

Symphony 2009

by Fergus Horsfall

Alistair sat in the passenger seat of Fredrick's 20 year old battered Beetle, carefully cradling his prize pumpkin. The tilt towards the front left wheel was obvious - half due to ailing suspension, half to the immense weight of the bulbously orange pumpkin taking up almost the entire view of the man driving.

Late for the Elmbridge Veg Festival. Fredrick increased the speed until the engine was making a harsh, choking noise, like an unfit boy right at the end of a cross-country race. Revving past a *Please Slow Down For Children* sign, they arrived at Elmbridge Civic Centre grey car park, which seemed outdone by the variety of latecomers hurrying in with excessively large and brightly coloured vegetables.

After two hours of eccentric judges sampling prime vegetables, A&F (an abbreviation used by their plotting rivals) drove to the local churchyard as they did annually on this occasion. Their plastic bags carried supermarket snacks and unusual home-growns. Today's picnic: boiled beetroot, marinated marrow and twice-cooked turnips. Unfortunately their crops, grown to such colossal proportions, were largely inedible.

There was a secret to their competition success. Canny Scotsman Alistair, stockpiled outlawed chemicals in a collapsing asbestos shed. If their prize-winners had been Olympic athletes, they would have been banned, but as A&F avoided organic categories, the veg-on-steroids continued to strike gold.

Alistair was high spirited after his carrots had done just that in the 'Most Likely To Turn You Orange' Category. Fredrick was gloomy. His mouldy- coloured, toddler-tall best cabbage had come second to what looked like a slimy ball of pondweed. As he sucked the end out of the last Frube, Alistair noticed shuffling under the ground, and

tuned his dusty asbestos clogged hearing aid. Then, a head popped up. 'Hallo, ich heisse Beethoven. Wer sind sie?'

Alistair jumped backwards, knocking the king sized pumpkin bruise on his thighs against a gargoyle-shaped water spout which had fallen off the roof.

Fredrick, who spelt his name in German, was a bit bonkers and always kept his 60s cool, translated, 'He says his name is Beethoven.'

Beethoven piped up 'Ich spreche Englisch. I speak English. I have been traipsing under the earth's mantle for years. Mistakenly believing I was dead, my contemporaries buried me. I was only paralysed and deaf as a daffodil. Four years ago I became healthy again and have been digging my way up since. I took a few wrong turnings on the way. As far as I remember, the place soil was lumped over me was Vienna.'

Alistair keeled over.

By the end of the week A&F had grown fond of Beethoven. After dusting the borrowed hearing aid with a feather, Beethoven discovered his hearing was restored. He had been staying at Fredrick's, but sooner or later he would have to find other accommodation. Beethoven was not the easiest house guest. At midnight he drummed out the Unfinished Symphony on the bedroom wall with whatever gardening tools were handy. That's why Fredrick had the grand idea of introducing him to the Modern World. Where better than at the Royal Wisley Garden Proms where The BeetleHovens would be playing extra-extra-short symphonies?

A&F travelled in the front. Beethoven was jammed (still singing) into the boot. He preferred that. After decades underground, the dark suited him. He received more musical inspiration with eyes closed.

Alistair searched the radio for Classic FM to drown out the cacophony from the boot. Beethoven caught snatches of songs on BBC Radio 1. He was immediately intrigued. A muffled voice queried. 'Is that the future of music?' A&F spoke together. "It's weedy nonsense. For youngsters who reject nylon for cotton, campaign for organics and vandalise chemical allotments."

Beethoven wasn't deterred. As the trio got out, attempting to re-start the songs, he ejected the car radio helpfully into his pocket.

Wisley, Garden Centre and all, was closed. The festival had been rescheduled because the Autumn crocuses had not yet bloomed. Worse, the car refused to re-start. Beethoven spotted several trolleys for transporting compost. 'Come with me,' he tra-la-laad. His musical mood continued. "Use the trolley." He picked up a large bamboo cane and, the three of them onboard, started to push it along like a gondola. After a metre's progress, Fredrick pressed down on the rusty brake. 'It's no use.' He sighed 'We'll just have to waaaaaa!' His sentence was cut as they hurtled down the path at breakneck speed, pebbles flying in their wake. A young gardener clipping hedges, saw them coming and dived into his ornate peacock. A sign whooshed past *'Please keep children away from.....'* As not only realisation, but the lake closed in, Beethoven remembered, too late, the radio in his pocket. They flew off the pontoon for duck feeding and, to the surprise of the goldfish, plunged into the lake.

