

Computer games inspire children to learn musical instruments

Children are being inspired to learn a musical instrument after playing music-based computer games.

About 2.5 million British youngsters have been inspired to progress into 'real' music-making after playing musical console games like Guitar Hero, Singstar and Rock Band.

The new report by the UK's largest music charity Youth Music states that these games are having a dramatic effect on children taking up an instrument for the first time.

The research found that 19 per cent of young people said they now play an instrument because they were inspired to do so after playing a music-based console game.

Of the 12 million young people in the UK, aged between three and 18, more than half play music games on computer consoles.

Andrew Missingham, a music industry expert who carried out the report, said: "The music games are popular because they are family friendly and inclusive."

"And it is this take-up of the games that is credited with the take up of musical instruments, the development of transferable musical skills and even the development of performance confidence."

"This research for the first time shows conclusively that young people are being inspired to make their own music by games that first piqued their interest."

The SingStar franchise hit 12 million unit sales in April 2008.

Playing music games help young people develop confidence in performance, and introduce many of the skills required to play other instruments - such as dexterity, inter-limb co-ordination, hand-eye co-ordination, pitch and rhythm.

The limits of console games means people turn to real instruments.

Christina Coker, chief executive of Youth Music, said: "We have established that there is a huge potential audience of new musicians and music-makers out there playing these games. "Now, we and others in the music education community, should be capitalising on that interest and encouraging young people to take up real instruments. "But we should also be thinking about how we can incorporate consoles and games into 'traditional' music education and be more open to embracing these tools in our teaching."



Hitting the right note: Children are being encouraged to take up real instruments after learning them virtually, a new study suggests

by Edward Gunawardena

The Island's pungent editorial on the legendary Puttalam Donkey (on November 21) prompted me to recall some of the rib-tickling stories that I have heard of the Puttalam booruwas. Perhaps these stories will help us better understand the behaviour of some of the present-day Puttalam booruwas.

The booruwa, during its asinine antics, apart from its wild kicking and braying, is proud of displaying its disproportionately oversized penis. The men who lived amongst these creatures, that had even been domesticated by them, had begun to consume the cooked penises of these animals as a delicacy and an aphrodisiac.

Biologically, a possibility exists that those who relished donkey penises also acquired a little bit of donkey characteristics. Although not in the same manner, the buffalo also seems to have had some impact on human behaviour in many parts of our country.

These behavioural traits are seen mainly among humans that wield state power. Politicians fall easily into this category, while there are police and other officials who are not far behind.

As mentioned in the opening paragraph, the numerous anecdotes on Puttalam booruwa, apart from helping us understand the behaviour of their present day descendants, are, indeed, interesting and hilarious. More importantly, they illustrate their asinine stupidity. Boorish and aggressive behaviour is perhaps traceable to the wild ass stage of the donkey when they enjoyed uninhibited freedom, like our politicians, 'the freedom

of the wild ass'.

Bernard (D. B. J.) Samaraweera was ASP I, when I was posted to Ratnapura as ASP II in 1959. DBJ had risen from the ranks, having first been in the Police Boy's Brigade.

He had been a PC in Puttalam in the late thirties. Recalling his days there he told me that it was in Puttalam that he had witnessed the most appalling living conditions. One reason was the donkey. Donkeys were so fond of human excreta that they rolled over the stinking heaps of it they came across. The only recreation for children was riding on the donkeys' bareback. As a result, some of the people Puttalam had become immune to obnoxious smells of these animals.

Like the donkeys, people seldom bathed. An occasional shower was a godsend. Once Samaraweera and

another PC had been walking in the rain well protected by raincoats and slouch hats when they saw a rare occurrence. A large number of women and children were seen standing in the rain with basins, buckets and pots on their heads to collect the rain water.

Another one of D.B.J. episodes was on sand in the paddy sold in boutiques. When he was on day patrol, people often complained to him that the paddy they purchased had a very high quantity of sand. On inquiries, he had found that the paddy cultivators dried the paddy spread on the bare hot sand and collected and bagged same for sale! The police had to advise the paddy cultivators to dry their paddy on gunny sacks and palmyrah mats spread on the sand.

The excuse given by the paddy farmers was that the paddy was spread on the sand to prevent donkeys and

goats from eating the paddy. They had to be told that the animals could be kept away by enclosing the paddy drying area with a fence. They had willingly heeded the advice of the police. (The thought of removing the trousers of the policemen had not occurred to them!)

In 1960, I was the Asp of the Chilaw Police District and the Puttalam police station also came under me. Charlie Sanders, the second of the three Sanders brothers who stood out in the inspectorate, was the OIC.

He once related to me an interesting case. The Muslim people of Puttalam, although they did not eat pork shot and killed wild pigs After shooting a boar a Sinhala buyer would be directed to the carcass, a pound of which was sold at only 30 cts. A carcass was usually sold for ten rupees.

Once a Muslim had shot a dog, mistaking it for a wild boar, and directed a Sinhalese buyer to the spot. The buyer was shocked to find that the dead animal was not a pig but his own dog! Inspector Sanders had settled the matter by getting the man who shot the dog mistakenly to pay Rs. 25 as compensation.

Hardly a month had gone by when a Sinhalese man complained to the police that a Muslim had shot his dog, naming a suspect. Police inquires had revealed that the Sinhalese man had shot his own dog suspecting it to be rabid, dragged the carcass to a shrub and made the complaint expecting to get some money. He had heard of the previous case. Sanders had got this man to pay Rs. 50 to the Muslim concerned for making a false complaint.

Inspector Sanders with a laugh remarked, "Sir, life is so interesting in Puttalam because of these donkeys!"

I have heard many more stories about Puttalam booruwas'. But due to space constraints, I will relate only two more.

In the 1970s a demographic survey had shown that Puttalam was a district where the population was increasing rapidly. An extension unit of the Family Planning Association had visited Puttalam, selected a specific area and demonstrated the use of condoms. To simplify matters, the FPA officials had taken a new condom and stretched it downwards on the tip of stick in a fence. The expressions on the faces of the men showed that they had understood the instructions.

The FPA people left having distributed a large number of boxes of condoms.

About a month later, the same FPA team visited the community to check on the progress and issue another set of condoms. Lo and behold! As they arrived, the first thing they observed was that most of the fence sticks around the houses were capped with condoms!

Before returning for the night, following the instructions as demonstrated, they had stretched the condoms down the top ends of the fence sticks!

The late H. M. Navaaratne, one time District Minister of Kandy, was a Director of the National Lotteries Board when I was the Chairman. His tale of two Puttalam politicians was indeed hilarious. It was about how the two distributed money among the voters at the 1977 general elections.

At this time there were five-rupees notes and they had real value. One politico had been going round distributing crisp five-rupees notes. The other politicians had followed with ten rupees. To every voter who had received this note he would say, "Chee, Chee give me that one and take this," extending a 10 rupee note. In some places people had gathered in numbers to give the five rupees and get ten rupees each! It had taken a long time for those people to realise the futility of the transaction.

Navaaratne ended his story quipping - Sabhapathi Thuma, Puttalame evunta booruwo kiyanne nikan neme". (It is not for nothing that those from Puttalam are called donkeys!)

The 'Puttalam DONKEY'



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