That’s Where The Music Takes Me

I love music but I have to admit that as I have got older I don't love it quite so loud as I used to. I also think there is a time and a place for it and shopping precincts or busy main streets are not it.

It’s not that I don't like buskers. My son is a musician and has busked on many occasions while trying to scratch out a living from his art. Its just that they seem to have all gone electric and amplified on me; amplified to the extent that they seem to be encroaching on my personal space and on my eardrums, and I am now beginning to avoid those places where they hang out.

Gone are the days when buskers sauntered along with their trusty old acoustic guitar in a battered and well-travelled canvas case, which they laid on the ground and you were happy to put a few coins in. They provided a pleasant backdrop to your shopping experience and some ambiance to the street. Nowadays, they arrive with the full range of equipment; guitar (more often than not electric), amplifier on stand and capable of scaring old ladies and children who happen to be passing by, and a microphone to dance around as well as sing into.

Add to that the now obligatory box of CDs showcasing their work and for sale at not much less than I could buy the latest Ed Sheeran or Rita Ora offering from the nearest WH Smiths or even stream it online for free. The end result is that even the homeless that used to hang around there have got fed up with the level of noise and moved on.

If you're really unlucky you'll hit town on the day that the 'troupes' are in town. This can be a bunch of drummers doing their best to recreate the dance and face-distorting routines that we see at some rugby internationals, or a couple of fire-eaters, tossing flaming torches at one another as they juggle bowling pins (well they look like bowling pins to me!) as they stand on one leg. All to the beat of the obligatory loud soundtrack.

If your are really lucky - or unlucky in my opinion - then you may just get your car parked in time for a whole group of buskers (yes they're now forming groups) with a whole lot more electric wizardry around them and eager to put on a full scale rock show right there outside your favourite boutique or bookshop.  Just what you need to help you browse the displays and drown out any conversation you try to put together.

Now, I am all for the performing arts. I am even all for them performing in the street. But I would like them to be more of a background feature and not a street version of the X factor. It’s in their interests as well as mine. In the past I would quite happily have stopped to take in the gentle guitar playing and pleasant voices whilst I dropped my coins into their bag. Now, well I wont' be stopping any time soon as my ears can't take it or I may just get my hair singed from the flaming torches.

Besides, if they can afford all that equipment then I will find some other worthy cause for my hard-earned cash.

Tom Kelly

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