

The Final Overture of Roy

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“Oh! Shut up, Roy.”

My brother Roy complains in the mornings of his cramped quarters. He has a point. We’ve been here for years. Despite the extensions I built onto our original shopping trolley, it’s no longer comfortable.

“There’s no elbow room!” he whinges.

He throws his arms about.

“How do yuh ‘spect me ta practise in this confined space?”

“Pull your feet in,” I tell him.

“I need more room if I’m gunna express myself physically as well as musically,” he moans.

His harmonica has got bigger, and the compositions that he is now practising have become more complicated. More room would come in handy. He is now playing the piano as well, but there’s no way I’m letting a piano in here. He can stick with the deal I’ve got with the music store for him.

The classics lend themselves to greater expression. Roy is very keen on expression. I try to explain to him after we’ve done our Tai Chi.

“Our trolleys probably have the best location in the car park.”

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“Rubbish, Jack!”

Roy begins to play some Bach

His Bach Fugue in D Minor is quite something. Constricted, I call it. He is obsessed with it at the moment. He’s amazing with his harmonica. He plays it over and over in a bid to attain perfection. Roy plays everything by ear. The noise is like being dragged through a tumble dryer. I don’t want to discourage him.

The long ending in G major resounds across the car park like a Kenworth Prime Mover looking for a parking spot.

“Today is your Big Day out,” I remind him. “It’s the Boxing Day Sales.”

“Yuh rekonn!”

“Roy, you won’t be playing Bach today.”

“Yeh! Well it weren’t my choice!”

“Why not warm up the 1812?”

It’s a big day out for both of us. I like to think that today will bring a severing of the cords that once bound us. A transition to a new life that has come about through the chords that Roy found for us. We’ve built a life here. We live on the edge.

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“Keep calm, Roy.”

“Calm! F...”

“Roy! Language!” I cut him short.

Roy’s been suppressing the fears we both have had recently. He has visions.

“The police are closing in on us. Look! Flashing lights. There, look! Bodies bucking and flinching.”

He’s sweating. He can’t breathe.

“Here!”

I hand him a brown paper bag.

“Blow into that!”

He knows the drill.

“Thanks.”

He comes round and down.

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“We’ll sell up when the moment’s right,” I reassure him.

“We’ll have ta move.”

He groans through a lower note of the mouth organ. Begins the first bars of the 1812 Overture softly taking himself to another place. He’s unsettled.

“ I need a place of grader inspiration. The sea...the sea. I need the inspiration of the sea.”

“Roy! You’re becoming just like all those other Australians who long for sea views.”

“We don’t have a sea view.”

“Look Roy! Even if I put several more storeys onto our shopping trolleys, we could only get ocean glimpses.”

“We’re not that far from the sea.”

If I do it, he’ll find something else to complain about.

“You’re afraid of heights.”

“How do you know?”

With Roy everything is largely operatic. To make my point I become expansive.

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“Look!”

I adopt my Aristotelian tone. Roy has to be presented with a logical argument. I demonstrate for him in bullet-point fashion.

“We live not far from Vanuatu.”

Roy follows my index finger as if it's the universal Sat. Nav.

“Vanuatu is in the d'Estrecaesteaux Fracture Zone. Such a seismic active zone could create a massive tidal wave affecting the eastern Australian seaboard. QED! Fundamentals of real estate Roy!

Tsunami, tsunami, tsunami!”

He follows my finger towards the east.

“What's the value of a sea view? We'll all be swept away soon, even without the factor of a tsunami. So why risk it?”

His eyes glaze over before I even complete my argument.

“What...tever”

Roy's shrug displaces more dandruff than I've seen anyone else shed.

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He angrily punches out some more of the 1812.

I can say unequivocally that I have tried from the very first day our mother left us to think positively.

Mother let us go. We were too much for her, both of us in the shopping trolley. Made even more difficult by Roy's screaming.

"Piano! Piano! I wanna piano!"

Music was Roy's first love. From the age of four he knew he wanted to be a concert pianist. He dressed in the glitter he found. The ukulele was never going to be enough.

Roy's capability of representing the instruments of the orchestra is amazing.

Aldi did have some Baby Grands on sale once. Gone by the time we got inside.

