

ISRAEL DIARIES

by Peter Donohoe

ISRAEL DIARIES PART 1

I have spent the whole of my musical professional life without being able to coordinate a visit to Israel until now. I have always been intrigued by the country and what it represents, and I have always wanted to come here, but somehow it was never possible.

The result is a feeling of a new and exciting adventure. It is a long time since I had one of those – the last occasion I felt anticipation and excitement like this was when I first went to the Soviet Union in 1982. It is not the fact of experiencing a new country – I have done that many times. It is that it is such a significant country - so special to the music world and to the future of world peace. It is so much a result of all the 20th Century historical events that interest me – events that have shaped all of our lives, our society and our ideologies (those of us who actually have one), and events of such unbelievable hideousness that we cannot even begin to imagine. That said, I have absolutely no real idea of what to expect, and am a little confused by what people say and what appears on the media.

The country's ancient history is something I ought to know more about than I do, but I certainly know enough about it to know how significant it was to the whole world.

I have had recent experience of visiting and working in the Arabic Middle East, mainly in Jordan. The main reason for going was to raise money for music therapy institutions dedicated to the victims of the never-ending Middle Eastern conflict. The company that made this possible was Music in ME, based in the Netherlands.

Many of my pre-conceptions were contradicted by those visits. That it turned out, for example, that in the orchestra in Amman there were two Jewish Israeli musicians, married to each other, were based in Ramallah in Palestine and had dedicated themselves to the music therapy project was to me a sign that, as usual, the impressions one gets from the media are unreliable, as the full story is always endlessly complex. That they were in mortal danger to be living where they lived and doing what they did seems obvious, but nevertheless they did it with huge commitment. That there was an Arab member of the orchestra who was openly aggressive and contemptuous of the Israeli couple did not stop

them, and it did not blind me to the fact that by far the great majority of Arabs there did not feel that way at all.

The Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellite countries, Northern Ireland and Kosovo are examples of places I have worked in over the years and without fail had my partly media-inspired pre-conceptions almost completely overturned by the reality. I certainly experienced it in the Arabic countries, and I anticipate the same in Israel.

The first thing you encounter is the extra airline security. At Brussels airport, being taken on one side by Israeli security in a similar way to when one is travelling to the USA is a reminder of the threat the country feels from outside sources. Israel also has a reputation for aggression in its own way, of course, and I hope to come out of the experience with a greater knowledge and understanding of the real truth behind the news.

On the El Al flight from Brussels to Tel Aviv, I had the best airline food I have had since I was on Malaysian Airlines in 1st Class between Auckland and Brisbane years ago. You might think that you should be able to expect good food in Business class on any airline. However, I have been on many airlines in Business and occasionally First class, and although I have rarely had complaints about the food, I have sometimes wished I had brought some peanut butter sandwiches.

I had heard rumours across many years that armoured guards were posted very visibly on all El Al flights, but they were not in evidence on this one. Perhaps yet another Chinese whisper? Or perhaps times have changed. Perhaps it is as simple as they are disguised as ordinary travellers.

The crew's uniforms make them look a bit military to my eyes – in fact the stewardess in charge of Business looked like a prison guard, but was actually very pleasant. The steward looked for all the world like a young Vladimir Ashkenazy.

Tel Aviv airport is modern, huge and very impressive. The landscape is like a cross between Southern California and Jordan.

The weather is very very hot - 33C and cloudless – this after the worst and wettest British Summer within living memory. I am not good with hot weather, but I do like to look at it from my hotel room with the air-conditioning set as low as possible. We have air-conditioning at home in the piano studio, but it has been somewhat under-used in recent years, and this year it might as well have

been put in a museum. So this is a bit of a contrast with yesterday's continuation of the previous four weeks' downpour and absurdly low temperatures.

I notice that the main arterial road signs are green like in the USA, and in both Hebrew and English. The rush hour traffic in Tel Aviv (my flight arrived at 4.45 p.m.) is beyond description - makes Seoul seem like a village.

ISRAEL DIARIES PART 2

I kept myself to myself on the first evening, and ventured outside only to a local late-night supermarket. (I wrote a lot and watched TV, which, other than the local Hebrew stations, by and large comprises the same American mix as – in fact pretty well identical to – that which I saw in Bogota, Seoul, Auckland and in the UK on Sky, some of which is entertaining, some of which makes me lose the will to live and my toenails curl.)

