

Special Three-Part Feature

Confessions of a Doomed Musician: Part Two

After Bob's early experiments with the piano, and his starring role as the soprano in a Gilbert and Sullivan opera, he grows older but no wiser in his musical education.

Singing was still my first love. Junior school choir was finished by now so, in the absence of anything approaching talent in any other musical field, the church choir beckoned. The church was a mile away but I was able to cycle to choir practice. The cycling was, of course, part of the attraction as this was my first real bike, but there were other reasons for joining.



attraction to the church choir. There was Wendy. She sat right behind us trebles, a heady mixture of fresh soap, dark hair and alluring, deep-set eyes. I was mesmerised. For the next two years we had a fling, if the furtive twining of fingers or a kiss behind the tombstones can be termed this; after which I was flung. I was still in the choir when

my voice broke and my angelic days were behind me. At eighteen, I went off to college and into yet another choir, this time in the college chapel.

Attractions of the Choir

Singing in four-part harmony was a new challenge and one that I mastered without too many howls of protest. Then there was the money! Summers were especially rewarding because of the weddings; up to four each Saturday. Many were the bags of pork crunch bought with the proceeds at the pub next door. The annual choir camp was a further attraction but, best of all was the organised game of proper football every Saturday morning. Oh the pride with which I raced onto the pitch one morning, clad in my pristine new Sunderland shirt complete with red socks and, the tiniest pair of red athletic shorts. The crown jewels were barely covered by this ensemble and, as I had the musculature of a born-again stick insect, the red vertical stripes of the shirt made me look like Bambi emerging from the extra hot-wash cycle.

So that's singing, money, camp and football; but there was one more

All Tom's Fault!

Tom was a quietly spoken Scot from Perth who, of course, played the bagpipes- I was entranced! Before long, I had bought a chanter and a tutor book and, armed with this strangled end of the bagpipes, I soon wheezed out 'Over the sea to Skye' and other Celtic favourites. Every so often, Tom would lend me his pipes to practice on the real thing. He practised out on the wide expanses of Port Meadow; I practised up in my Iffley Road bed-sit. A cold, airless room plus the need for lots of puff proved my downfall. Tom was studying in the room below when he heard an almighty thump followed by the unmistakable wheeze of expiring pipes. Running upstairs, he found me lying flat out on the floor beneath a set of dead bagpipes. I never played them again.

Bob Forster