

SAMPLE EDITION

19

AUTUMN 2017

THE
Nightwatchman
THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

WISDEN



THE Nightwatchman

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

Cricket's past has been enriched by great writing and Wisden is making sure its future will be too. *The Nightwatchman* is a quarterly collection of essays and long-form articles and is available in print and e-book formats.

Co-edited by Anjali Doshi and Tanya Aldred, with Matt Thacker as managing editor, *The Nightwatchman* features an array of authors from around the world, writing beautifully and at length about the game and its myriad offshoots. Contributors are given free rein over subject matter and length, escaping the pressures of next-day deadlines and the despair of cramming heart and soul into a few paragraphs.

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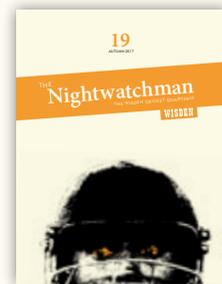
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ISSUE 19 – AUTUMN 2017

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CUE COWBELL

Scott Murray on the heritage of sport's great theme tunes – including the greatest of them all

Say what you like about BBC Sport, but they've always known how to belt out a tune. The bar was set high early doors, with the selection, in 1948, of "Out of the Blue" – a gentle march composed by Hubert Bath and performed by the Central Band of the RAF – as the perfectly pompous theme to Radio 2's *Sports Report* on Saturdays. (Radio 2 being the natural and correct home of *Sports Report*, as opposed to the Light Programme, the Third Programme, Radio 5 or Radio 5 Live, as anyone exactly my age will agree with righteous zeal.)

Since then, their run has been one of unbroken brilliance. The original 1958 theme to *Grandstand* was a jaunty string number that screamed "outdoor broadcast" with just the right amount of newsreel urgency; the title music to the first *Match of the Day* in 1964, "Drum Majorette", perfectly captured a time before PA systems killed the marching band. The replacement tunes for both programmes were, needless to say, even better. Belters.

The melodic brilliance was spread across the board. The Beeb's snooker coverage wouldn't have been half as much fun without the three-handed soloing of rag pianist Winifred Atwell or the 28-fingered riffing of guitarist Doug Wood. *Ski Sunday's* unrelenting "Pop Looks Bach" brilliantly evoked the barely-in-control thrill of skittering down the side of an icy mountain with two planks sellotaped to your boots. Similarly, the brooding pulse of "Cranes" – the darts theme – considered the existential struggle of trying to retain one's core balance with a fag on while four pints of stout, a couple of nippy sweets and a pickled egg do internal battle. A quietly dignified affair, "Cranes", when compared to the shameless Sky Sports darts anthem "Der Der Der Der, Oi Oi Oi" (if that's indeed what it's called).

Star quality has been in no shortage, either, whether in off-the-shelf selections or bespoke compositions. The World Cup coverage has been soundtracked,

one way or another, by artists as diverse as Luciano Pavarotti, Andrew Lloyd Webber, Leonard Bernstein and Stevie Wonder. The *Sportsnight* music was written by Tony Hatch, who penned "Downtown" for Petula Clark, "Joanna" for Scott Walker, and the *Crossroads* theme, later to be covered by a blunted-beyond-judgement Paul McCartney. The burping, quacking *Rugby Special* intro – that glorious evocation of fat policemen and half-cut barristers rolling around in ploughed West Country fields – was scored by Brian Bennett, the drummer from The Shadows; Bennett also did the golf and the theme to Tony Blackburn's least favourite sitcom, *Robin's Nest*.

An incredibly strong field – and we haven't even mentioned either of the Wimbledon themes or the deployment of "Bean Bag" by Herb Albert and his Tijuana Brass for *It's A Knockout*. Yet one theme is so spectacular, so synonymous with its sport, and so goddamn funky, that it stands out head and shoulders above all others. Cue insistent cowbell, one of the great intros in pop, an instantly recognisable percussive hook up there with "Lust for Life", "Smells Like Teen Spirit" and the not altogether dissimilar "Honky Tonk Woman". "Soul Limbo": the quintessential cricket theme, and the sound of a million hopeful English summers.