However, on the second day, after our rehearsal with the orchestra (the Israel Symphony Orchestra based in Rishon LeZion near Tel Aviv), the conductor (the Australian, Kynan Johns, who studied conducting here with the founder of this orchestra, Naom Sheriff, some years ago) and I went off to Jaffa Old Town to eat.

What an extraordinarily beautiful place. I am not good at verbal descriptions, but imagine an American skyline of high rise buildings (Tel Aviv) on the other side of a bay from where you sit after dark in an ancient enclave of restaurants and bars by the side of a small harbour in a temperature of about 35 C. And great food.

Then there is the sea – the Eastern end of the Mediterranean somehow reminds me of what I imagined as a child when I read the part of Jules Verne's Journey to the Centre of the Earth when the explorers reach the Lidenbrock Sea – I am sure you know the bit. It may be fanciful and stimulated by foreknowledge of where I am, plus the late-evening haze, but I felt it very strongly.

The first impression that I can guarantee not to change with the days I am here is of the extreme openness and friendliness of most people. I don't mean just people who know who I am and what I am here for, but almost everyone – in the supermarket, at the restaurants, the hotel – everywhere. Even the immigration guy at passport control smiled a welcome. I absolutely do not want to give the impression that I cannot see any problems, or to be obsequious about the place, but so far, it has been a real pleasure to be here.

To feel the history is particularly thought-provoking. People mention Jerusalem, Bethlehem, The Sea of Galilee, The Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Dead Sea in the same way as we in the UK mention Brighton, Burnley, Loch Lomond, Chichester Cathedral, The Cotswolds and the Lee Valley Reservoir – of course they do; they live here, and those places are present day living and working environments to them. My comment may seem silly to those readers who are either Israeli themselves, or who have visited. But to encounter for the first time such places in the present day real world, as opposed to either on the

media or in the Bible at Sunday-school is spine-tingling to me. I felt it for slightly different reasons - as the history is so totally different - when I first crossed the Iron Curtain into Hungary 35 years ago, and in particular when I later first visited Siberia.

It makes me realise how lucky traveling musicians are to experience such things. Of course, we can all visit them on holiday, but I promise you that it is not the same as working together with the people in such diverse places as we do. The reality of actually living and working permanently is obviously going to be even more different to the impressions we have, and visiting musicians are for sure shielded from that. However, we get closer than any tourist – partly because we work with the locals at least temporarily, and partly because music is such an emotional experience that it opens up peoples' hearts and one feels close even to audience members one doesn't meet – in some places more than others.

Silly interlude: One of my wife's favourite jokes, going back to her childhood: Q. 'What do you call a male teabag?' A. 'A He-brew'. [Yes, I know it's terrible, but it is so terrible that it keeps coming out at parties.]

Israel is a very small country, even compared to the UK, and seems to be surrounded on all sides by enemies. However, it is protected to some degree by the democratic West – particularly the USA. It also has an extremely aggressive element itself, and contains hugely diverse cultural and political views; Zionism is one of them, and there are many different forms of that alone. Its Secret Service - Mossad - has the reputation of running rings round the CIA and MI5 and of having even given the KGB a run for its money. And it has what they called 'nuclear ambiguity'. The less ambiguous countries are USA, Russia, China, UK, France, India and Pakistan. In all cases it is a good thing the others are in a position to fight back, and the same applies to Israel. But God help us all if Iran tries to put into action the ravings one hears about on the media - ambiguity or otherwise.

I cannot help but respond positively to Deborah's comment that the Jewish musical traditions and tomatoes comprised a good reason to live here; both of those items are wonderful. And some Halloumi I had yesterday was to die for, as was the avocado (I know they are not specifically Israeli, but they were very special). But the political, religious and historical significance of any country, plus the way it is regarded by the rest of the world, are things I am always aware of wherever I go, including the UK. [The way the latter is regarded at present has more to do with banking and government impotence than it does with our cuisine or local produce. Oh - and the climate, particularly this summer.]

ISRAEL DIARIES PART 3

So today is Shabbat. I am of course familiar with the tradition, as some of my friends observe it very strictly. In addition to which my mother's mother and her brothers and sisters were apparently Jewish, although I barely remember them. I do remember that mention of Jewishness in the family provoked many questions from the ever-inquisitive young kid from South Manchester (into which they probably felt you needed a passport to cross over from the more traditionally Jewish North.)

