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Reading Article G1

Article #6: I WISH FOR A LITTLE STREET MUSIC

by Maeve Brennan

There are times when this city seems actually to disapprove of people. In gloomy moments, I think we are allowed to stay alive here but not to live, much less to enjoy ourselves or take pleasure in what we see when we look out of our windows or walk around our streets. If we have the fortitude to get up out of bed in the morning and get going to face the day, we should also have the freedom to rejoice, and I think the freedom to rejoice is being denied us when our senses are dulled at every turn by streets that are inimical when they are not simply sad.

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people crowding the sidewalks moved steadily, jostling along like sheep in a pen that has no end, except that this Broadway pen must have had an end, because some of the people were coming back.

They seemed to be the same people coming back. Not that the crowd was faceless but that there was a common expression — not passive, not alert, not expectant, not disappointed: a crowd expression that conveyed nothing because it said nothing. There were few, if any, tourists in the crowd, and it was not a holiday night, not even a weekend night. The people on the sidewalks were ordinary New Yorkers after working hours. I thought to myself: All these people are sheep and I am a sheep. Somebody behind me gave a push, but I did not look around, for fear they might become angry and push me again.

Instead, I watched the light and I thought: There are too many people in this world. I

looked up. Over there the pale moon was rising to meet the night. At that moment I wished very much for a little street music: a man with a melodeon, or a brass band, or a piper, or a barrel organ, or a person with a big voice and a tuneful song — something surprising and friendly.

The light changed and I started across Broadway along with the rest of the people who had been waiting. I was about halfway across when I heard a wild shout of "Father, Father!" and a young man ran forward so that I only saw his back. He was a very tall young man, fat and untidy in a tweed jacket that was too short for him, and gray flannel trousers, and he ran as awkwardly as though he had seven arms and seven legs to control instead of only two of each. He seemed to be keeping all his knees high in the air, and he held one arm up, like Mercury.

Then I saw, on the corner, a middle-aged man standing alone with his hands clasped patiently in front of him. The middle-aged man was not very tall, and he was very thin

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all directions at once. His hair was ruffled, and as he talked, gesticulating with his arms and chattering at full speed, he kept putting one big hand flat on the top of his head and holding it there, hoping not to grow another inch just yet, I suppose. He wore big spectacles, and his face was red and shiny. He had his father's brown eyes and his father's straight, narrow nose and perhaps his father's serious mouth, but it was hard to tell about that, because he was smiling and talking so much.

They moved along slowly, going north, when suddenly the son remembered something more he wanted to say, and he scrambled around in front of his father and started all over again, talking and waving his arms and getting in the way just as he must have often done not long ago, when he was a small boy. The father stared admiringly up at his son, hearing every word, and you could see that what he longed for was to have the chance, just once again, to pick his child up and walk a few steps with him in his arms. And it would have taken very little to cause that boy to embrace his father and whirl him

around in the air.

What a funny trick Time had played on those two — or was it a trick of light that made the son so big while the father remained the size he had been? It was as though some cameraman had enlarged a picture of the child and left the father life-size. They got themselves side by side again and went on up the avenue and were lost to my view in the crowd that was gathered outside the Criterion Theatre.

I think they were going to have dinner someplace. Maybe they went to the Howard Johnson's at Forty-sixth Street. That is a nice place, especially if you get near the window, so that you can look out at the crowd passing and see that at a little distance there are no sheep on Broadway.

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