Gridlock outside 6.00ish. Crash up derby inside.

"Mine! Mine!" The plaintive sounds of the punters clambering across other specials.

Some got whole Grands. Others got a keyboard or leg. In the trolleys, and all finished by 8.50 am.

"Yuh could've got here earlier." The whine from Roy's voice filled all spaces.

I get every Aldi flyer delivered weekly and read them from cover to cover. They're never likely to come up again.

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“I tried, Roy. I don’t think we would’ve got it in the trolley.”

“I’ve seen people comin’ outov Aldi’s wif fridges in their trolleys!”

I have to counter his artistic temperament by being a calming influence. That way I’ve been able to take some of the anxiety out of his life. I speak quietly to him.

“They’re family people. They all help each other, Roy.”

“We’re family.”

The strains of the 1812 Roy is currently playing follow the mood of the day perfectly.

He can be aggressive.

“We’re alone, Roy.”

Mother was always under so much pressure. She had a part time job, yet Father constantly entreated her to get another job and...

“Why haven’t you finished the ironing?” He’d yell from the couch.

Why they had to buy yet another property, I’ll never know. I know there’s this obsession with real estate in the country, and Roy and I have been punished because of it. We’ve made good with living



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in a condominium made of shopping trolleys for eleven years. If more homebuyers considered mobiles like we have, it'd take a lot of heat out of the market.

“Value added” pieces of real estate I call them, just lying around waiting to be picked up by the astute buyer. Roy and I have done well out of the Mobile Home business with our collection of stainless steel modules. They just click together like the covered wagons of the Wild West.

Our mother rushed everywhere. She spun like a CD. Racing from shop to shop. Picking things up here, dropping them there. Putting things on Lay-by. Joining as many loyalty programs as she could. Returning unwanted items at the same rate as she purchased them. Her Ipad buzzed with links to online outlets.

Even *Wonder Woman* had time off, but not our mother.

She had to let us go as the weight of the trolley was beyond her control.

“Mother! Mother!” I called out as plaintively as I could muster at the time.

It was a day firmly etched into my mind.

She grimaced and clutched her imitation Louis Vuitton handbag to her chest. We went rolling down the ramp in free fall. Not the slightest flicker of a wave from her as she thrust her hands out in front to break her collapse. She hit the concrete apron with force. Her despair was clearly evident as the gap widened between our trolley and her.

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Roy still regards the separation as an irreconcilable schism.

“You must learn to forgive, Roy.”

He’s hard Roy, hard.

I saw it all. It was a terrible experience for her.

She was splayed on the car ramp, a source of distraction for some shoppers. They had to swing violently to avoid her prostrate form. Some couldn’t make the diversion in time, and as we drifted apart I observed trolleys bumping into her. Her arms flailed the air as she was hit time and time again.

It was unfortunately, at a peak time. I heard sirens. Fire engines raced up the ramp. Ambulances followed. Her trauma must have been immense. Scarred by the sense of abandonment!

Roy and I drifted across the car park, gathering pace as we dropped down the different ramps. We flowed like eddying water from level to level through the car park. Our trolley spun and spun, and rolled across the perfectly troweled concrete aprons. We finished up lodged among the shady wattles and sprawling grevilleas. Our mobile quarters are now firmly established in that section of the car park that the trolley pushers describe as,

“A place too far...”

They leave us alone.

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I figure we have the essential item of any permanent dwelling, firm footings.

The food in our trolley did not last more than a few days and we reverted to the ancient pastime of hunting and gathering. I do most of the hunting while Roy helps out with the gathering.

Getting food was always the challenge. Roy used to lie in the trolley and cry.

Elderly men wandered by and furtively circled us. My role was to stand by the carriage and look downcast.

In the early period of our confinement our sores gave us away as unfortunates.

“You’re lost!”

Was always the opening line. Still is. Followed by,

“You poor...”

It is easy to see that free speech is not common in public.

“Thing...”

To get them to understand the seriousness of our plight, I’d have to tell Roy out of the corner of my mouth.

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“Cry harder!”

The coin drops.

“And your brother’s lost too?”

This said with a raised inflection of concern.

Flushed with the success of appropriate empathy, they ventured forth with help.