It was recorded in 1968 by Booker T and the MGs, the house band at Memphis soul label Stax. The group – Steve Cropper on guitar, Donald "Duck" Dunn on bass, Al Jackson on drums, and Booker T Jones on organ – would provide backing for the likes of Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett and Sam &

Dave. But they also released their own instrumental material, most notably the gorgeously sleazy 1962 blues album "Green Onions".

"Soul Limbo" was a Memphis stew of reggae and calypso, inspired by Jackson battering out the famous beat for the best part of a week before anyone could come up with a melody to match. Jones, Cropper and Dunn eventually added their Jamaican-inspired groove, and considered the job done. But Stax executive Al Bell suggested it might still need a little polish to turn a jam into a smash.

Cropper played the tape – which had working titles of "Island Girl" and "Limbo Rock" – to engineer Terry Manning and Isaac Hayes, the latter at this point just (just!) a Stax session player. Manning channelled his inner Bobby Hutcherson to add a marimba solo, while Hayes threw in some piano jangle and that cowbell. Bingo! The track was renamed and released as the first 45 in a new era for Stax: the label carried the catalogue number "Stax 0001", as well as a fine new finger-snapping logo which would become super-famous super-quickly. The record reached number 17 in the charts, selling nearly half a million copies.

Had the story ended there, it would have been success enough. But the record took on a second life soon after, when the BBC selected it as the theme for its televised cricket coverage. Once again, albeit in very different circumstances, the song proved an instant hit, no surprise given the main constituent parts did sterling work: the cowbell somehow suggests both the sound of willow on leather and the tinkling of bails



and stumps, while the hazy shimmer of the organ provides some seasonal sun. (The marimba solo was usually faded out by the time the titles had rolled, but you can't have everything.) The whole Kingston-on-Mississippi mash-up was perfectly timed for the joyous rise of West Indies, who were about to hit their imperious stride during the 1970s.

"Soul Limbo" and cricket became as one in the nation's hearts, so much so that in 1987 it was re-released by Ace Records on a "cricket-ball-shaped-picture seven-inch disc featuring Don Bradman and George Duckworth". It couldn't last forever, though, and when the BBC lost the rights to televise live Test cricket in 1999, the perfectly syncopated jig was up. Lou Bega's "Mambo No.5" would be an inspired replacement by Channel 4, tap-tap-

tapping away at the same receptors in every cricket fan's brain. An unpretentious search for a good time - and there's nothing wrong with that - "Mambo No.5" eventually became lodged in the national consciousness as the party soundtrack of *that* Ashes summer.

But it's not "Soul Limbo". Happily, the classic Booker T track lives on in the cricketing firmament, shunted over to the wireless as the intro to *Test Match Special*, which is why we're all here. Of course, some *TMS* listeners of a certain vintage will express a preference for the programme's previous choice of theme - "Florida Fantasy", John Barry's jaunty flute-and-Moog romp from *Midnight Cowboy*. Probably the same folk who want *Sports Report* back on Radio 2, but you can't please everybody.

• • •



EXTRACTS

Give me the sun and a big TV
Give me a chair positioned beautifully
Give me a hat-trick from the SCG
Give me a *Test Match Special*
And set me free

THE DUCKWORTH LEWIS METHOD

• • •

He was on commentary when David Gower faced his first ball in Test cricket. It was bowled by Liaquat Ali and Gower insouciantly cracked it for four.

"Oh, what a princely entry!"

Gower wasn't the only one who nailed it at that instant of time: with that single adjective, Arlott did the same. Could anything else have caught Gower's nature so perfectly? That presence, that languid air of being above and beyond the stuff that troubles the rest of us, that immense if slightly embarrassed awareness of his own talent: all caught in the one phrase. It was as if Arlott knew what Gower would go on to be.

