



In Retrospect

I spoke last week about old family photographs, and of course as part of the 'research' for the story, I dug into some of the boxes in my storeroom looking for the old photo albums. After finding them I enjoyed a nostalgic hour or so browsing through the photos, but the story didn't end there; I also came across something that I hadn't seen in years - a box full of cassette tapes.

I haven't had a working cassette player in years. The one in my component stereo stopped working a long time ago; but because most of the music I listen to these days is from CDs or streaming over the internet, I hadn't bothered to get it fixed or replaced. When I browsed through this box though, I found many cassettes containing music that I had once enjoyed very much; it would be a shame to feel that I would never hear them again.

So a couple of days later, when I was downtown on another errand, I dropped into one of the big electronics retailers and picked up a small cassette player. This wasn't something worth spending too much money on, so I just got a simple portable unit that would let me play each cassette while copying it to my computer, where the music data would then be available 'forever'.

I've had such fun listening to this old music! The fidelity isn't very good, but that doesn't matter so much; it's just pleasant to get reacquainted with the old favourites. And I found a few items that are real 'treasures'. One I had completely forgotten about is a recording of a 'big band', made more than 30 years ago. Why is it a treasure?

Because I'm on it! This is very rare; back when I was an up-and-coming young musician, the only useful recording equipment was in professional studios. Home recording was pretty much non-existent. I have spoken in these stories now and again about concerts in which I performed, but nothing has been preserved.

I remember the story behind this cassette. I was a member of what is known as a 'rehearsal band' - a group of people who get together to practice and play, even though there is no real prospect of work available. It was an 18-piece big band, and the chances of such a large group finding much work were slim indeed. But we enjoyed playing and learning, so we met once a week for a good workout, followed - of course! - by a couple of hours in the pub.

It's not easy to find a space for a group of that size to rehearse, but one of the members had a connection with a local college, and arranged for us to use one of their facilities, even though we weren't students there. We thought we had a pretty good group, and some of the members even wrote original music for the band.

One day the member who had a college connection told us some interesting news; the college wanted to use our music for some kind of promotion and was willing to pay for a professional recording session, in exchange for permission to use the music. We of course jumped at the chance, and a short time later, found ourselves in one of Vancouver's professional recording studios. We had a fabulous time making the recording, and a few weeks later, when the boxes of cassettes arrived (there were no CDs in those days) we were proud to see the results.

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This is the cassette that I found the other day. Listening to it now - with much more dispassionate ears - I can clearly hear that it is an amateur effort; we are too loud, too fast, and just generally too undisciplined. But we sure had a lot of fun, and that's the important thing, isn't it!

Perhaps my kids will now believe that I was once able to actually play something!

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