

'UTTERLY READABLE AND LAUGH-OUT-LOUD FUNNY' STEPHEN FRY

HUGH DENNIS

BRITTY



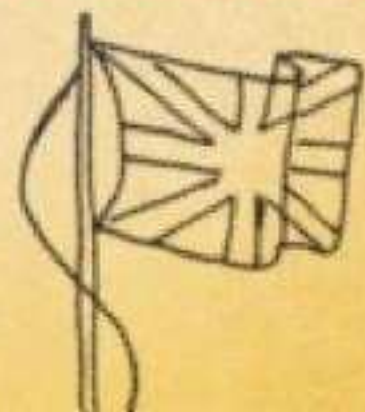
BRITTY

BANG



BANG

ONE MAN'S ATTEMPT
TO UNDERSTAND
HIS COUNTRY



Hugh Dennis



results of a poll designed to identify 'the top 50 British traits'. Top, obviously, was 'talking about the weather', second was 'queuing' and third was 'sarcasm', which was a problem because I was then unsure whether I should believe the rest of the survey. An uncertainty which was exacerbated by finding that the 29th most British trait was 'not saying what we mean'. Luckily, there is also the evidence of music.

In 2011 *Weather*, a journal whose very existence indicates that we are quite fond of the subject, published a paper by Dr Karen Aplin of the University of Oxford and her colleague, Dr Paul Williams, entitled 'Meteorological Phenomena in Western Classical Orchestral Music'.

Yes, you read it right. Don't tell me that I haven't been to the furthest reaches of the internet to research this stuff. Essentially, it was a survey of which composers most mimicked the sound of weather phenomena in their music, and its conclusion was that composers from the UK are more enthusiastic about the weather than their colleagues elsewhere. You know how I was saying that this book could be useful for pub quizzes? Well, get this: three of the seven composers depicting frontal storms are from the UK. That is, as a country, we account for 43 per cent of storms depicted in Western music.

OK, to be useful in a pub quiz, there would have to be a round about music and weather, including the specific question 'What percentage of storms in Western music have been depicted by British composers?' but you know what I mean. Imagine if you had played your joker on it.

It is good to know that there are aspects to British weather, like storms, which can be inspiring to those of a creative bent.



Britty Britty Bang Bang

Obviously it is each to his own, but I can't imagine anyone uncovering Britten's great lost *Drizzle Symphony* or Handel's musical tribute to British meteorology, *The Scattered Showers – Clearing Later*.

If celebrating storms is indicative of our weather obsession, then we also have the evidence of our own Olympics, of course, for no one from Antwerp in 1920 to Beijing in 2008 had even considered including a mistaken weather forecast in their opening ceremony until the British did it at London 2012. Yet, for us, it was obvious, so there it was. And there he was, poor old Michael Fish, in front of a global audience of one billion people, delivering his forecast before the 'Great Storm' of 1987, skilfully reminding us of previous summer Games by being an twerp himself.

'Earlier on today a woman rang the BBC to say she'd heard there was a hurricane on the way,' he began. 'Well, if you're watching, don't worry, there isn't.'

Cue the biggest storm to hit south-east England since 1703.

To be fair to Michael Fish, it wasn't technically a hurricane, which to be given that title needs to have originated in the North Atlantic or North Pacific, which this one didn't. It simply had hurricane-force winds. Hurricanes, incidentally, may be named for the Mayan god Huracan who, among other achievements, is credited with destroying 'the wooden people'. I'm not sure what that means, but to be safe, I think the cast of *The Only Way is Essex* would do well to stay in if they hear the wind getting up.

To help Michael's cause further, they got the forecast wrong in France as well, where the devastation was on roughly the

Acknowledgements

In particular, I would like to acknowledge the following sources:

The website of the Cloud Appreciation Society – www.cloudappreciationsociety.org/

The Automatic Rain Gauge of Sir Christopher Wren F. R. S. – Asit K. Biswas (Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London, 1967)

Considerations for Sustainable Irrigation Development in Asia – Asit K. Biswas (Water Resources Development, 1994)

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