

Complementary Rhythms

by Sidney Schuman

The steady cadences of pedalling and the patterns of heard and imagined music have provided me with complementary rhythms for most of my adult life. It was at eleven that I had my first bicycle, and it was at thirteen that my radio listening became more focussed on 'classical' music.

The sudden feeling of liberation brought on by learning the art of bike-riding was matched by the revelation of classical music heard on the Third Programme and then imagined in my head. The spills and thrills of those first rides were matched by Tchaikovsky's orchestral frenzies or Rossini's catchy tunes.

Then, with a few friends, I started to go on rides which followed the rule: first left, then first right, then first left, then ... etc, which ended up in various other parts of London. The destination, depending on the exact point of departure in Hackney, was completely unknowable. The music of Beethoven had the same effect - I would start listening with no idea what was to come. My brain was in overdrive, struggling to remember the layout of London as well as all those overtures, concertos and symphonies.

But worse was to come! A mad ride to Southend and back (there in two hours, back - against the wind - in five) was the prelude to exploration of the world outside London, during which time Prom concerts at the Albert Hall contributed to the expansion of my imagined repertoire.

Then I joined the Hackney Clarion cycling club and began to experience 'small group' cycling, while my concert-going moved on to the Conway Hall, where I discovered the pleasure of 'small group' music. (Why is the rapturous sound made by four pairs of hand with one heart given the po-faced name of 'chamber music'?)

My club activities inevitably led me to time-trialling, and for several years my weekends were characterised by strenuous efforts starting early on Sunday mornings. With a memory that seemed unable to discard anything musical, I would choose which pieces to 'listen' to during the 25, 50 or 100 miles that had to be covered. If I was on a flyer I might have to speed up the music, but more often I had to think of yet another piece to fill up the time before I got to the finish.

Now, with fading memory replaced by an MP3 player, I could bring my whole classical music collection out to grant me the privacy that I used to get in a time trial, but I can't get the damned ear plugs to stay in. I enjoy the club runs with the Lewisham Cyclists, but if now and again I suddenly go quiet - why, that's just me being startled again by Mozart.