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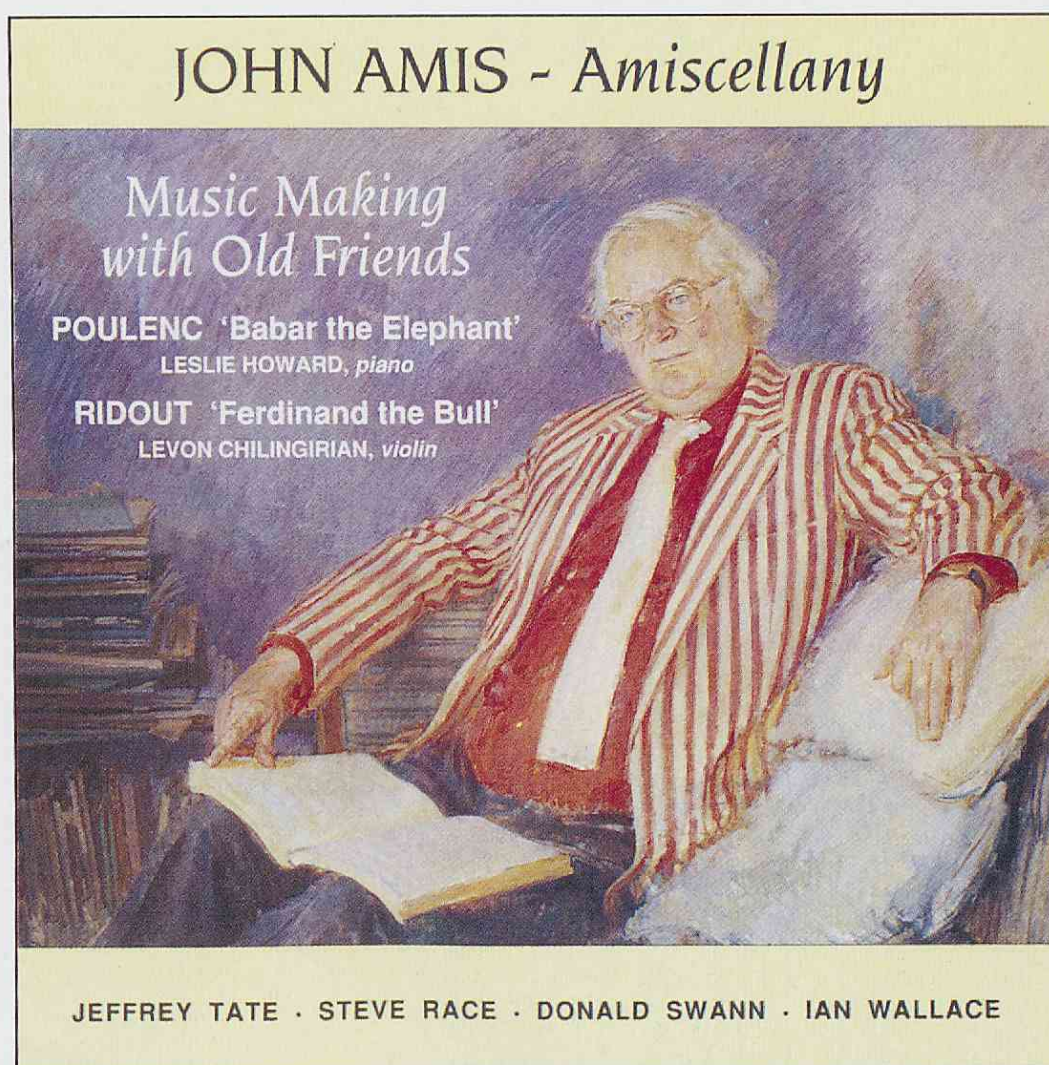
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JOHN AMIS

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'Babar the Elephant'
Leslie Howard, piano

RIDOUT
'Ferdinand the Bull'
Levon Chilingirian, violin

Poems, Songs and Whistles by

Edith Sitwell, Amanda McBroom, Poulenc, Haydn, Grainger, Elgar, Marc Blitzstein,
Steve Race, Schubert, Penelope Thwaites, Malcolm Arnold, Donald Swann

performed by

Ian Wallace, Steve Race, Donald Swann, Leslie Howard, Levon Chilingirian,
Jeffrey Tate, Nicole Tibbels, Thomas Hemsley, Penelope Thwaites, Lyn Garland



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forward, black tights in the heat, A-line skirt, white blouse, maroon cravat, green blazers with maroon trim, all topped off with a curly bowler hat as they line up proudly to receive their gongs.

