of copper, to be played at 16 $\frac{2}{3}$ revolutions per minute and to be attached to each craft complete with cartridge and stylus and pictorial instructions for playback.

Here is a summary of the contents list of the Voyager message:

118 pictures, encoded as sound

the first two bars of the *Cavatina* from the *String Quartet No. 13 in Bb* by Beethoven

Listening to Satie

[From *Evenings of Music*]

Gymnopédies'
limpid tones fall
like raindrops,
each a small jewel
of sound
in the still pool
of midnight.

Music with a still
centre abides;
such calm is a pearl
set deep
in the troubled pool
of the mind.

— Bet Briggs

Web

With the death of Carl Sagan in 1996, the mantle of “best known scientist in the world” seems to have passed to Englishman Stephen William Hawking. He was born on 8/1/42, the 300th anniversary of Galileo’s death.

His fame beyond the esoteric walls of cosmology and theoretical physics rests on two factors. One is his 1988 book *A Brief History of Time*, which has sold over ten million copies (a handful of whose owners, it’s said, have actually read it). The other is the fact that he is a victim of the degenerative motor neurone disease known in America as Lou Gehrig’s disease.

It comes as little shock, then, to discover that hundreds of references to Hawking and his work on the Internet.

What better place to begin than his personal site, *Professor Stephen Hawking’s Homepage*? Maintained and updated regularly by his graduate assistant, this site predictably covers two main aspects of his life and work: his



Line

career in physics and his crippling disabilities.

Apart from a brief bio section entitled *A Brief History of Mine*, one feature of his physics work covered is a selection of transcribed recent lectures given by Hawking (some “popular“, some very technical), such as:

The Nature of Space and Time
Does God Play Dice?
Gravitational Entropy
Rotation, Nut Change and Anti de Sitter Space.

Another highlight is a series of reporters’ questions. Many are very ill-advised, so Hawking’s replies are fun to read. For example,

Q. How do you deal with the way you are described all the time by journalists?

A. I don’t pay much attention to how journalists describe me. I know it is media hype. They need an Einstein-like figure to appeal to. But for them to compare me to Einstein is ridiculous. They don’t understand either Einstein’s work, or mine.

Q. What do you say to the comment “Isn’t it a shame that such a brilliant mind is trapped inside a useless body?”

A. I have never heard anyone say “Isn’t it a shame that such a brilliant mind is trapped inside a useless body?” If I did, I would treat it with the contempt it deserved.

Q. Can the study of Physics take you beyond physical limitations?

A. Of course Physics can take one beyond one’s physical limitations, like any other mental activity. The human race is so puny compared to the universe that being described as disabled is not of much cosmic concern.

Q. What sort of music do you like and why?

A. I mainly listen to classical music: Wagner, Brahms, Mahler, etc., but I like pop as well. What I want is music with character.

Hawking’s admirers are legion, so I have selected just three sites as representative of the widespread Net homage paid to him.

Despite his atheism, Hawking is respected by many Christians, such as Dr. Henry “Fritz” Schaefer III, Professor of Quantum Chemistry, University of Georgia, part of whose lecture, *Stephen Hawking, the Big Bang, and God* is on the Web and is well worth reading.

Quite a different site — this one is for schoolchildren and their teachers — is called *Stephen Hawking’s Universe*. It’s part of the PBS site. While little is specifically about Hawking himself, there are many cosmological questions addressed, e.g.,

Strange Stuff Explained
Universes
Unsolved Mysteries
Things to Do in the Dark
Ask the Experts.

Perhaps my favourite Hawking fan site is *Psychlops’ Stephen Hawking Pages*, run by one Nick Donaldson. It was here I learned these two vital new facts:

Hawking appeared in *Descent*, Episode 252 of *Star Trek: the Next Generation*, playing poker in the Holodeck with Data, Einstein and Newton, and

He has also guest-starred in *The Simpsons*.

Could some kind *Bikwil* reader bring me up-to-date on these episodes, please? Have they been screened in Oz yet?

— TR

Internet sites referred to above:

<http://www.damtp.cam.ac.uk/user/hawking/>

<http://www.leaderu.com/real/ri9404/bigbang.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/hawking/html/home.html>

<http://www.psyclops.com/hawking/>