“Can I... do anything?”

The pattern was always the same.

Occasionally, a patron tickled him.

His ability to flip the trolley over is startling and, he then crawls from the mall to our estate on the rim of the car park with the trolley on his back just to spite me.

It still happens, although not as often.

I can see he’s fuming at the moment.

“You’ll get nothing until you get back...to...self control.”

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“I’ll do a Mahler on you!” He threatens me.

He knows how Mahler’s Fifth frightens me. The finale in D played on the harmonica is terrifying.

He’s started on it now.

“Not the Mahler Roy! Save it for later.”

He goes back to the 1812.

We just knock things off while people are putting their trolleys back. *Microwave* frozen packets dropped here and there! Women shoppers, children in tow, baskets filled with produce, flat out know what they’ve bought. They provide us with a balanced diet.

I’m constantly on to Roy about a balanced diet. He won’t eat his greens. I pitch arguments about the complexities of the food chain cycle and the dire outcomes of anorexia, which I tell him has become a scourge in our affluent society. Roy is a hard case and sits there drawing on his *Just Juice* countering with a typical sneer.

My defacto responsibility weighs heavily at times, but right from the start I knew it was up to me to nurture him.

We spent time looking for that policeman our mother had told us about.

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“Roy, I think you need to warm up a bit before we go across to the centre.”

“Whart...ever!”

“I’ve got to get your clothes ready.”

At the end of that first month, we knew we were on our own.

“Here Roy, try this on.”

I’ve a nice reversible jacket for him. It is demure on the outside and flashy for the right moment on the inside.

Our father was a kind of *South Park* character. He lay on the couch in front of the TV every night. His grunts synchronised with incoherent wind passing. He had been a failed jockey whose eyesight had become so bad he could no longer see the winning post or work out where he was in the field. His last race finished at a canter. The stable had to let him go. Redundancy, it’s called. His package came with copious amounts of straw.

“Perfect, Roy.”

I give the jacket a dust off.

Father was a busy man and could be forgiven for his quick flashes of emotionalism.

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“The Open’s about to start and I’ve got to look at the Big Bash as well. Don’t expect me to...you know. Oh God! Not another Covid update!”

His gift to us is slight stature. It is an asset to anyone who has to live in a trolley with attachments.

I forgave him. Roy can’t. As soon as I mention our father, Roy erupts.

“He’s a ...!”

“Roy, he’s your father.”

“Yeh, and he’s a ...!”

Roy has learned some bad habits from the trolley boys and girls.

“Roy, all parents go through difficult periods.”

“Not from birth!”

This is the Big Day. In my own humble way, I’ve worked things our way.

“Here we are, Roy,”

We’re at Centre Stage in the complex. There’s a piano in place. The plan is that Roy will begin with the Pastoral sequences that he will play in his brilliant way, ad lib, to provide a hypnotic effect.

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“Up you go, Roy.”

The elderly males suddenly collapse out of their stares. They applaud him as he begins. He is their saviour. If it weren't for him, it would be kinked necks and sore throats from snoring.

The music store has been his apprenticeship. I've got him centre stage in the Mall. This'll be just the shot for the performance of the complex pieces he claims he no longer can give value to in our humble dwelling. For this arena, the Centre Management has provided the latest Grand Piano with in-built electronics. The works!

I've provided the further background electronic loop that will accompany him. Full orchestra! It is Bernstein's performance via YouTube. It is a potted version of the piece.

I got him work. Roy has an amazing ear! He hears something once; he can play the thing from beginning to end. As with Mozart, he never has to even hear the whole piece. It certainly is “Mozart for madness” with Roy. After a full recital of the Magic Flute, he becomes “becalmed”. It's like he is one with the great composers.

I got him a job in the music store window on keyboard. Roy's taller than me and at fifteen has a hand span the breadth of Franz Liszt. This gets him across any number of piano keys with little effort.

I'm into management. So I manage Roy's enterprising career.



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Roy is so good at working the crowd.

The crowd is beginning to gather. They come dragging their purchases as if they're crossing the Russian Steppes. Roy's playing is supported by the backing, and moves from the quiet to the tempestuous, then back to the quiet again.

