

RONDO'S RHYTHMIC RODENTS

In South West England, in a small town called Crockerton there is an avenue called Palladium Way, and in that avenue there is an old mansion which has not been lived in for many years. It is thought that years ago an old gentleman called Larry Lizard lived there, he used to look after Meerkats at the local zoo.

All the rooms are in a state of disrepair and one of the rooms in the basement obviously used to be a children's playroom as it still contains old children's toys.

Occupying the playroom at the present time is a family of brown rats who are actually enjoying their time playing with all the old toys.

Head of the family is Rondo Rat, accompanied by his partner Allegra. They have 4 offspring, two girl rats Cadenza (always plenty to say) and Adagio (a little bit slow) and two boy rats Agitato who is very lively and Forte who at times can be very noisy.

The rats are all vegetarian which is great because outside the house there is a massive garden so they can help themselves to lots of fruit and berries for their meals.

In the autumn these items were becoming a bit scarce so Rondo rat thought it was time to travel a little further in search of food. He made his way through a couple of gardens still awash with berries and the odd strawberry which he adored.

He was sitting on his haunches eating a strawberry when he heard a strange sound coming from the house in whose garden he was in, a pretty sound, a musical sound so he decided to investigate further. There was a drainpipe at the back of the house so he climbed inside and made his way upwards, it was a bit tight and very slimy but he managed it and found himself sitting inside the bowl of a toilet which of course was full of water, he shook himself off and perched himself on the toilet edge and just listened and really enjoyed what he was listening to.

So, who was Rondo listening to? The family who live in this house are called Tune. Father Justin is a Professor of Music at one of the leading Universities in the Country and a brilliant pianist and Conductor. His wife Cynthia plays the cello and they have four sons who all play musical instruments.

The four boys were playing a piece of music called Trumpet tune and Air by Henry Purcell. Of course Rondo had no idea what the music was called but he was entranced by it and really enjoyed it. He came out of the toilet and sat by the door and listened and became very excited and even started wagging his tail. When the music stopped he crept away, dived back into the toilet down the drain pipe and made his way back home.

In the basement at his mansion he told his partner and children all about his experience and said "my dear children these humans made wonderful sounds and it would be great if we could do the same". The next day Rondo led his family to the musical house to listen again. It was a tight squeeze in the pipe and the toilet but they stayed in the bowl listening to the beautiful sounds coming from the room. Being brave all six of them crept out of the toilet and made their way along the landing towards where the music was coming from.

Unfortunately half way along the landing they met a great big black and white dog with big eyes. The dog whose name was Boris said to them " what are you all doing here? This is not your house", Rondo quivering with fright said "Dear dog we are very sorry we mean no harm but I heard such lovely music coming from your house that I brought my family back to listen to it".

Boris said " I will let you listen very quietly then you must leave" Boris who was very knowledgeable pointed out what each boy was playing, Amadeus is the oldest and playing the trumpet, Jazz is playing the French horn, Riff is playing the trombone and Harper the youngest and smallest is playing the tuba which is the biggest instrument.

Boris then said "I think it is time for you to leave before you are seen by the Tune family" So they did.

Rondo thought how wonderful it would be if his children could play music instruments as well, and began to search through the various boxes of toys in the basement room and he managed to find 2 plastic trumpets and 2 plastic trombones.

Rondo was very excited as he handed out the instruments. Cadenza and Adagio had the trumpets and Agitato and Forte had the trombones. Of course they had no idea how to make any sounds on the instruments and tried to copy the boys but the right noises did not seem to come at all and all

they could make were faint buzzing noises and they got out of breath which made their tails stand out straight.

So, Rondo had a plan, the next day he was going back to the Tune household, see Boris and arrange for his family to be introduced to the Tune family.

So the following day off he went , he met Boris on the landing, they rubbed noses this time as he was no longer afraid of Boris. Following conversation Boris went to speak to Professor Tune and Rondo was invited in where he met the Professor who seemed quite at ease meeting a rat for the first time.