A closet embroideress, Mary Corsar has surrounded herself with framed embroidered samplers, hand-woven rugs which commemorate each WRVS anniversary, and mementoes lovingly crafted by volunteers over the years, making her utilitarian skyscraper office an almost homely affair.

In the boardroom nearby hangs an enormous wall tapestry which shows WRVS gels at work. It is the lone handiwork of founder Lady Reading, a gel who believed that the devil finds work for idle hands. On these grounds, she kept her own hands busy embroidering during the interminable meetings which took place from 1938, when the service began, until her death in 1971. It was the Home Secretary who charged Lady Reading with a mission way back in 1938 — to recruit women for Air Raid Precaution Services.

She was obviously good at it, as a year later there was a membership of 165,000 which grew to a million after war began. Here they were, Britain's plucky housewives, handing out clothing, running billeting, nurseries, mobile and static canteens. During bombing they were on the scene salvaging, helping the homeless, and feeding emergency teams. And, from the first, there were meals on wheels. Since then, there has been no stopping them.

Mary Corsar is the epitome of the WRVS woman of today — outside, the fork lightning crackles, thunder rumbles and roars in what is fast becoming a London flood emergency, inside her office, she remains unflinching. 'The only time I worried was during the last hurricane when the building started shaking,' she confides.

These gels are built of that stuff which made Britain Great: duty, backbone, discipline, commitment, cookery and sewing. Selfless service to the community is its own reward and most helping volunteers get no more than expenses and a smile of gratitude (if that) when the meals on wheels arrive or the crèche is opened. A charmed few will receive the British Empire Medal, while the lone CBE (Dame Commander of the British Empire) goes to their chairman on retiring.

Of course, numbers have diminished a little since the war. Those were the days when WRVS members met our boys returning from Dunkirk. In one day, legend has it, while the WI was still bottling

fruit, those plucky WRVS gels served 16,000 cups of tea and buns to troops passing through York station.

At its peak during World War II, the services of WRVS' one million members were in such demand that civil servants had to run the WRVS so that our gels could get out there helping families with evacuation, meals on wheels, clothing, nurseries and emergency feeding. Oh, halcyon days!

So what has changed? Strangely enough for a peace-torn country, they're still doing much the same thing here in Blighty apart from evacuation. From modest beginnings of 5900 meals on wheels, they now produce 17 million a year. And they have added hospital shops, contact centres and prison visitors' canteens, amongst other things, to their battery of selfless service to the community.

Today you'll find them on beaches, up mountains, in forest fires and by flood waters — anywhere that an emergency is in the offing, no matter how large or how small. Oh yes, and as long as they're asked to turn up by the emergency services.

They'll be the ones running canteens and rest centres for the homeless and looking after victims. 'We do so much, that it's true a lot of our members have no idea of all the different things we do', admits Mary Corsar, a trifle guiltily.

Indeed, it's fair to say that the WRVS marches for other people's stomachs, even producing pamphlets telling people how to cook the EC way. Mary Corsar herself began in the WRVS as a meals-on-wheeler before getting sucked upward to greater things.

Now, 30 of the WRVS' most intrepid volunteers are on permanent stand-by ready to go at a moment's notice anywhere in the world that has been overtaken by disaster. When they arrive, while international rescue teams go looking for survivors or war rages around them, you'll find our gels setting up the emergency grub tent. Back at HQ, they're busy showing women displaced by war how to cook under impossible conditions too.

'You're not going to cook on an electric cooker or a gas ring under those conditions; you've got to be prepared to make a fire out of the materials you find and cook properly on it,' says Mary Corsar, herself a former Girl Guide leader to whom a pair of dry twigs and a ray of sunlight represent infinite culinary possibility.

An exciting life for oldies? Yes. 'We have a lot of retired people join us, but we do have a rule that we don't appoint any-

body over 65 as an organiser,' Corsar says in her soft Scottish burr. 'You know you get to a stage where, with the best will in the world, you're not as with it as you once were.' (It's fair to assume that present company is excepted.) 'Also there's no doubt that you, um, discourage younger people joining if they see you as a lot of elderly ladies.' Heaven forbid, especially when ten per cent of the membership are elderly men. 'We've got to improve our image. I do think that we have to produce something more professional and up-to-date, not so fuddy-duddy. We've suffered from this elderly, middle-class image.'

She agonises over the intricacies of modern marketing to people who have never heard of it and have even less idea what the WRVS stands for or does. 'We're trying very hard to get away from it and to make people realise that you don't have to be either elderly or middle class in order to join us,' she explains. Imagine a WRVS full of non-U twenty- and thirty- somethings. All the current members would up sticks and leave.