I was related to some very religious people in my extended family - Catholics on my father's side, Jews on my mother's (in both cases many moved from North Manchester to the Leeds area many decades ago – I never knew why, and the vast majority have now passed) as well as the Anglican set. All of them were quite fervent, and a few good old family feuds resulted from the differences.

I was brought up quite strictly as a Protestant and very much appreciate the moral code, the discipline, the music, the architectural heritage and many other things that most religions have given us - it is just that I cannot for the life of me reconcile the belief systems behind any religion with what I know of the real world. So I guess I am a Humanist or at least an Agnostic.

I was a choirboy in one local church for a couple of years before entering Chetham's at the age of eleven. I then joined Manchester Cathedral choir in which I remained until the age of fourteen and left for the usual reasons. Thus, I was exposed to many many religious sermons, which I listened to very carefully with an air of fervent superiority over those other choirboys around me who took the sermon as an opportunity to get up to all manner of things in the choir stalls that would take up a whole chapter to detail.

All of a sudden, it seems to me in retrospect, I found the whole thing very questionable, and I have been an Agnostic ever since. However, what I am so grateful for is the personal training that being part of that ethos gave me. I am particularly grateful to the Cathedral for having sent me on weekend courses that were run in a most Victorian manner by the Royal School of Church Music – something I will never forget; talk about hard work and merciless musical discipline – compare that with the exposure British young people are now given to music at school and you will die laughing - or crying. I hated them at the time, but it is for sure where I developed my musical memory and my ear.

Anyway, I am rambling. The main point here is that the traditional Anglican day of rest on Sunday was to my family very important – it probably was to

most families at that time. That it was done on a religious basis is not really the point. The way it rejuvenated everyone in preparation for the next week, giving them the opportunity to be circumspect - and not have to go weekend shopping, go to Disneyland, take City-breaks or to continue with everyday life in some other hideous way or other – these weekly interludes comprised, for me, and still would, a great institution. That was the day my parents would take to see my aunts and uncles and grandparents. When Sunday trading was made possible, I think British society lost something very fundamental – and actually you only have to go to one of the major cities in Switzerland and spend Saturday and Sunday there, just to see what a wonderful breath of fresh air the day of rest actually is. Of course we continue to give concerts on Sundays, but that makes us part of that group of enablers that should make it possible for society in general to have a special day.

Shabbat is obviously a stricter one, one that is observed by more people, and with more fervency than I am used to. The details of what Jewish families actually do during Shabbat vary a lot, and the diverse traditions make fascinating reading, particularly with regard to the meanings behind them and the long-term effects on the families' futures. As many of the people reading this are probably Jewish, I guess these words will seem a bit childlike and elementary, so please forgive me – I type more quickly than I think sometimes, and it comes out more extended than it needs to be. I am told that here in Tel Aviv it is much more diluted than in the rest of the country – particularly in Jerusalem – as it is the commercial centre and biggest city. Even here, however, a comparative air of peace and stillness has descended that convinces me even more of the value of it.

Peace is, quite naturally, what motivates most of these people, given the appalling history that goes back centuries, as well as what is going on now in the Middle East. 'Shalom' after all means 'Peace' – it seems an awful lot more meaningful than 'Hello' – a word that was invented for use on the telephone – to say nothing of 'all right mate?' (with the 'l's syllabised) or 'what's happening Man?' or 'iyer'.

On another subject, my first impressions were that most people were so much friendlier and welcoming than in the majority of countries I have visited - almost like the country is a huge version of a kibbutz [maybe in fact that is exactly where the feeling comes from]. However, I have begun to notice that they are sometimes not quite so friendly towards each other. Two separate members of the orchestra and two taxi drivers have all told me that Israel is a terrible country in which everyone is so much in a hurry, rude and impatient. These people have obviously not been to Paris or New York. It is certainly not my experience so far that Israel is at all like that, and I said so, but it was to no

avail. One of the taxi drivers was telling me how he had ambitions to come to Manchester to watch his favourite team Man United. I am sure that if he does that he will have a whale of a time soaking up the patience and politeness of the other fans, if he thinks Israelis are a bit impatient.