Rondo explained to the Professor what he wanted and he agreed to teach the juvenile rats, scratched his chin and said "Ok I will give it a go and see how they get on, bring them to me tomorrow but please do not come up through the toilet there may well be somebody using it and you will frighten them to death"

Boris agreed to meet them at the door the following day and Rondo went home.

The following morning Rondo led his family to the Professor's house where they were met by Boris who took them to the music room. The four boys were amazed to see the rats and really quite frightened but their Dad assured them that they were harmless and were very keen to learn how to play music.

So gradually the four young rats became more proficient and by the end of the day had learnt a scale on their instruments. Professor Tune was so pleased with their progress he suggested to Rondo that all the rats could stay in his basement instead of travelling and arranged some old blankets for them.

There was also a cat flap there so they could find their own food in the garden.

As the weeks went by the 4 rat children gradually became more expert in playing their instruments and progressed to playing simple tunes such as Rat a tat tat, Rat bat blues and Flight of the Rat..

One afternoon Professor Tune suggested to Rondo and Allegra that he thought the juveniles were ready to play their tunes before his class of music students at his university. They were over the moon, The Professor bought 3 baskets to take them in, and made them comfortable by putting some very nice pillows in the baskets.

The great day came. The Professor met the excited rats, put them in the cages and then placed them in his car and drove the few miles to the University with their instruments. The three cages were placed on a table in the classroom and the 6 rats climbed out. Some of the students were rather frightened as many of them had only heard bad things about rats. However Professor Tune reassured them that they posed no danger and were only interested in playing their instruments. No written music was involved as the rats had memorised their parts. The students were amazed to hear them produce real brass notes as the 4 rat children stood in a group and played rat a tat tat, rat bat blues and then flight of the rat. At the end the students went completely mad and clapped so much they almost brought the roof down. Many took photos on their smartphones. Professor Tune bowed and the four young rats did the same, they were then taken home by car with their parents.

That evening the 4 young rats could not stop talking about their experience in front of the students and were more determined than ever to continue to play their instruments encouraged by mum and dad. In fact Rondo was so delighted with their performance that he decided he would like to play as well and after giving it great thought decided it would be good to give the quartet some rhythm and play the drums, so back he went to his previous house and found a set of drums in the basement and with great difficulty managed to carry them on his back and return to the Professor's house.

When he arrived back at the basement with the percussion set, Rondo made his children get their instruments together and they started to play one of the tunes they had been taught, Rat a tat tat, joined by Rondo and it was very noisy as Rondo had not yet learnt to play quietly, in fact they made so much noise that Professor Tune came downstairs to see what was going on, he was mightily impressed to see Rondo playing the drums but asked them all to play more quietly as it was getting quite late.

Christmas was approaching and it was time for them to learn some seasonal tunes with the Professor. O Holy Rodent was a trombone solo so this was performed by Forte with the others accompanying. It took a while but the Professor was very patient and finally Forte made quite a good show of a difficult song. The other songs they learnt were A Rat in a Manger and God rest ye Merry Rats.

In the village there was a Community Hall and each Christmas a concert was held which was very

popular. Professor Tune approached the hall Committee and asked if it was possible for the rat family to perform. After much discussion and some objections it was decided to allow them to perform with the proviso that if any of the audience became frightened they must stop immediately and be taken home.

Professor Tune thought it would be a good idea if the rats looked smart for the occasion so he asked his wife Cynthia to make some uniforms, which she did, watched closely by Allegra. The uniforms were very simple but smart, all wearing white shirts and nice red scarves.

So all were loaded into their cages and taken by car to the village hall which was decorated for Christmas and looked lovely. The hall was full up as there were lots of acts taking place. The audience who filled the hall were made up of all ages and many kept looking rather nervously towards the cages at the side of the stage wondering what was going to happen.