SIMON BARNES

• • •

For two days I had sheltered myself from plot spoilers. Now, after eight sessions of intoxicating cricket, and with the final act in sight, would the England head coach give the game away when I spoke to him that afternoon? Could we somehow steer past current events and focus completely on coaching theory? Could I ask him not to reveal the result of the match without tossing away any credibility I had as a journalist? "Hello Trevor, thanks so much for agreeing to speak with me, but may I first ask you please not to say anything about Chittagong, because I have only reached tea on day three on the *Test Match Special* website, and the game is right in the balance."

BENJ MOOREHEAD

• • •

The names are as familiar to radio listeners as Boycott, Arlott or Johnston, they rhythm of them as stirring as Worrell, Weekes and Walcott.

Viking, North Utsire, South Utsire, Forties, Cromarty, Forth, Tyne, Dogger, Fisher, German Bight...

They transport the listener to another world, a world both mysterious and recognised, exotic but comforting. Many of us listen without understanding, or hardly listen to the words at all, rather just enjoying the sensations.

ALAN TYERS

• • •

For those of us who fall in love with cricket on the radio, it's something television can never match. Watching is purely about the sport, in its most direct method of consumption. Listening is equally about the medium. This edition will reinforce that; few topics would have provoked such a cascade of misty-eyed scribes toward the Nightwatchman office. But it's real. Vision is direct, audio is sport rendered in another form. In effect, the game becomes literature, becomes performance. Sport and art are false distinctions anyway: they're all part of pushing the limits of human capacity, pleasing the brain via aesthetics or narrative, finding new ways to generate expression.

GEOFF LEMON

• • •

Push back against the pillows, baby wriggling in his cotton sleeping bag, a stout little toad in the hole, rhythmically gulping, tiny little fingers pummeling plump flesh. England are doing badly, a too-long Australian adventure spiraling into an extended disappointment. But at this minute, listening to Test Match Special, everything is ok.

TANYA ALDRED

• • •

I'm starting with pre-history, Trent Bridge, June 1953, the first Test of the Ashes series. It's late at night, Australia are batting first, and I've been allowed into my parents' bed to listen to Alec Bedser and Trevor Bailey open the series bowling to Arthur Morris and Graham Hole. This is Hamilton, New Zealand, and the radio broadcast sounds as if it's coming from another planet. Or perhaps I'm listening from another planet. The familiar signature call of the BBC News – "This is London Calling" – has always sounded to me as if it is beamed from the centre of the universe to a remote asteroid on which I live. As the New Zealand writer Janet Frame put it several years later in her novel *The Edge of the Alphabet*: "Everybody comes from the other side of the world." That's certainly how it felt to me back then.

ROD EDMOND

• • •

Born in lowly circumstances on the edge of a South Yorkshire pit yard to a family that some locals looked down on as gypsies, he was a fish out of water and blamed for things on and off the field that he simply didn't do, such as calling a West Indian umpire "a black bastard" during the 1953–54 tour; the umpire himself told me that the culprit was Johnny Wardle. He developed a bad-boy image that was mostly unjustified and yet, to add to the complexity and indeed fascination of his story, he deliberately fanned the image when it suited, especially when it came to telling peers of fabricated occasions when he'd held plenty of alcohol as well as plenty of women. Over time, just about every cricketing story ever told stuck itself to Fred, a phenomenon he called "The Curse of the Truemans". In fact, when asked what epitaph he wanted on his headstone, he always used to quip, "It wasn't Fred, 'cos he's here."

CHRIS WATERS

• • •

At a time after the Second World War when the British Empire was dismantling itself as speedily as it decently could, something as quintessentially English as a description of a cricket match from the heart of the Mother Country must have been reassuring to those in far-flung parts fearful of this political fragmentation. If one of radio's missions was to act as social adhesive, some of its strongest bonding agents appeared to be dance-music and news that Len Hutton's forward defensive remained in good working order.

SIMON WILDE

• • •

It was the first day of the Headingley Test; this was the game where Geoffrey Boycott, as obdurate and unchanging as the conveyor belt of Stanley knives that rattled around the factory all day, scored 191 against the manic and destructive Australian bowlers. And I wanted to hear it because somehow, in my mind, cricket was like art, or poetry; it was the contemporary not the modern. I'd put that to my mate Dave at North Staffordshire Polytechnic and he'd said that he agreed because watching Boycott was like watching paint dry.