What always struck me from my experience of Russia and the Russians is that they had a tendency to be rude and unwelcoming at first sight, but that most of them then became the warmest possible friends after you got to know them and vice versa: witness the way the Aeroflot crew treated the passengers in the Soviet time, or the impossibly cantankerous and inefficient women who manned (womanned - personned?) the state money exchanges, and compare that to the incredible friends one makes of Russians once you get past that barrier. As many of the people in Israel are Russian and Soviet exiles (I heard that the Israel Symphony Orchestra is 80% Russian), I wonder how that works, given how welcoming everyone seemed to be at first. I hope it isn't the Soviet Union in reverse here, and that I will not find that after a week they will have had enough of me, yelling 'good riddance!' and will be celebrating in the streets when I am gone – but I don't think so.

And I encountered my first couple of misery-gutses yesterday. One was on security where I was practising, who sharply contrasted with the extremely nice man in the same job the day before. The other was a waitress in a restaurant the conductor and I went to at lunchtime to book for dinner that evening. We decided to have a tea and a cola whilst we were there. The waitress's response to the suggestion that anyone should drink tea when the weather was so hot was deplorable, but I took it in good humour at first. She made some more facetious remarks when she brought it, to which I said, 'You do want us to come back this evening, do you?' She came back with, 'I don't know if I do'. Thus far I was quite happy to put it down to a bit of excessive misguided cheekiness. However, she then tried to force a tip of 29 shekels for two teas (I had a second), a coke and an espresso. The conductor got heavy with her then - he was very kindly picking up the tab – and the episode ended rather tensely.

We decided to stick it to her and had dinner somewhere else – a move that may have bitten me because, although the food seemed exquisite, I woke up today with mild food poisoning; I am hoping that the tempo of the Gershwin Concerto will be unaffected later this evening, and in any case I now feel much better, but it was very nasty earlier on. It appears that the conductor's stomach is thankfully OK, so at least the performances of Daphnis and Chloe and Pictures at an Exhibition will not be under pressure.

Talking of which, the rehearsals have been very good indeed, and I am looking forward very much to the concerts. The Gershwin Concerto is a difficult work

for the orchestra, not least because it is not played much, but it is going very well.

We are planning a trip to Jerusalem Monday, so I am sure there will be much to write about after then.

ISRAEL DIARIES PART 4

I realised suddenly one day last week what the greatest difference was between my expectation and the reality of Israel. That it is the only country in the world with a majority Jewish government, and that its official homeland is obvious. What is not so obvious is the way that gives the people living there the confidence to be simply people who happen to be Jewish, rather than being Jewish first and foremost and it becoming the chief aspect of their personalities. Of course the very religious Orthodox Jews are very open and visible regarding their faith; but the non-religious people are in the main just people – and on the whole very welcoming and tolerant ones at that.

I had worried that entering Israel might have been a little like entering a Synagogue where one was made to feel (or perhaps made oneself feel) inadequate and a lesser being for sharing neither the faith nor the racial background, but nothing could be further from the truth. It turns out that I myself do share to a small degree the racial background, which is perhaps why I felt so at home, but I don't believe that to be either important or even the point at issue here. The way all nationalities and members of different cultures seem to instinctively respond to being away from the origin of their traditions is to tend to wear those traditions on their sleeves much more than when they are in their homeland, and the Jews are no different.

I have been traveling regularly to other countries for my work over the past now forty years. During that time I have found that, on the whole, those countries that have political and economic problems galore, are in social chaos, and are often avoided by superstar artists and their managers, have been the ones that have got under my skin and made me want to return most.

I think somebody said once (maybe it was me...) that you love people, places and things much more for their weaknesses than for their strengths.

That those countries get under my skin more is perhaps also because those countries cling on to culture much more ardently than comfortable affluent societies. I have felt extreme closeness with such diverse cultures as Russia (particularly in Soviet times), all parts of South America, Zimbabwe, Papua Niugini, Thailand and Kosovo. In different ways, those countries were all in a mess, but the people were so committed to working at understanding the nature of the music I was playing, and – perhaps most significantly of all – they were incredibly generous (not in the financial sense – nothing to do with money at all). They seemed to enjoy life a lot more than people in the 'First' World. I was always sad to leave and often had a feeling of desperation that I might never have the opportunity to return, although only in the case of Zimbabwe has that actually come to pass.