Wading out, Fredrick noticed a tacky black plastic object with peeling silver paint. It looked familiar.

Fredrick was furious with Beethoven. He was a pensioner, and he needed a new car and a new radio. His gardening clothes were ruined. The peacock clipper had squealed to the Director-in-Charge. Now they could never go to Wisley again. Ever. He lectured Beethoven "Forget your famous symphonies. What makes you so

careless of your friends? Who would believe that you sprouted out from ground?
Only gardeners understand miracles grow from the earth.

Beethoven wasn't listening. The news of fame had shocked him. In his own era, his music was regarded as revolutionary, but too experimental. Now once again, he had been symphonically inspired.

Beethoven owned a wrist-dial, a unique and highly collectable sundial strapped to his wrist. He exchanged it in Elmbridge for a keyboard, a sound mixer and a car radio. He would compose a new piece of music inspired by the Lake accident and the few notes he had heard in Fredrick's car.

Symphony 2009 mixed Michael Jackson, the Beatles and the original Beethoven greats. It featured the tapping of the bamboo stick on the ground, the snap of the brake, the pace of the trolley and the concluding splash in the lake.

He logged onto Fredrick's computer. The second hand desktop was huffing and puffing like Fredrick's now dead engine. He searched anxiously for the right icon-something called the 'in-teer-nett'. He double clicked. In the search bar he typed 'song records'. Nothing came up. He clicked on 'How to publish songs.' It said: post to Sony Music Entertainment, 98 Kew Road, London.

Fredrick was staring disconsolately at his car, dumped outside his house by Reclaim-Wrecks. A radio with SONY MUSIC engraved in radiant letters was plugged Tom-tom like upside-down onto the dashboard. He ran into the house and found Beethoven, who shrugged his shoulders, 'I decided to make it up to you.,

Just then, a call came through. 'You're from Sony music? No, I do not know what a pseu-do-nymm is. Beethoven's my real name. Brilliant. Goodbye to you my friend.'

Beethoven looked round triumphantly. "That's my contract. My song is sure to be a hit. Lay-Zee will sing it.'

Alistair was so surprised, he fainted.

The money took months to appear. Lay-Zee was busy with other songs on his upcoming album, and the Beethoven recording was a marathon 26 minutes. Finally the song was released. It escalated up the charts into the top spot. But Beethoven was very angry. His name should be prominent. He had translated experience into music. Lay-Zee had only spent a few days in a recording studio and strutted around stages worldwide. Beethoven spiced his complaint letter to Sony with German expletives. Sony emailed back that

business was business: his name wasn't trendy. Beethoven annulled his contract.

Alistair was in his front garden- which was entirely filled with runner beans on criss-crossing poles- when Fredrick arrived waving £100,000 pounds, several unpublished songs and a note. The note read:

Dear Alistair and Fredrick,

I am tired after my antics with you. / am returning to my grave to have a light snooze for a few years. These songs should be enough to support you (and possibly bribe you back into Wisley). I've set up a new record label (Ludwig's Label) and bought the Civic Centre as headquarters. Don't worry about me.

Your friend,

Ludwig Beethoven

P.S. I've taken the old radio which seems to have regenerated itself so I can keep up with the times.

Alistair was eating beans from the garden. They had a half natural, half toothpasty kind of smell. Frederick fiddled with the digital radio and sighed. Across the airwaves boomed the craft of the master, resonating with the adventure of the lake, rock n' roll criss-crossing with orchestral splendour.

Who knows if this is Beethoven's finale or if he will pop up again out of the earth? If you see a man with permanently electrified hair, a suit smudged with soil, a sundial spliced around his wrist with a leather strap and a tacky car radio sticking out of a pocket, you know who he is!