I worked it out; at the tea break, when the conveyor stopped and the music continued, I'd rush the office like I was occupying an embassy. I'd brush Mr Fawcett and his choirmaster's protests aside and change the station to Radio 3. Just as I did so, Boycott would hit a glorious six and everybody would be converted to The Really Beautiful Game. The idea was brilliant in its simplicity; the intellectuals on the Left Bank would have been proud of me, raising tiny cups of espresso in salute.

IAN MCMILLAN

• • •

Baseball and cricket, as culturally distinct codes of bat-and-ball, share many broadcasting idiosyncrasies. If baseball is what happens when the British game of cricket is played in America – as history shows us that it is – then America, equally reliably, is what eventually happens to Britain. Sure enough, cricket is now being baseballised with the flat throws and power hitting of screen-friendly T20.

And both of these distant sporting cousins still work spectacularly on the radio. No one can quite agree why that should be so, even if a relaxed pace of affairs – an average baseball game comprises 280 pitches over three hours – and a diligent sense of tradition are obvious ingredients in the recipe. But there seems to be an element of magic, of audio sorcery, at play. What happens to the crack of the bat and the whoop of the crowd and the thud of ball on glove as they rise from wobbly lines on a sound meter up through the airwaves and hundreds of miles with the birds into our homes? Why are we drawn to the people who describe these simple acts of bat-ball hoopla as if they were family members?

MIKE PHILLIPS

• • •

Half of commentary is mood music: the sound of a voice, the sense of a presence. Listening in the car or the kitchen, or watching from the sofa, we need the commentators to be good company. On the telly, Richie Benaud had this quality, and Mike Atherton has it now. On the radio, many have had it, and most of all CMJ. He wasn't comical like Johnners, lyrical like Arlott or blimpish like Blowers, but he was a vital member of that cast, radiating courtesy, clarity, decency, and – the attribute so valued by players and coaches – composure. In the classic *TMS* line-up, he was not so much second fiddle as the bass player. He wasn't short of opinions, but he was a reporter first, giving the score, setting the scene, engaging the agnostic. When he did pass judgment, he would do it in a way that was eminently humane, balanced without being bland. In the days when the Test team was announced only four days ahead, Sunday lunchtime in the shires was defined by two things: the smell of a roast, and the sound of CMJ trying to make sense of the selectors' whims.

It didn't have much to do with being posh – Henry Blofeld, from a similar background, settled on a very different style. It was about being a class act, with the knack of striking the right note. If Johnners was the master of comedy and Arlott of poetry, CMJ was the master of tone.

TIM DE LISLE

• • •

On the fifth day of the 1990 Bridgetown Test between England and West Indies there was a sudden knock on the door of the *TMS* commentary box. Peter Baxter, the producer, went to answer it. Outside there was a large man, with a piece of paper in his hand. Baxter instantly knew he was a bailiff because his job title was handwritten in biro on a badge on his lapel. The bailiff was after Christopher Martin-Jenkins, who was commentating on the game. Baxter blocked the doorway and turned his head back towards his colleague to warn him that he was a wanted man.

STEVE NEAL

• • •

So when we learnt that Arlott was a poet, we were delighted, my Gran and I. Not that this led us to actually reading his poetry – just knowing he was a poet was enough for us. We shouldn't even have really been surprised, on a moment's reflection. He's even got a line of his own poetry on his gravestone: "so clear you see these timeless things that, like a bird, the vision sings."

TIM BEARD

• • •

The mystique of clipped English accents that so mesmerised deferential Australians of that time didn't beguile Maxwell so much. "McGilvray was my beacon," he says. "His voice was very distinctive. My young cricketing brain wanted to hear what was going on. They were just a lot of voices, but with McGilvray standing out. Whenever he was on he took you into the game in a way that no one else could. I felt more confidence listening to McGilvray than anyone else, knowledgeable as they may have been."