Israel falls into neither category – it is not 'comfortable' in the Western European or North American sense, but neither is it disorganised and chaotic in the South American sense. What it is is extremely culturally aware, highly educated, very intense and exhausting, racy, somewhat dangerous in the sense of where it is geographically in relation to some very threatening neighbours, and maybe slightly hedonistic, but - most importantly - warm, generous and welcoming. I did love being in Israel even more than I expected, and I have always wanted to go but somehow never managed to make it work.

Jerusalem is a major capital city in the modern sense, where well over a quarter of a million (about a tenth of the country's population) people live and work – everyday lives and jobs – with shopping malls, cafes, bars, office blocks and all the other trappings of a modern city. At the same time, it surely has more historical significance to us all, whatever faith, race, culture or education, than any other place on Earth. The latter is why I felt that I had to visit, why I was somehow able to put my dreadful food poisoning (or whatever it was) to the back of my mind (see below), and why I felt tingles down my spine at the thought of being in this special place.

I was of course very sad that the visit was blighted by the continuous possibility of having to rush into the nearest public loo, and that I felt distended beyond description as I trailed after my two colleagues Kynan Johns and James Inverne* - climbing up the ancient steps as if I had walked all the way from Tel Aviv in the sweltering heat and had just celebrated my 115th birthday. But I am so glad I went, and I am determined to go again when the opportunity presents itself.

* James Inverne was until recently assistant editor of Gramophone Magazine. He was in Jerusalem at the time we went, and very kindly offered to show us round – his father-in-law is a professional tour guide in the city, so his knowledge was invaluable.

It was in Jerusalem that I discovered how true the comment was made by 'baruch' earlier that I should realise that “Salam” in Arabic also means peace and that one fifth of Israel’s population are Palestinians, Christians and Muslims.’ [This was in response to my observations about the use of the Hebrew word 'Shalom' as a greeting.] It is in Jerusalem that the meeting and coexistence of all these faiths and races is at its most obvious and public, and a great eye-opener and food for thought it is too. The West Bank and Gaza Strip issues are far too complex for me to comment on – I have no knowledge of the facts, other than what I have gleaned from the ever-unreliable media. But away from those areas, it seems to be a miracle of mutual tolerance.

We did not have the opportunity to travel through the legendary tunnels, but we visited the beautiful streets of the old city lined with thousands of stalls selling an unbelievable variety of food, wonderful arts and crafts, religious artefacts of every denomination and furniture, mixed in with an equally unbelievable variety of junk. We visited the Western Wall and its environs, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (which Catholics believe is built on the site of the Crucifixion, and in which I apparently touched the wood of the actual cross Christ died upon), passed the entrance to and looked into the Garden of Gethsemane, and took in the Mount of Olives by car.

We also experienced the Mamilla Shopping Mall – complete with large underground car park, Top Shop, Mango, Adidas, etc. etc, just to remind one that the USA – like plaster dust – gets everywhere. Having said that, the buildings of the mall were made to blend in with those of the old city, and it has been done very well.

OK. It is time for me to reveal the truth about the last few days of my Israel trip. I mentioned before that I had contracted mild food poisoning from one of the restaurants the conductor and I went to on our third evening in the country. In truth, I thought it was mild at the time I wrote that, but it got worse and worse – in fact, it was probably gastroenteritis, the source of which I will never know. The only eating activity I can think of that I didn't share with the conductor was a ready-made salad from a supermarket. Israel seemed thankfully mostly free of mosquitos, but there were exceptions – during my third night I became aware of a single mossie in my room that seemed about the size of a small tractor, and which took a fancy to my left ankle – as they do – but I cannot imagine a stomach virus resulting from that. Towards the end of the trip I thought I would end up in hospital.

It didn't, and it never does, occur to me, to cancel the concerts because I know from experience that the adrenaline flow a concert gives one keep the symptoms away. [I never did have much sympathy with people who cancel on a regular basis – at least if they are not singers – because a whole infrastructure that has taken months and sometimes years to put together is dependent upon you, and, because of the above-mentioned adrenaline flow, there is very rarely any real reason to cancel, save a family tragedy or a debilitating injury. The one time I did pull out of multiple concerts was when I had nearly lost the index finger of my right hand in an hotel window in the USA in 1994 – I had to cancel three months of performances because of a severed artery and multiple nerves – but that seems, even after sixteen years, to be a reasonable explanation of being unable to fulfil the engagements; with one of the fingers being unusable, the chances of a decent performance were zero.]