The act before the rats was a choir from the local Primary school and they sang some lovely carols such as Ding Dong Merrily on High and The First Nowell and received some lovely applause at the end. As they left the stage Professor Tune opened the doors of the cages and the rat family climbed out and sat in a line at the front of the stage and were handed their instruments by Professor Tune whilst the audience sat there completely silent having never in their lives experienced anything like this before.. Professor introduced them as Rondo's rhythmic Rodents and introduced each one individually. He then raised his arm and conducted the first carol which was A rat in a manger. It went so well and the audience hummed to the well known tune. Then tremendous applause. It was now Forte's turn with O Holy Rodent on his trombone . Ok a couple of mistakes but he made a good job of it. His mum Allegra looked proudly on and the audience clapped and hooted so loudly at the end. The five rats lined up and all bowed together and the audience were on their feet clapping.

Reluctantly the family were put back in their cages and taken home exhausted but so pleased and excited, they had difficulty getting to sleep that night.

The following day all the rat family slept in late. Rondo said he had an idea. They had displayed their talents to many humans but he felt that the extensive rat population around the village would also benefit from their talents and decided to round them all up so that his family could give a special one

off display to them on the patio of their old house. So Rondo went to all the local sewers and greeted the rat population and advised them to be on the patio at 4pm that day where they would hear something that they had never ever heard in their lives before.

Later that day he was amazed and delighted that nearly 300 rats arrived to listen to their performance. He settled them into rows. There was a lot of rat talk going on so they were told to be quiet and they then listened to the christmas carols that Rondo's rhythmic rodents had played at the village concert. At the end all the rats stood on their hind legs, put their paws together and clapped. Nothing in the world had ever been heard before like the sound of rats clapping in unison and not only that they smacked their lips together making a sound similar to a drill before dispersing their separate ways.

In Professor Justin Tune's house they were reading all the National newspapers about the Christmas concert which were full of headlines about the rat family. Also they received many phone calls from journalists and TV reporters asking about the family and wanting to do interviews. Professor Tune decided against any interviews as he was concerned about their health and wellbeing. However he did receive a call from Sir Simon Rattle a famous conductor who wanted to include Rondo and his family in the annual Christmas concert at the Royal Albert Hall. The Professor thought long and hard about this but decided it was too good an opportunity to miss so began to think about the tunes they could play.

As they all lived in the lovely County of Devon, the Professor decided to compose a piece of music named after that area and he called it Devonian Rhatsody made up of 4 short movements. The start featured a drum solo by Rondo and then straight in with a very lively movement with all 5 rats, in the middle of which was a trumpet solo by Cadenza, the second movement was much slower with a beautiful trumpet solo by Adagio. Third movement was very jazzy with a trombone solo by Agitato and the fourth movement was slow and pompous and in the middle Forte played some long loud notes very impressively.

Professor Tune transported the rats to London to meet Sir Simon. He was rehearsing a big orchestra and they waited in their cages and he came across and was introduced to the rats. After the main

orchestral rehearsal Sir Simon conducted them having previously seen the music and he was very impressed. At the end of the afternoon they were returned to their cages given some food to eat, and dressed in their very smart performance clothes.

That evening at 7.30 pm the cages were placed at the side of the stage, the massive hall was totally full up with a lot of interest in the rats. The audience could be heard whooping and yelling when the rats were brought in. Extra big screens had been erected at the sides of the stage so that the rats could be seen by everybody.

The orchestra performed and then just before the interval it was time for the rats. They were taken out of their cages and placed right at the front of the stage looking very smart in their uniforms of white shirts and red scarves, in fact the best dressed rats in the world.

Of course they performed the rhapsody with perfection. Sir Simon, the whole orchestra and the audience rose to their feet and clapped and clapped. They were totally delighted by their talent.

After the concert they were taken back to Devon.

What a wonderful experience for the rats and indeed for the Tune family who had been looking after them.

In the weeks that followed many TV and newspaper reporters tried to get photographs and interviews with Rondo's family, but Professor Tune resisted all of that. He was concerned for the welfare of the rats and felt they had had plenty of exposure to the wider world so he just let them do their own thing in the basement of his house. And so they just lived happily ever after. Although Professor Tune did have an idea that it would be a perfect way to introduce primary school pupils to the art of playing music, and learning more about the rat population, that is for the future.