ADAM COLLINS

• • •

The commentator is the one at the helm. He – or she (I was lucky enough to be alongside Donna Symmonds when she became *TMS*'s first female commentator in the Caribbean on the 1997–98 tour) – describes the action and leads the conversation. He or she is in charge of proceedings. This has always struck me as a far more demanding task than the role of the summariser. It requires proper broadcasting skills, which includes the ability to listen to instructions in your ear while saying something comprehensible with your tongue. On the 1993–94 tour of the Caribbean, I was asked to commentate, which I happily did. I'm not sure how it went. I do know I was not asked again.

VIC MARKS

• • •

The choice of new-ball pairing to start a Test match is always a crucial decision – not just on the field but at the microphone too. That morning’s team selection blessed us with Henry Blofeld and Phil Tufnell: the most entertaining commentary-box duo of recent years. To steal a Blofeldism, they were both in mid-season form as they greeted us while the pre-match formalities frothed in the background. Above the wafting strains of “Jerusalem”, we learned that England’s songstress-du-jour, Laura Wright, was wearing a striking mauve dress which Stuart Broad’s sweater could beat in the length stakes. But the length of Broad’s sweater was no competition for Gary Ballance, who had “the longest jumper in the business”. Then, there was an eruption of cheers to greet the England fielders, and Blowers – fighting to be heard over the hubbub – conjured a succinct homily to Trent Bridge: “It’s a magic ground, small... and the most perfect cockpit for cricket.”

JON HARVEY

• • •

As for so many cricket fans, the denizens of TMS have provided an aural accompaniment to my domestic summers for many years. No matter that I could only actually attend a fraction of the hundreds of Test matches, one day cups and what have you during my half century of obsession with the summer game – Messrs Marks and Selvey, Foxy and Tuffers have always been there for me, and it’s been nearly as good as being there for the real thing. I’ve listened in innumerable theatrical digs up and down the country, tuning in in the wings of theatres, hoping for a crucial wicket before going on stage, or catching the odd surreptitious snatch of commentary at wedding receptions, christenings and funerals. And don’t get me started on 3am at Brisbane and Perth.

MICHAEL SIMKINS

• • •

In truth, it was the drink that brought a premature end to his *TMS* career. In the 1960s and early ’70s, the BBC was pretty relaxed about how their commentators refreshed themselves. But when Cliff Morgan took over as head of Outside Broadcasts, and Peter Baxter succeeded Michael Tuke-Hastings as *TMS* producer in 1974, attitudes hardened. Drink was banned from the commentary box, an edict which Alan greeted by turning up on the Monday afternoon of the 1975 Headingley Ashes Test, already well-refreshed, with a pint glass of whisky and water. For Cliff Morgan, the ensuing debacle was the last straw. “He doesn’t broadcast tomorrow, see. I don’t care what you have to do,” he told the producer Don Mosey. The embarrassment of an on-the-spot sacking was avoided, thanks to the George Davis protestors who dug up the Headingley pitch that night and prevented play on the last day. He was on the way to becoming a most celebrated and still fondly remembered cricketer writer, with his reports on county cricket in *The Times*, but he never worked for the BBC again.

ANTHONY GIBSON

• • •

To borrow a phrase from Bob Marley, Gerald de Kock felt rather like a “sweepstakes winner” when he walked into the dressing-room of the West Bromwich Dartmouth Cricket Club as a young man. The year was 1983 and De Kock – fresh from his two-year stint in the South African army – was recruited to play a season in the Birmingham leagues. Quite suddenly, he found himself rubbing shoulders with sundry West Indians and Asians and the occasional Australian professional or two. Ron Headley, son of George, was still a part of the Birmingham club scene, as was Harshad Patel, cousin of the New Zealand Test all-rounder, Dipak. He looked around at this embarrassment of cricketing riches and couldn’t believe his luck.