As if to prove the point, HQ is no longer in ultra middle-class Mayfair, it's in Brixton. However, as many new recruits are introduced by chums who are existing members (middle-class, often elderly), she's got an uphill struggle on her hands with the class notion. What's more, people who volunteer for unpaid work during the day usually have some other means of support — so that cuts out a lot of the young and people on lower incomes who are too busy earning a living.

Could things be changing at this Great British Institution? Mary Corsar says not. Always an ominous sign, though, the WRVS needs more money and the Home Office is not being forthcoming enough. 'It's for equipment, training, more professional staff and volunteers' expenses,' she assures.

'Up to now, every single penny we've got from hospital shops, we've returned to them. We're suggesting that a small proportion should now come back to further WRVS work,' she explains. The first steps of change have been taken. A questionnaire designed to find out what members thought of this heinous idea was recently sent out. 'We wanted to test the water,' she explains. 'It has been extremely useful. We will continue as we are but be more professional and not so "hand to mouth".'

The problem for mere mortals is that the WRVS keeps such a low profile that no one knew it was unprofessional or having difficulty getting by. Perhaps that's changing too.



DID IT. Hatched a gosling in my incubator and got Audrey to accept it. I scooped it into a tiny egg-shaped basket, rushed it down to where Audrey sat on her eggs, and flipped it out on its back in front of her. As she pinched it gently with her beak, as if tasting it, the other geese bustled up and softly tugged its still damp down with their beaks. I watched to see if their tweaking should turn to something more sinister, until the gosling pushed under Audrey's wing. Now the crows sit on the fenceposts as the geese process and parade with the tiny yellow thing safe in their midst. A different kind of predator pounds the telephone. *Am I having a reunion with my mother?* I haven't been estranged from her. *Didn't she arrive at the weekend?* (The fuss was not surprising, since the purser on her Qantas flight, despite instructions, told all the other first-class passengers who she was.) My goslings are safe, but reptiles are stealing my life.

The right to privacy is like most other rights in that it does not belong to those who cannot defend it. Persons who meet a violent death in any place where news is being made have no defence against their bodies being seen naked, bloated, bloodied and distorted in Sunday supplements across the world. Fat people can eat breakfast regaled by images of emaciated children who were photographed even as their eyes were glazing in the merciful onset of oblivion. Catatonic mothers are filmed, videotaped and photographed from the moodiest angles with their dead infants in their laps and these likenesses are beamed to all corners of the globe. The purveyors of these sacrilegious items tell us they sell them merely to bring home to us the pity and the terror. What this exploitation of the helpless actually shows is our contempt for suffering, especially the suffering of the poor. I live in hope that some young Ethiopian will bring a multi-million-dollar suit against the media that desecrated his family's death-place and covered the walls of his mind with horrific images of his family's humiliation and anguish. No one's life, be he a blind beggar or an illiterate peasant or an overdressed princess, should be stolen for any reason, least of all for entertainment.

Those ignorant savages who imagine that the person who takes their photograph steals their souls are of course neither ignorant nor savage. They are right. Sometimes the photographer will offer a consideration, a fraction of what he will get for the image to which he will keep the copyright. As often as the picture is



Germaine Greer

Stump Cross Roundabout

reproduced, the theft is repeated. In the 1950s, a photographer from the *National Geographic* took a picture of a laughing boy of the Beni Amer. The picture was hung in every fly-spotted bar and beloved of Ethiopians, who called him the Mick Jagger of Ethiopia. He made money for hundreds of people, the photographer, the magazine, those who reprinted the pictures, those who sold them. Nevertheless, the boy and most of the Beni Amer are gone, wiped out by starvation and civil war. The acids of grief and privation ate that beautiful face away long ago.

The boy of the Beni Amer was a private person and he remained so, because, despite one attempt to discover what became of him, he was exploited only this once. He could have been managed, massaged, developed, parlayed, finessed into a media star among media stars, with a song to match his dazzling smile and words to express the joy of life that beamed from that picture. A thousand parasites would have worked on him, saying that they were working for him but all the while working for themselves. He could have been groomed, exhibited, merchandised. The beneficiaries would

have been legion; the only loser would have been the boy himself. Other people would have reinvented him in a format that they could understand and manipulate. The *quidditas* that was his birthright, his human uniqueness and unpredictability, the unprogrammable part of him, would have been reformulated in a language of cliché, the excreta of the parasites that fattened off him.

