

Special Three-Part Feature

Confessions of a Doomed Musician: Part One

Nobody should be made to suffer, especially if that nobody is your wife. But a chance remark overheard in the staff room back in November saw the start of an ongoing period during which our thirty two year old marriage had its matrimonial harmony tested to the full.

"I'll probably sell it on eBay," said one of our supply teachers across a crowded room full of cold mugs of tea and empty crisp bags. Sadly for my wife, I pricked up my ears at that point. Further conversation ensued. To cut a long story short, it heralded the arrival of another instrument in the house, one more to join the long line of half-baked failures; but more of that later. My musical roller coaster began much, much earlier.

One Arpeggio Short of an Octave

My parents both played the piano. As a result, I can hum most of Mendelssohn's 'Songs Without Words' off by heart. Come to think of it, it's a good job they did come without words or my love of singing could have led to an enhanced rate of infant mortality in my home city of Birmingham. Also as a result, I began piano lessons at the age of ten. By eleven I had stopped. Hours of practising my scales left me feeling one arpeggio short of an octave.

My parents gave in to the inevitable and apart from a few dog-eared piano books,

there is little evidence left of my first failure.

At least, however, singing required little in the way of technical ability. The junior school choir was ideally suited to my various attributes: big ears, large mouth, fair hair and angelic demeanour. By now I could read music, and singing in harmony, albeit with a few notes the composer never intended, opened up a whole new world of musical challenge.



Bob as Mabel

A Boy of Angelic Demeanour

Those self-same attributes were essential when I moved to a boys' grammar school on the edge of the city. Gilbert and Sullivan operas require high voices as well as butch ones so at the age of eleven, the angelic looks, resulted in being cast as Mabel, the leading 'soprano' in 'The Pirates of Penzance.' Ears well pinned by a blond wig, and body engulfed in a voluminous pink frock, I belted out 'Poor wandering one' to a less than impressed Frederick, my supposed beau. One memory that my mother never fails to recall was the performance when I was in full flow while simultaneously hitching up the white games' shorts beneath the pleats.

Bob Forster

In the next edition, Bob's attempts to learn a new instrument leave him, quite literally, flat on his back.