

Recording of the week: South African gumboot guitar

This week's selection comes from Dr Janet Topp Fargion, Lead Curator of World and Traditional Music. I was studying Zulu street guitarists in Durban in 1984 when I met Blanket Mkhize, a guitarist from Glebelands male hostel in Umlazi township on the outskirts of the city. Blanket had a fascinating...

Proposed withdrawal of Stagecoach X8 bus service



I have raised with the Commercial Manager, Stagecoach East Scotland, the negative effect of the proposed removal of the X8 bus service that runs through the West End travelling to/from Perth Royal Infirmary from/to Arbroath and taking in both Ninewells Hospital and Royal Victoria Hospital.

This issue has also been highlighted by my colleague Perth and Kinross Councillor Willie Wilson and we have pointed out that removal of the X8 will mean that the only linking hospital service between Dundee and Perth will be the X7 service which uses a coach-style vehicle, totally unsuitable for passengers who have mobility difficulties as virtually all seats are upstairs.

Stagecoach has not given the X8 a decent chance to get established as it only started last summer. On the other service – the X7 – it uses coaches that only have one space for a wheelchair, have no dedicated built-in access ramp and the amount of seating on the lower deck is restricted to only two cramped seats immediately behind the driver. There are no facilities for buggies and prams to be taken on the coach apart from them being dismantled and loaded into the boot.

I have said to Stagecoach's Commercial Manager that he should give the X8 a

proper chance to build a passenger base, but if the company is determined to take the service off, it absolutely cannot leave the X7 with the coach-style vehicles. I have long-said to Stagecoach that must have a vehicle type that is suitable for a bus service that serves three hospitals – the coach certainly is not.

Governing ourselves

The one senior job I have held which I grew to dislike was the job of being the UK's Single Market Minister. I was faced with an avalanche of new draft laws which the EU wished to put through in the name of the single market. It was difficult to see how most of these laws would help people buy and sell more with each other. It was a simple power grab for the EU to take control of more and more policy areas and laws. It was clear they would often keep out competition, limit innovation, favour the large incumbents and put up costs. They were united with the Customs Union approach, seeking to keep out non EU imports. I defined the job as damage limitation. Which draft laws could the UK persuade others to help block, to hold them up altogether? Which laws could be amended to limit the damage they did? Could smaller and more innovative businesses be exempted from them? We had our wins in all these categories.

The task was, however, made more complex by the fact that large parts of the UK civil service always wanted us to reach a deal. Quite often they would ensure my hands were tied by taking the issues to a Cabinet Committee which itself was primed to prefer deal to no deal and set minimum objectives for the UK to reach an agreement. It was usually easy to secure these objectives, because they asked for too little, or because it appeared someone would tip off the other key negotiators what my required bottom line was. They then usually offered it to me quite early on as they knew I would dig in until they offered the full requirement. Some realised I probably preferred no deal in most cases.

Some of the draft legislation was bizarre. They usually wanted to set out how certain goods or services were designed and offered, in ways which sometimes did not allow the UK method as their draft was based on some continental model. The UK then had to work hard to get amendments to allow us to carry on with successful business models we were using.

As we exit the EU we need to make sure Ministers provide good leadership to their officials, explaining in future we wish to turn our backs on this way of legislating. It is high time we had the self confidence to pass our own laws that can be good for both customers and businesses. They should not set out how everything is to be done, as that gets in the way of competition and innovation. Laws are needed to ensure honest dealing and safety, but are not needed to tell businesses how to make things or to define services.

War Memorial Boys and Girls Hostel (WMBGH) at Dehradun Inaugurated by Chief Minister Shri Trivendra Singh Rawat

War Memorial Boys and Girls Hostel at village DandaLakhond, Dehradun was inaugurated in a grand ceremony by Honorable Chief Minister of Uttarakhand Shri Trivendra Singh Rawat on 18 Mar 2018. The ceremony was also attended by General Bipin Rawat, Chief of the Army Staff.

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Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Shri Radha Mohan Singh addresses the Valedictory function of KrishiUnnatiMela 2018

The developments in the field of agriculture and the efforts for the betterment of farmers made under the guidance of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi are bearing fruits. The efforts of the last 3 years have brought about a qualitative change in the life of farmers.

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