

Bill Rea ? There's bad music too

Many, if not most of us, enjoy music; some of us more than others.

There are, of course, certain factors that come into play. They include types of music, which involve things like personal taste. In my case, my tastes are eclectic, broadly covering the whole spectrum, delving deeper in certain cases, with exceptions. For example, I love most of the music of the Beatles, but there are a couple of exceptions. If I'm driving with a music station on the radio, and a Beatles tune comes on, I usually crank up the volume. But if that song happens to be Hey Jude, my finger is finding another station ? pronto! I abhor each and every note of that song. There are many reading this who love that piece and hate what I just wrote. I don't care.

Some of us think back some 35 years when disco was all the rage. While there were some exceptions (Village People being responsible for most of them), the music that came out of that particular movement was mostly, as far as I'm concerned, rubbish. I was in university during its prime, and danced a lot of Saturday evenings away in the campus pub. But, as they say, it was the only game in town.

Then we come to some types of music that no one likes, such as what is commonly known by a couple of names, like elevator music or Muzak.

There's really not a whole lot wrong with that type of music, depending on the source. In my early teens, while my father was part owner of a Canadian Tire store, I was sometimes taken to the establishment Sundays to help out ? ?Pressed into service? was the way the Royal Navy referred to it about 200 years before that, but I did know from where my weekly allowance was coming. The point is when we got the store, Dad usually cranked up the Muzak before we got down to work ? Slavery is much more bearable if you can hum to it. I have seldom heard any complaints about the music we hear in stores, etc.

Indeed, some years later, a high school choir I was part of performed at a function that had been organized by the Provincial cabinet. My music teacher at the time (one of the very few people from my high school days with whom I'm still in touch) told us we were to provide ?dinner Muzak,? which we did. The premier of the day (the one and only Bill Davis) was appropriately appreciative of the singing, told the teacher that and made sure her charges heard it. There were about 100 voices in that choir, and some of those kids already had votes (myself included) and we had parents who definitely had votes, and Davis wanted as many of them as he could get, since an election was coming. And before anyone accuses me of bashing Davis, Stuart Smith and Stephen Lewis (the guys who led the other two major parties at the time) would have done exactly the same thing. But the music was great even if we weren't on an elevator (I know, I was there).

Then there is the bad music.

Have you ever been put on hold for a while?

In my line of work, it happens on occasion. And in some cases, while you're on hold, you're ?entertained? with music. There is a certain advantage to that. While you're hearing the tunes, you know you have not been disconnected, even if you have been put on forget.

Having had that happen lots of times, I have heard a wide range. Sometimes the music is not bad (sometimes, it's even tunes by the Beatles). But there are other times when it's insipidly repulsive drivel.

We in the Citizen office were treated to a prolonged helping of such drivel last week. The demands of the company required contact with a particular agency (no further identification is required). The staff member who was obliged to deal with this agency was put on hold for a prolonged period, and since she had other things to do, she turned on the speaker of her phone and went about her other duties. So for more than an hour, the entire office was treated to a form of music that brings to utter discredit the whole concept of background music.

And I wonder who actually benefits from such a creation. The tune that we heard constantly was far from entertaining. It wasn't quality music. The people responsible for its composition and performance probably don't brag about it. I certainly wouldn't if I were in their shoes.

To think it took such drivel to make me a music critic.

Remembering Richard Whitehead

Richard Whitehead and I seldom saw eye-to-eye on anything to do with politics.

He was a Liberal, and fiercely proud of it. I'm a red Tory, and offer no apologies.

Richard died last Wednesday. He was 71. In many ways, I considered him an adversary, but also a friend.

It was our respective differences that characterized our association, especially since we both enjoyed baiting each other. For example, when he returned to elected office in 1991, I boldly predicted a week before the election that he didn't have a chance. His 'roots have been out of the ground too long, and they're not anchored,' I wrote at the time.

Richard, of course, never let me live that one down.

It is true that Richard had a tendency to hog the microphone at meetings; more so in years past than recently. But it was also true that he had lots of points to make. His knowledge and grasp of issues was considerable, and maybe a little frightening. His ability to recite facts off the top of his head was formidable. I was always impressed with the way he could work seemingly irrelevant facts into a discussion and demonstrate how they were connected.

In the days after last fall's municipal elections, I took a call from one man who was upset that Richard had been defeated in his bid for another term.

'How could they let a guy with his knowledge go?' he asked me.

What could I have said?

'If I'm in a Trivial Pursuits tournament, I want him on my team.'

He was also very hard working, getting to many events throughout the town, as well as Peel Region.

It is a basic reality of political life that all things must come to an end, and I believe Richard knew that as well as anyone. I talked to him a couple of days after the last election. I detected disappointment, to be sure. But there was no bitterness. It was part of the lot in the life he chose to follow, and he accepted that.

Richard told me at the time his plans for the future included doing some writing, and I was looking forward to reading the results.

He will be missed

