HASLAM'S VIEW



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It's easy when you know how

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN DEEPLY IN AWE OF MUSICIANS. THEY SEEM TO HOLD SOME MYSTERIOUS secret that the rest of us mere mortals can only marvel at.

Music of all kinds matters hugely to me. Despite this passion, the only things I can really play with any proficiency are my iPod, CDs and my residual and much treasured vinyl collection.

Over the years I have attempted to play all manner of musical instruments – including the most recent bizarre trilogy of bluegrass banjo, ukulele, and dulcimer – but none of them will release their treasures to me.

I am well aware that the musically proficient among you would barely consider any of those three a proper instrument anyway.

The closest I've ever got to any proficiency was when I brought a sitar back from India when I travelled there overland as a student.

By proficiency I simply mean that I was as absolutely useless as almost every other amateur sitar dabbler at the tail end of the sixties.

The sitar has therefore hung on my study wall for the past 40 years, untouched but still loved, goading me with my incompetence.

Every few months I will go out and buy another book, or DVD, or find yet another magical music tuition website, but none of them includes the secret. By which I mean *the* secret.

I know it's out there somewhere - how on earth do all those musicians actually do what they do if they haven't been told the secret? But these tutors all irritatingly say the same thing – practice. And I simply haven't got the patience to practise.

'Any admiration is mingled with a sense of despair ... that the task looks mysteriously impossible'

Whenever I watch musicians in action, I am struck by how absurdly easy they make it look.

The musicians I most admire – from Richard Thompson, through James Taylor, to Yo Yo Ma, Pat Metheny, and the majesty of great orchestras – just look like what they are doing is as easy as falling off a log, even though their fingers are weaving miracles of dexterity. I have no idea how they do what they do.

And whenever a new trainee sits in with an experienced GP for the first time their reaction tends to be exactly the same. 'How on earth did you know to ask that?' 'What made you think he was depressed?' 'How could you do all that in just ten minutes?'

And inevitably any admiration is mingled with a sense of despair – despair that the task looks mysteriously impossible.

I suspect that most of us in general practice think that the surgical specialties look breathtakingly complex and risky. In fact, I have had at least three eminent surgeons say to me over the years that there was no way that they could conceive of handling the degree of risk required to cope in general practice.

When we have to deal with anything and everything with no notice as to what the next patient might bring, they are almost certainly right.

But because GPs do it each and every day, we stop noticing how much practice it took, and how skilful the task actually is.

Musicians probably feel exactly the same way. But I still wish they would tell me the secret.

Tell us what you think?

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