

The Birth Of A Song

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Puerto De La Cruz, Tenerife, September 2010. My wife and I are having a week in the temperate sun. I'm not one to sunbathe and having heard, for the umpteenth time, the same rolling news on the one and only English-language TV channel, one day I decide it's time to go for an exploratory hike.

At around 10am I set out with backpack, water and precious little else. I like to travel light – no maps, GPS, food, sun-cream, hats, umbrellas, rain-capes etc. In a place where you can always see the sea, where everywhere is on a hill with the only place to go being 'up', 'down' or, occasionally, 'flat for a while' you can't really get lost.

For a time I walk along the gradually ascending coast road and I'm able to look down onto a series of increasingly distant coves. Most of them are deserted but some of them host a few sunbathers on dark volcanic sands that have been ground down by millennia of tidal forces. I walk through banana groves with their beautiful but sinister Triffid-like flowers. Then I decide it's time to ascend the foothills. To achieve this I have to experience some life-threatening excitement and run to then leap over the central barrier of the busy non-pedestrian-friendly dual carriageway.

Very soon the sounds of the road are muffled and eventually extinguished by distance and vegetation. The going gets steeper and I now lean forward and put my back into the job of maintaining a steady pace. After the strange creatures whizzing by in their tin boxes on the motorway I've hardly seen a soul and welcome the isolation. I'm now in a quiet landscape that feels as if it has always existed and, somehow, will remain unchanged for a long time.

I walk through small sleepy silent villages, hearing the occasional human voice from behind closed shutters. My mind's ear provides an imaginary translation: 'Hah! Another mad Englishman out in the midday sun'.

I go off-road for a time and after traversing a difficult, ancient-looking and rugged volcanic feature I emerge onto a level tree-lined avenue. I'm very high up now and can look far out to the sea on my left and at more hills rising steeply on my right. The shade is most welcome as I don't like to stop on these hikes, preferring to fish the water bottle out of my backpack and drink on the move. It's all about keeping up the semi-hypnotic walking rhythm and besides which, as the effort starts to bite, not wanting to stop because I know that starting again will impose some discomfort. I can see the land falling away a couple of miles in the

distance and realise the climbing is over, the hard work is done and it will eventually be downhill all the way. I fall into a steady rhythm and become aware of my footsteps which, though perfectly regular, seem to suggest a rhythm. Well, they don't, but my subconscious does. 'One two and three and one two three, one and two and one two three'. I listen to this for a while then a melody starts to surface from somewhere to accompany the rhythm.

Now what about a concept? That comes easily. The landscape, the quiet, the ordered desertedness suggests the illusion of something created, self-aware and self-maintaining. A world that exists for its own sake. One that doesn't need Man and may indeed be better off without him. Gaia in fact, the very personification of the Earth.

All I need now are the words. Something about birds. And the gentle sea breeze. The imagined distant ancient lands that lay far out to sea. The feeling of wanting this experience to go on for a long time.

"Listen to the birds" pops into being. What? 'Where did that come from?' I ask my subconscious.

"Listen to the birds a-singing their song" it says. "Heed the wind just echoing"
'Don't stop, carry on' I tell it. So it dutifully continues and delivers the rest of a first verse.

"As I climb the hill to view the far lands
Birds and wind are following
The higher I climb the more I see
The higher I climb the sharper I be
If I could just meld into the land
If only I were to be here forever
If I could be one with the land
And become eternal in Gaia's hand"

Now I'm worried. How am I going to remember all this for the duration of the six-mile return journey? I've lost too many ideas in the past through failure to recall my own creations. So the voice recorder on my mobile phone comes to the rescue and it comes to pass that I do remember, and another two verses will follow later on.

Eventually I return to the hotel, completely walked-out but very self-satisfied. 'Had a nice walk dear?' says the wife. 'Quite pleasant dear' I say as I ponder the statistics. 12 miles. 210 minutes. 24000 steps. 1600 vertical feet. 3780 breaths. 18000 heartbeats. 440 notes embracing 230 words in 288 seconds. And the best statistic of all: 50 centilitres of the coolest, most refreshing Canarian beer I've ever had the pleasure to consume.