

The Bughouse Blues

Pistachio glared at me. Vranduski frowned and Zankowitz sneered. I had just dropped a verbal bombshell into their complacent lives.

They continued to glare, frown and sneer while I sat there in gleeful silence. I, whose only musical accomplishment was the ability to play the phonograph...and the radio, had given those three famous musicians something to think about.

Pistachio was one of those long-haired boys; he played first piccalo with the Vranduski Symphony Orchestra. Vranduski, of course, was the conductor.

Zankowitz was a far-famed singer of Irish folk ballads. He also composed those little advertisement-jingles which are the delight of every radio-conscious housewife...

"When everything goes flooey
Use the soap that's known as Gooley!
Gooley's suds last so long
That you simply can't go wrong!
Mrs. J. K. Dewey uses Gooley
Why don't you-eeeeeeeee?"

Ah, yes...

Finally Vranduski spoke.

"My friend," he said, "You are mistaken. These blue songs... pah! They stink!"

Pistachio's gurgling voice came to the surface.

"I second the motion," he muttered loyally, "Vranduski—he is right. But then, of course, he is always right. These blues songs, bah! Stink? They smell to high heaven like a dead cat under a door step. That last is a quotation from a poem. One of my favorites. Like a dead cat..."

Zankowitz interrupted.

"I agree with Mr. Moffatt (a bow to me) but I also agree with Pistachio and Vranduski. (a bow to them) Attend! I explain: Moffatt says the blues song is immortal. I disagree. The blues cannot be considered real music. Real music comes from the heart..." He smote his chest. "From the soul..." He smote his head and was forced to readjust his spectacles. "But the blues come from the body...the physical—and is dressed up to appear as though it came from the heart, you see? No, it isn't immortal. It is, shall we say, immoral?" He paused for the laugh. No one did. "Now! Moffatt says that the blues music did not originate in the deep south...in this place...what is it...Basin Street? He says that the blues were sung in ancient times also. There, I agree with him—but only there. Otherwise, the Blues stink and are not here to stay, as the saying goes..."

Pistachio stood up. He waved his arms and popped out his eyes.

"Then it is decided! The blues she is nothing! She will not last!"

Vranduski murmured, "Bravo!"

Pistachio sat down. I stood up.

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"You are entitled to your own opinion concerning the blues... that is, whether they are or are not real music. But I assure you, gentlemen, that the blues have been sung for ages and am happy that Mr. Zankowitz agrees with me."

Zankowitz beamed.

"Yes," he said, "I have noticed certain blues notes in my Irish ballads though, of course, I always try to suppress these....er.... undesirable elements...."

Vranduski leaped to his feet thus forcing me to a sitting position.

"So all right! So there are blues notes in Irish ballads! SO what? They are not so ancient! And Mr. Moffatt mentioned ancient music!

As they say in Japan, Wa ka re mas ka?"

"Wa ka re ma sen," I replied, "But where did you learn to speak Japanese?"

He thrust out his chest but it failed to overlap his stomach.

"I once played in The Mikado."

(I later learned that he did have a bit part in this Gilbert & Sullivan masterpiece and had spent weeks learning to speak Japanese. When he discovered that there is as much Jap lingo in The Mikado as there is English in Col. Stoopnagle's dictionary he attempted to commit suicide; he was caught in the nick of time by some kind hearted policeman....)

"Tell me," I inquired, "What do you think of David's song poems? And Solomon's for that matter?"

"David? Oh! You mean David The King by Gladys Schmitt?"

"Well....yes. Though I had the Bible in mind..."

"Ah! So that's where she got her ideas! Stealing from the BibleCome to think of it, I read some of those Psalms and the Songs of Solomon some time ago---that is---"

"And the Book of Job and the Lamentations of the Prophet? "

"Uh..yesss."

"And do you agree that the Bible is considered one of the best books of poetry by many of our literary boys?"

"Yesss...wonderful poetry. Wonderful song lyrics..."

"And when you read Job and the Lamentations and the Song of Solomon...what impression did it make on you?"

"Some of the songs, they were so beautiful; they make me sigh. But mostly they make me feel blue..."

I leaped to my feet. Vranduski fell to the bench.

"There!" I shouted, "There you have it! You admit that those ancient songs made you feel blue. And that is exactly what a blues song is supposed to do! Huzzah! I win!"

Vranduski hung his head. Pistachio imitated the dejection of his employer.

Zankowitz smiled. He patted Vranduski on the shoulder.

"But the blues still stink," he consoled, "These modern blues, that is. Just because the blues have degenerated down through the ages is no reason for you to weep. You still have your classical music. You still have Chopin and Bach and..."

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"Aw, shaddup!" growled Vranduski. "I-got-those-lost-an-argument-to-a-man-who-dunno-nothin'-about-music-Blues..." He began to hum softly.

Pistachio hummed with him. Zankowitz yawned. A restful peace settled over our little padded cell.

I stretched myself on the floor and wondered when the man in the white coats would bring us our supper.

The End

Monsters I Have Known"



JSW

