

Mockingbirds in Waltons



Northern Mockingbird

“When he gave us our air-rifles Atticus wouldn’t teach us how to shoot. Uncle Jack instructed us in the instruments thereof; he said Atticus wasn’t interested in guns. Atticus said to Jim one day, ‘I’d rather you shot at tins in the back yard, but I know you’ll go after birds. Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit ‘em, but remember it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.’”

read the following, or something like it recently, ‘a friend is someone who knows your song and sings it to you when you have forgotten it. Those who love you are not fooled by mistakes you have made or about the dark images others may say of you. They remember your beauty when you feel ugly; your wholeness when you are broken; your innocence when you feel guilty; and your purpose when you feel confused.’

Everyone’s got a song as a friend, even or more especially when they’re low. You’ll sing love songs, hum chords and broken tunes and maybe, even when broken, you’ll lift a bottle to a familiar tune and try and find the dream.

A song’s like a forecast; always got the potential of something about to happen. At any time it can surge or ebb, be it in the morning or maybe just to soothe to sleep. You’ve got melodies, where notes morph, melt, glide and collide from and into teasing lips. The note will show itself off like a girl in spring and then hide and fold into itself until the summer comes inside the song.

Notes can gather speed, stretch from Ross’ point as far as Rockhall, stand and soprano to Mizen or baritone their way down to Malin. And they’ll run away from you forever, over rainbows, along side factory walls, through the rain, trains with no sunshine, into deep velvet nights where you want to sink softly forever.

I’ll betray a few years and tell you I started pharmacy in Trinity in 1985. There’s not much of that Dublin left anymore, but recently I found myself in a place that brought me back to bedsit land. A friend got me a series of singing lessons in Walton’s School of Music in George’s Street. I have to admit I was pretty reluctant to go, even the welcome and assurance from Jo,

the ever pillar of sense, when I got there didn’t help. I didn’t hear the cats, like me, only the mockingbirds and wanted to run, but the place had something going for it, like an orphan’s aura.

It’s a rabbit warren of old stairs and rooms with high bedsit ceilings and maybe it was the forgotten memory but that, for me, was the first anchor, it was like even the building itself could breathe. I’ve had the same teacher for three years now, a Polish lady called Marta. Communication can be fun there, but you don’t need words when you’ve caught a song, you don’t need words for that.

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Marta’s all about support, connecting the body, supporting the note. She’s tiny but she knows about support; when she sings it’s like all of Warsaw is behind her. Of late it occurred to me that’s what perhaps the school and it’s old biscuit redbrick are all about. That old Georgian house can empty itself of air, breathe and then it’s burren of high ceiling rooms support volumes of happiness.

John Mardirosian and his better half set up the

present school in 1994. Today, they have some 60 teachers and approx 1400 pupils per term.

His mission is and I quote, ‘It’s about balance and choice. Music is a mysterious area for a lot of people and it can be intimidating. What is important is to demystify it up to everyone ... and you have to have breath, you can’t be narrow.’

Or for children he has; ‘Music is an outlet for children that’s every bit as valuable as sport and it’s also one that offers kids a clear indication of progress. If you practise a piece with any kind of application, then the next day you’ll be better at it.’

So, I recommend, in these somewhat dark times, to go over the rainbow, or go back to a memory and learn to sing. It’s as simple as that.

Oh, and there’s one other thing; on the way home, if she’s raining, you’ll feel the rain on the side of your cheek as opposed to getting wet. That’s what singing does.

“That was the only time I ever heard Atticus say it was a sin to do something, and I asked Miss Maudie about it.

‘Your father’s right,’ she said. ‘Mockingbirds don’t do one thing, but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t eat up people’s gardens, don’t nest in corncribs, they don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That’s why it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.’

JULIAN JUDGE

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