He does a quick turn around with his jacket. He turns it inside out. The sequin-studded jacket livens up the event.

He now thumps out *La Marseillaise*. A brief interlude added to the overture later in its creation.

He knows how to get the punters all going. The blokes in the shiny shorts are wide-awake. Some of them look like they fought during the 1812.

Roy told me he had it all worked out how to get the fans onside.

“Insult their intelligence!”

Shoppers are streaming out of stores. They sense a major event.

“Roy, you can't do that.”

“Our politicians have been doing it to us for years.”

Only a young man, but such insight!

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This is the moment. We all live for this moment. *The Voice, Australia's Got Talent*, and now Roy!

He's out there!

He rips open his Velcro clipped trousers to reveal a further sequin-studded costume underneath.

He leaps about the stage as if conducting. I race to the lighting board and flick on the schizophrenic lighting, that I had pre-set. He is all sparkles! The laser lights play out their magic.

“Parasites, para...sites!” He sings at top voice.

The customers not yet quite on the scene scream back from amongst functionally arranged clothing racks.

“Parasites...yeh...para...para...sites.”

All shoppers rush en-masse towards the entertainment area carrying their products with them.

“Afterpay! Afterpay! Afterpay!” rumbles from their mouths.

Store alarms that have been activated by clothing tags, are ignored. They ring out like warning bells. Such is Roy's animal magnetism that the customers become fans...become fanatics.

“Parasites! Bums! Dole bludgers!”

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His hands begin to leap across the keyboard.

The crowd love it and chant back at him. The colour is amazing in the crowd, and they wave their off- the-rack clothing back and forth.

“Parasites! Bums! Dole bludgers!”

And of course their favourite saying of all shouted with full nasal force.

He pauses and holds everybody in suspense. Hands suspended above the keyboard.

“WHART...TEVVVVER.”

Now, it’s my moment. I introduce Roy from my roving mike.

“Ladies and gentlemen! Products of western materialistic narcissism...”

The place is rocking. They love big words.

“Narrrcisssim!” They shout back.

Boy, it’s great to be alive. I work my way through the crowd. I push here, and shove there. I roar into the mike.

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“ SELFIES! SELFIES! We might be! Buuuuutttt at least we’ve learned one thing... THE VALUE OF ENTERTAINMENT!!! annnnd... herrrrre, he is! The BOOOY brought up in a TROLLLEY...ROYYYYYY!”

I kid you not! The place resonates like a Nuremburg rally. The crowd wave their colourful clothing purchases back and forth. I slip amongst the crowd. It’s all Roy.

The electronic performance continues in waves.

“Roy! Roy! RRRRRoooy!”

He puts everything on pause for the moment. He is resplendent in the sequins and silver suit. The costume jewellery reminds me so much of Mother.

“Youse bin enjoyin yourselves?”

Roy hides his own nervousness so well.

“Yes! Yes!”

The response reverberates beneath the acoustic tiles.

“Yehhhs...ahhh...ahhh...yersh!”

Roy roars back at the fans.

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He's back on the piano. He's everywhere. Finally, free from the confinement of a trolley, Roy has found true purpose in his life.

“Handsup if youse’r enjoyin yourselves?”

Hands shoot up everywhere. The crowd is frozen in the hypnotic flickers and flashes of laser lights.

“Sway to the right if youse bin enjoyin yourselves.”

I relieve the left hand pockets of our customers of certain possessions in those fleeting moments. My stature allows me to rabbit around quickly from pocket to pocket.

“Sway to the left if youse bin enjoyin yourselves.”

It is a quick reverse for the ones I missed. It's great to pick up a bit of revenue.

“Nothing like a Boxing Day Sale, hey!”

Roy has great punch lines.

“SALE! SALE!”

Roy's voice is at fever pitch.

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“Got somethin SPECIAL for youse today!”

The crowd has got the message that there’s something real special about to happen.

“SPECIAL! SALE!”

The fans on the second floor are hanging dangerously over the balcony above the stage. Their fists are in the air. They are as one.

“UP TO 50% OFF MARKED ITEMS!!!”

The roar sends tangible prickles down my spine.

Some small children are distressed at being crushed against the railings.

Roy makes a gesture that gathers them all into his arms. They are one with him.