The right to invent oneself is priceless. The pretty girl who agrees to show her breasts to a press photographer or validate the career of an awkward prince will do so for some kind of bribe, but the true price of her transformation into a cliché will be paid by her and not by those who benefit from it. As the commodity she has become is sold a hundred, a thousand, a million times, she is depleted. She becomes as common as the earth beneath our feet and the air we breathe. Every sadist, every yokel, every hick has a right to think he knows her, knows her intimately, knows her better than she knows herself. If the Princess of Wales is to survive the hideous and unnatural proliferation of her image, she

must become a monster who exploits and

Illustration by John O'Connor

enjoys her ghastly destiny. Though she may run, she will never be able to hide. There can be no turning back. The simplicity and spontaneity of a private person are lost to her for ever.

I did not myself understand how a life could be stolen until a man I was married to for three weeks accepted a huge advance from an American publisher to write his story, his story about me. He was offered 30 times what I had written *The Female Eunuch* for, because he had been married to the author of a best-seller. When the book was published I read it, curious to know his side of our story, and found I could recognise hardly anything in it. At first I tried to make it fit my own memories, then I tried to make my own memories fit it. A dead spot developed over my eyes, as if I really was one of those prisoners of war driven mad by water dripping slowly onto a bucket placed over his head. If I walked in the street I became confused and disoriented; if I stayed at home I became obsessional, reading sentences of the book over and over trying to understand how a man who loved me once could ever have thought that anything like it had ever happened. Eventually I taught myself that he was too drunk on most of the occasions that he described to have had any clear recollection of what was going on, but the people who paid him the money wanted what he could not remember, the 'real truth' about me, so he made it up. He invented me, and the me he invented is more real to the people who have read his book than I am. My own publishers asked my permission to publish his book alongside mine. My reaction, namely horrified amazement, was interpreted as a crude exercise of power in an attempt to frustrate my husband's legitimate literary ambitions.

Since then I never willingly read a word that purports to be an account of me. And because, like royalty, I never sue, the accounts have become grosser and grosser impositions upon the credulity of the public. Now, the reptiles have begun to create my mother. The *Evening Standard* invented both a time of arrival in England and a close family friend, who informed the world that my mother had never been to England before. The Murdoch press long ago decided that she 'abused' me; if I thought my mother could stand public discussion of the case I would sue them for criminal libel, but she cannot. The lie keeps on spawning more lies, so that reconciliation between unloved daughter and unwilling mother is less likely today than ever. Well done, lads.

An Orthodox Voice

by John Michell

How lucky we are to have Prince Charles! He is the most advanced idealist among us, and in everything he says and does, from encouraging the quest for true standards, through geometric proportions and the harmonies of music, to visualising this country and then the whole world as reflections of paradise, he rarely puts a foot wrong. Of course, like everyone else, he has his weak spot, and this was exhibited the other day in his speech calling for world-wide population control.

By imputing blame to the most harmless among us, young mothers and children, he is playing straight into the hands of the international usurers, whose ideal society is made up of a few rich, orderly consumers signalling each other by computers and faxes. The source of his error is the insidious myth, promulgated everywhere by boastful governments, that under their rule the wealth and numbers of the people have vastly increased. It is assumed that populations in ancient times were much smaller than now.

Traditionalists have always opposed this myth. The great 18th-century Scottish philosopher, Lord Monboddo, showed that the ancients were larger as well as being more numerous than we today, and William Cobbett saw that, in Britain at least, the countryside was less populous than in olden times. His evidence ranged from the ubiquitous earthwork enclosures of prehistoric times to the derelict hamlets where medieval churches were built for the former hundreds of villages. To prove his point, he surveyed a humble settlement, Horton Heath, consisting of 30 cottages grouped around a common. It was, he said, the sort of place modern economists would call a wasteland; yet, counting up the variety of produce raised by the 200 inhabitants, not to mention their craft products, he showed that

these 150 acres yielded far more real wealth, while supporting a far greater number of independent people, than the same area would provide under commercial cultivation.

Shortly afterwards, Horton Heath was enclosed, its people were carted off to an urban slum, their traditional skills and culture were lost and their labours were diverted to the spreading of disease and pollution. The harm they were made to do, as involuntary servants of the Industrial Revolution, was not caused by excessive numbers. It was due to the THING (Cobbett's name for the prevailing thought-form) which removed the Horton Heath folk from their maintenance of the wealth, beauty, population and culture of the countryside to being employed to destroy all those things together with their own well-being. The trouble is not that there are too many people in the world, but that too few of us are integrated with our habitats, and too many are sucked up into centres of power, money, industry, and vice generally, deprived of our natural functions, deculturised, alienated and set in opposition to our own natures and to nature itself.