LUKE ALFRED

• • •

Paint a picture, our producer on *TMS* Adam Mountford begs us, but when the picture is an incoherent mess that Jackson Pollock would have rejected for being too formlessly bewildering, naturally we sometimes stray into fantasy. This is easier than you might think. My first commentaries when I was a child were all vocal articulations of my wildest inner cricketing fantasies. Initially I was the hero taking centre stage. Lillee, Thomson, Roberts, Holding, Hadlee and Imran Khan were all left breathless as I bestrode the greenswards of Manchester, Melbourne and Multan like the great nine-year-old colossus the world knew me to be. Impossibly attractive girls would watch on, gasping in wide-eyed, almost tearful amazement at my prodigious feats, proclaiming their love under their breath and vowing to shower me with gifts as diverse as a lifetime supply of chocolate cigarettes and five boxes of toy soldiers from the 7th Armoured division, “The Desert Rats”.

DAN NORCROSS

• • •

Fear is not an emotion you associate with *TMS*. Fear of an Aggers wind-up, maybe... Fear of eating too much cake, fear of having to switch off and miss something vital, like whether Moeen Ali is the first bearded player to take a Test match hat trick, or whether Geoffrey Boycott believes in the power of feng shui... But real, sitting-in-a-park-outside-of-Edgbaston-on-day-two-of-England-v-Pakistan-2016-wondering-if-you-can-keep-your-lunch-down fear? Well, I can tell you, when you’re about to go on *TMS* for the first and very probably only time, fear is real...

JON HOTTEN

• • •

At its best, *TMS* in the 1970s was like jazz. The play on the field provided dominant themes, which the commentators and summarisers developed, sometimes in unlikely directions but rarely without fidelity to the cricket or consideration for each other. And for all that critics moaned about public-school influence among the team, I found their personalities contrasting and their voices distinctive. Arlott, who only commented in the first half of the day in order to give him time to write his *Guardian* copy, brought a true writer's eye to the cricket. Yet he combined it with an appreciation of the game befitting one who had begun watching Test matches in 1926 and a quickness of thought which poets rarely need. He seems to me to rank with people like Alistair Cooke (*Letter from America*) or Jacob Bronowski (*The Ascent of Man*) among the great communicators of the post-war world. Arlott's imitators may have got the Hampshire accent right but they could never match his mastery of language or range of reference. At the recent Trent Bridge Test, people were still wearing T-shirts emblazoned with Arlott's face and the words, "The Sound of Summer". For over three decades it was true – although the embarrassed subject would disclaim any such title and would surely insist on the indefinite article.

PAUL EDWARDS

• • •

There were few things the world needed less in the summer of 2016 than a new paper scoring system for cricket matches. There were, after all, already fully functioning paper scoring systems. History will record that this renowned planet of ours had several more pressing demands clogging up its collective in-tray in 2016. And it had become abundantly clear that the Internet, with all its instantaneous-cricket-scoring possibilities (surely Tim Berners-Lee's most positive and lasting legacy for our species), was no passing fad about to disappear down the same historical plughole as powdered eggs, Betamax and former celebrity Ancient Greek deity Zeus.

ANDY ZALTZMAN

• • •

What people most like to know when they find out I am *Test Match Special* producer is what some of the characters in the box are really like. Surely Geoff Boycott can't be as belligerent as he sounds all the time? And keeping control of the free-spirited Graeme Swann must be a nightmare? Well in many ways a lot of what you hear on the radio is exactly what it is like. Henry Blofeld lights up the box every day with his eccentric wardrobe. Ed Smith is to be found nose in a book of which Phil Tufnell can only understand one word in three. But in other ways the characters are not quite what you'd expect.

ADAM MOUNTFORD

• • •

"He almost made it through. His face was absolutely buried in the paper but it was that snort of Frindall's, just at the moment when Brian was taking a breath – that's what did him in the end," remembers Agnew. "That's when he just collapsed. And so on it went from there. I actually felt quite sick halfway through to be honest, but when you are totally corpsed up like that, it's an impossible situation because you can't broadcast."

RICH EVANS AND JONATHAN AGNEW

• • •

THE **Nightwatchman**

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