“The Overture of 1812 by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.”

The name just falls off Roy’s lips. The crowd pick up on it as if they’ve been waiting all their lives for this Russian moment.

Roy is back on the job.

“Illlyyyitch!!!Illlyitch!”

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The crowd is frenzied. They're in raptures at being exposed to Russian culture. They sway back and forth.

“The 1812 SALE! 50% OFF”

The brass of the orchestra comes in on cue.

It never ceases to amaze me how a once a year sale can bring the country together. As a nation we can be divided over so many things, even irrational. But a once a year sale! It is the most culturally significant gathering most of us can manage to attend in one calendar year.

I slip a ring off a bejewelled, shrivelled finger here, and a wallet there. I place them carefully in my environmentally friendly Coles Bag with the other collectables and hurry to the sound-mixing table. I'm light fingered as well as short. We only keep them until the reward is posted.

Sequins catch the laser lights. The crowd becomes as tense as a finals night in the Block series. Their knuckles tighten round their take-away coffee cups. I bring up the pre-recorded accompaniment from the orchestra pit.

I sense the power of the masterful Leonard Bernstein loud crescendos come in and under. One or two of the more sensitive men have fainted.

I have planned the closing of the 1812 with excess fireworks that I purloined from the last fireworks festival. Fell off the back of a truck, sort of. I wait in my pit for the moment. Roy is leaning back and

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then when he moves forward, I fire the first salvo. Then, the next and the next! The occasional rocket with a flurry of colour! A fountain of flame! Building and building the cacophony with the background accompaniment of the full New York Philharmonic Orchestra played to complement Roy's crescendo.

My God it's good!

Roy is almost horizontal across the keyboard stretching and rolling back and forth with the right amount of a performer's perspiration present. The colours and flashes affirm the value of appropriately worn costume jewellery.

I slide all the faders on the mixing desk to their maximum. I am totally rapped, "maxed out" as they say. The air is alive with sound, light and smoke. The final Tom Thumbs ratchet out their staccato rattles.

Hang on! I don't have Tom thumbs in my repertoire!

I begin to taper things off.

The smoke is a bit more than I anticipated. It is impossible for me to see. There are shapes running everywhere. I can see dark shapes running, in crouching position behind each other.

As the smoke clears further, I can see it's a SWAT team. They appear attached to each like caterpillar segments. They fire sporadically. Solitary red beams from laser lights pick off anyone who moves.

Somebody must have reported an illegal gathering of shoppers. With the ever-widening allocation of



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police powers, even cultural gatherings can be deemed illegal. Culture in this country has always been viewed with suspicion. This is a “firm response”!

Somebody has tipped them off that this gathering warranted special attention.

If I stand on my toes, I can get my eyes just above the control pit. I can see a pensioner near me shot through his “I AM NOT A TERRORIST’ identi-necklace. Bodies are strewn in the manner of a Syrian conflict.

I have got away with a lot of things in life by virtue of my stature. Saved by SWAT not shooting at my height level.

Many shoppers, victims of their addiction to “specials” have been shot while running away with the reduced items. The discount stickers are evidence of intent. The quality of the Sale is strikingly clear. There is hardly a customer without a discounted item in their hands. It is obvious to me, but not to the highly trained anti-terrorist unit, that the purchasers were not able to get their Flybuys Cards out in time to identify themselves as valued customers.

There is now the threat of silence. An uneasy quiet descends on the complex. The SWAT team sweeps through the crowd ensuring things are tidy. They have eradicated clear and present danger in a well-executed fire-fight. The SWAT members congratulate each other in that time honoured manly way of team hugging and fist pumping. They will eventually make an assessment of the collateral damage and, of course, include in their body count those perpetrators neutralised by “friendly fire” in time for broadcast on the six o’clock news.

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It's been a Closing Down Sale!

Roy is lying prostrate across the keyboard. The last electronic notes of the 1812 are still buzzing through the speakers in the form of feedback. His hands are frozen Roy aka: Liszt. He's been shot in the head. A clean kill! Point of exit of the bullet is clearly evident. Both lenses of his John Lennon styled glasses have been fractured. Roy, my brother of such vision now robbed of it.

What a final overture!