



Keeping up with the Joneses

(continuing ... David's adventures in London, many years ago ...)

I was so busy during my year in London! Did I have a job? No; as I mentioned in an earlier story, I 'made a living' by busking with my flute, at least until deep winter set in. And that was only a half-hour or so each day, only a few days a week. Was I studying flute at a school or with a teacher? No, I never had so much as a single 'lesson' all year. And I had neither the place, nor the inclination, to spend much time practicing. What then, kept me so busy? What was I doing every day?

What I was doing, was simply enjoying London! Right after breakfast each day, no matter what the weather was like, I picked up my little 'briefcase', inside which was my flute and a very battered 'A to Z' city atlas, and headed out into the vast city. If I was planning to do some busking that evening, then I would plan out the day in such a way that my walking route would bring me near the concert hall at the appropriate time for catching the maximum number of 'customers'. Until then, for the whole day until it was time to 'work', I walked, and walked, and walked.

There was no corner of the central areas of London that I didn't come to know. I found a library in the Holborn area that had a special collection of books about London history. I would devour one of the volumes, and then set out to visit the places that had been mentioned in it.

If it was rainy, then I wouldn't even think about busking that evening, and would spend the day in one or another of London's incredible public buildings. The British Museum was of course a regular stop on my travels, but I actually preferred the gigantic Victoria & Albert Museum, over in Kensington.

They had a vast collection of antique musical instruments, which I suppose is what caught my eye at first, but what sticks in my mind now, thirty-five years later, are my visits to the galleries known as the Jones Collection. This was a series of seven connected rooms at one corner of the building, containing a collection of European furniture and decorative artifacts from the 18th century. Was I particularly interested in such things? Not on the face of it, but there must have been something special there to attract me, because I returned to those galleries time and time again during my year in London.

Thinking about this now, I can only guess that what drew me to those objects was the incredible craftsmanship that was everywhere at hand - the delicacy of the inlaid marquetry furniture, the wonderfully carved ivory ornaments, and the miniature paintings and sculptures. Mr. Jones must have had very good taste!

And it was all just sitting there for anybody to see and wonder at. You came in the large front door of the museum, walked down a short flight of steps at one side of the concourse, and a moment later you were in the quiet galleries. No admittance fee, no guards hovering at your elbow, just you and the incredible objects on display.

I can laugh now, about the fact that I probably never - not once on many repeated visits to the V&A that year - spent any time at all in the rooms upstairs that held ... one of the world's most important collections of Japanese prints! I must have walked by those galleries without even giving them a second glance!

Isn't life funny!

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