Musical Minefields

*Organist **Susan Wilson** treads carefully*

‘Can you play anything French?’ I could tell by this inauspicious start the conversation with the minister wasn’t going to go well.

‘I could try something by Messiaen,’ I volunteered, reluctantly. ‘I was thinking more *La Marseillaise*, actually.’

‘How about *Frere Jacques*?’

We were talking weddings, of course. Gone are the days when the bride entered to Wagner and exited to Mendelssohn. Now, anyone who still thinks ‘You Tube’ is a term of abuse, or ‘My Space’ the cry of a petulant teenager, needs to procure a PC with an internet connection pretty quickly. Because, as a church organist today, you’re going to need it!

Witness a typical conversation with today’s wedding couple:

Me to bride: ‘I looked up that arrangement of *Somewhere over the rainbow* online, like you asked, and, while I feel we could certainly have the melody, it might be a little tricky to inject the reggae beat on the pipe organ.’

Bride to me: ‘How about Roger Forster’s *Love is all*?’

Me: ‘Now that’s a great piece, and hits just the right note for when you process out of the church.’ Bride looks crestfallen. ‘Unless you had another idea?’

Bride: ‘I thought we could all sing it.’

The initial approach by the family can also be unnerving. I recall a conversation with a woman I took to be the mother of the bride, but who turned out to be the professional soloist engaged to sing the Bach/Gounod *Ave Maria* during the ceremony! Suddenly, the request to ‘have a run through beforehand’ didn’t seem so strange.

Funerals are no less challenging. ‘He really loved The Proclaimers, you know. Do you know *Five Hundred Miles*? If not, I’m sure you could pick it up from a CD I’ve got.’ This is becoming a more frequent call, as is: ‘Could you play a medley of Scottish country dance tunes?’ My first encounter with that question made me realise that a couple of rounds of the *St Bernard’s Waltz* as the coffin left the church wasn’t going to suffice!

But don’t we prefer that people take an interest in the music? While it may be reassuring to the organist to trot out the old favourites, there’s a real frisson in engaging with the wedding couple or bereaved family. Arriving at a service which presents an ‘authentic flavour’ of the personalities involved, well, that’s really why we do it, isn’t it?