Anyway, I digress.

I gather that my conductor colleague Kynan may have contracted the same virus – a week later - just as he embarks on a vacation in Eilat to go diving. If it develops like mine, I don't think he will be able to dive. It was as much as I could do to stand up. I feel terrible about that, particularly as he has been very patient and understanding of my tendency to be a dead weight socially. But hopefully, it will not develop – in fact, I have seen on his Facebook page that he is enjoying diving very much, so presumably he is made of very strong stuff and fought it off.

Thus far, I have avoided mentioning the concerts themselves, because it is not really a fair place to discuss them. However, I can reveal that the four concerts were very successful; the orchestra rose to the occasion, as everyone concerned had predicted they would when we rehearsed, and the conductor, Kynan Johns, is someone to really look out for. Not only was Kynan extremely able and mature with the music, and with my somewhat divergent approaches to the four performances of the Gershwin Concerto and with the demands of the rehearsal; he was also a great guy and we got along really well, away from the concerts as well as during them. The rest of the program comprised Ravel's Daphnis and Chloe Suite No. 2 and Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition; I heard two performances of each of those works and they were really terrific. I also must mention a beautifully played and stylistically excellent trumpet solo in the Gershwin – a particularly difficult solo, and one that has, at least musically, tripped up many more great trumpeters than not.

The whole trip ended with the trip back to London Heathrow on an El Al 747. [It's a long time since travelled on a Jumbo Jet – the plane I always felt was the most impressive and awe-inspiring flying machine ever invented (next to Concorde, that is, which I was only ever lucky enough to fly once on a New York to London rather time-sensitive mission to get to an engagement in Copenhagen in 1983)] There seemed to be more Orthodox Jews on the plane than I encountered during my whole trip in Israel.

Before signing off, I just want to express some thoughts and theories that perhaps I don't have enough knowledge to be very confident of; however, they are not so private worries about what might happen in the Middle East that would affect us all.

The Western World, led by the USA, has in recent been directly involved in armed conflict in Afghanistan (separated from Israel by Jordan, Iraq and Iran), Iraq (immediate neighbour of Israel across the Dead Sea), Libya (separated from Israel by Egypt) and Yemen (separated from Israel by Saudi Arabia). We, again led by the USA, are gearing up to at least become very heavy on Syria (immediate neighbour of Israel to the north), Iran (on the other side of Iraq from Israel), and Bahrain (off the coast of Saudi Arabia).

In all these countries the reasons for western involvement are, at least on the surface entirely justifiable (I realise that many are suspicious of the motivation behind these conflicts – quite rightly too), ranging from seeking out the perpetrators of 9/11 and other terrorist acts, quelling appalling and murderous civil war, unseating totally unacceptable dictatorships in favour of western democracy, and keeping a check on the development of nuclear capability.

However, the result is very startling when you look at the geography of the Middle East. With the exceptions of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, Israel is surrounded by one aggressive country after another that is torn between its own government and the western democracies, and almost all of them seem to be openly hostile to Israel's existence.

I can see why at a glance; society in Israel is not only the religious antithesis of the countries that surround it; it is in so many other ways too – particularly in its work-orientated, religiously tolerant and fun-loving lifestyle. Every one of those countries must feel to Israel like a threat – not just Iran, whose President wants to 'wipe Israel off the face of the earth', and not just Syria, whose government seems to be happy to sacrifice anyone and everyone who has anything contrary to say. What is going on in the area is another Cold War; let us not forget that

the earlier Cold War could have gone hot at any time – in fact it is a miracle that it didn't. What will happen to the area, and to the rest of the world, if Israel decides to have a go at Syria or Iran, with US support? And who could blame it for doing so?

Just a thought..... Nothing much we can do about it, but I do believe we need to be extremely aware of it until peace finally reigns in the Middle East. We ignore it at our peril.

Anyway, it was one of the most eye-opening experiences of my life to make my first trip to Israel, which I sincerely hope will be the first of many. I have enjoyed writing about it very much. Thank you for reading it if you have been, and thank you to Norman for inspiring the idea. This is me signing off for now.
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