There is only one answer to this and it is simple: to rediscover and readopt the traditional world view and the science of sacred landscape design which naturally develops from it. Vestiges of that science can be found in traditional societies everywhere, particularly in the East. Its object is to combine harmony and beauty in the landscape with a large, high-spirited local population. In imperial China it was a state science and was called *feng-shui*. If you care to, you can study its principles in the literature and learn how everybody now on earth could be accommodated within the terrestrial paradise which every new baby has the expectation and right to be born into.

Lord Shawcross

Chief prosecutor for the British at Nuremberg, Attorney General in the Labour government and chancellor of Sussex University, Hartley Shawcross turned his back on politics in the Fifties to concentrate on a life in British industry. Now ninety, he talks to Naim Attallah

You began your political career as a socialist, but there would be few who think of you any longer in that light. Does that surprise you?

No. It depends of course what you mean by socialism. I was always a radical, still am. I come of a radical tradition, and in the 1940s, up to the 50s, socialism was the creed of most radicals. Mr Kinnock is now saying very much what I said in 1951. He has abandoned socialism in the old sense, and socialists are really now social democrats in the continental sense.

You sit on the cross-benches in the House of Lords. What was it about socialism that began to make you uneasy, and when did that unease start?

It started about the middle of Mr Attlee's government when I found it really wasn't working. One of the first measures for which I had a major responsibility was the reform of the trade union law, including the restoration of the rights to engage in almost unlimited picketing. I was sure the trade union members would be loyal and would not abuse this right. But in fact, within a year or two, it was being gravely abused; we were having mass picketing and a lot of unofficial strikes. That, I think, was my first disillusionment. Then I was president of the Board of Trade which brought me into contact with industrialists and the working of industry. I was only there for nine months, but I learned a lot. I then realised that state control of industry was not working efficiently, and that it was characterised by a great deal of bureaucracy which was almost impossible to eradicate from the system.

Did you know Attlee well?

Very well, and I admired him. I think he will go down in history as a very able prime minister. He was of course deputy prime minister throughout the war, and responsible for a great deal of the more detailed work on day-to-day administration while Winston Churchill was the great leader. Attlee was a tower of strength to him, and although they didn't get on very well socially, Winston did rely on him during the war for being an honest, responsible and helpful person.

You turned your back on the Labour Party in 1958. Many people at the time and since said that it was in order to reap the rewards of the boardroom. How do you answer that?

There is some truth in it, but I could have remained at the Bar. After the fall of the Labour government at the end of 1951, I went

back to practise at the Bar, and I built up possibly the leading practice of the time, although fees in real terms were not so high as they are today. According to the newspapers, I was making the largest income at the Bar, but I couldn't save anything. The taxation rate left me with about sixpence in the pound. I had a wife much younger than myself and three children and we had no private means. I was very much concerned with the obvious probability that I should die long before my wife did and probably before my family had grown up, and that I must make provision for them. That really forced me to go into industry, where I could enter into some arrangement which insured a pension covering my wife. That was the basic reason for leaving the Bar.

There are repeated efforts made by the right to tar all socialists with the totalitarian brush. Is there any sense, do you think, in which socialists are bound to be anti-libertarian?

When I was a member of an undoubtedly socialist government, we were, to some extent, anti-libertarian because we believed in the efficacy of controls. A great many controls and restrictions on liberty were essential during the war, and we carried them on during the period of demobilisation and reconstruction after the war. But it must be remembered that even after the Labour Party went out of office in 1951, many controls had still to be continued, such as rationing of one kind and another and exchange controls. Some degree of restriction on complete liberty is probably necessary in any system of ordered government and is more likely to occur when that government is of the Left rather than the Right.

The larger-scale experiment with socialism — namely communism — has gone badly wrong. Why do you think that was? After all, it's not such a bad ideal.

There was a strong, largely underground movement of communism in this country immediately following the war, naturally encouraged by the success of the Russians. The communists made a great effort, with some success, to secure control of the trade unions. As I was aware of these efforts, I helped to support the more orthodox, right-wing trade union leaders who were fighting to maintain a degree of democracy in the trade unions. I was involved in the case which destroyed the communist leadership of the Electrical Trade Union, for example. In the end, communism failed because it took no account of the natural instincts of people both to improve their own condition and to enjoy a certain amount of freedom and liberty.

How far do you think the government ought to interfere in busi-

Dear DA Green

Am I allowed to
include any of your
? Stamp Cross in the
Oldie annual (coming
November) ?

Also when is the
Don Giovanni

Love

Cynome

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