



'There you are my friends, that's it!'

Kamilo the Ant

THE STORY OF COMEX IN SONG

**'The miles have gone behind us, far away but still remind us
That some journeys have a beginning, but no end;
'Til that final destination, everyman in every nation
Learns to call a wayside brother blessed friend.'**

- from Silver Train

This is a story; a story in song of the experiences of 3000 men and women from all over the Commonwealth through the lands of a thousand million people. They are the storytellers. They came from every background and profession as volunteers, prepared to take the risk and adventure. Their most enduring impression was of everyday values: 'words, gestures and actions that uplift the spirits and kindle afresh love and respect for one's fellow human beings.' Their lasting legacy is The Green Pennant Awards 'identifying the spirit of adventure with crossing the barriers that divide people' – perhaps the greatest single challenge of our times. Singing is an unusual medium for telling such a story, but is universally understood, relying only on the sympathetic attitude of the listener towards the countries involved, the countries visited and, ultimately, the challenge facing the Commonwealth.

The United Nations Asian Highway, starting from Bazagan within sight of Mount Ararat, provided the stage – 10,000 miles of it - on which the Commonwealth Expedition, Comex, faced a world audience - marching to the tune of Together Unafraid.

The initial composition of Comex was made up of representatives from Australia, Britain, Canada, India, Pakistan and Zambia. Many more followed. And there were stars of course, not many but enough to be going on with.

Chris Nicholls had an excellent voice, and scored most of the music. His brilliance as a guitarist won him a special place on Comex - before he could move on from Oxford University to Moscow with ICI.

Mary Abendroth was another star. She came to represent her beloved Minnesota armed with a well-worn guitar, and a caressing voice. She returned to the United States with 'a Comex star and two bars!'

Brenda Stevens took leave of the Bank of England to serve Queen and Commonwealth; her vivid personality and singing will long be remembered.

Norman Leigh was destined for the British Council from Exeter University; but not before he had proved himself on Comex which he did three times: as a driver; a confident member of the choir, and as a contingent leader with a love of versifying when other forms of communication failed.

Celia Congdon was a teacher with an interest in choral singing, but there was little scope for a beautiful voice in a classroom. So it was the long dusty road for her too.

Jane Boston had theatrical ambitions. She could also play the guitar, sing and act with enthusiasm. Her authoritative personality on stage was a bonus, and she was readily adopted by the Heritage Singers of Zambia.

Paul Truby, the musical son of a musical father at Dartington School in the county of Drake, was still a sixth former when he decided to fly the nest and take to the road with Comex. And there were many more - not only from the home country of the Head of the Commonwealth.

Kamal Kant Sharma was a tabla player with a profound knowledge of Indian classical music. He played with the touch of feathers and the speed of butterfly's wing, and could perform exotic rhythms to enhance the quality of singing – good and bad!

Promod Shanker learnt to play the sarod from the father of Amjad Ali Khan – or, at least, was inspired by him. He set aside a promising career as an accountant to honour the home countries of the sarod.

John Mwesa came from a singing family in Zambia. As a director in the Department of Higher Education, he was summoned by his president, Kenneth Kaunda, and instructed to represent the African continent on Comex 10 with the Heritage Singers.

Chris Brown-Syed claimed his place on Comex as a representative of the largest country in the Commonwealth, armed with a young voice and an old guitar, before moving on to Australia for further studies, and then to the University at Buffalo where he was invited to organise a seminar on 'the little green flags'.

The late Stephen Burnett, also from Ontario, was a jazz pianist, and therefore the obvious choice to arrange the music for the Comex musical, KENAKI - based on a 16,000 miles train-ride through the subcontinent on the Commonwealth Express, Comex 9 - that made him the first man to conduct such an event on the platforms of the India.

The main body consisted of a large contingent of lesser stars doing its bit with enthusiasm, and making a noise big enough to drown the bum notes whenever they intruded on the reputation of the stars. When the tempo dropped, which it often did, Greg (Lionel Gregory) seized his moment with a spectacular bit of leadership on the Iranian Zarb, or beat the hell out of a Nepalese madal - or a South Indian Madungum.

Credit belongs to all, not only for their unselfish, and unflinching cheerfulness - whatever the circumstances - but because without them there would have been no story to sing about. And as the quality of their singing improved (carried eventually into the Royal Albert Hall) large numbers turned out to greet them. Even the stars looking down on the deserts in Syria, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, twinkled with approval – and there was never a hostile act.

But when the multi-talented Kevin Lacy was persuaded to dress up as a Sikh and declaim *'The Long Dusty Road'* in the presence of several thousand of his adopted brothers, a great thunder of applause rose up to the heavens, and there it surely remains!

It is in the name of them all that this story is recorded with affection; authentic in essence and with generous co-operation at home and abroad: from the BBC, CBC, the Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation, All India Radio, the Director of Music of the 2nd King Edward V11's Own Goorkhas and Mactrak of Musselburgh. As a good Brahman, Kamal Kant Sharma reminded us all that 'people like to sing, that is why God gave them voices,' so we prayed for a little inspiration from that direction too. One day this story may reach the remotest corners of the Commonwealth to encourage - in the words of the Head of the Commonwealth - 'the spirit of adventure which is the finest quality of youth,' and by youth Her Majesty did not mean just those who are young in years, 'but all who are young in heart - no matter how old they may be.'

LITTLE GREEN FLAGS OR NANNHEY HAREY DHWAJ

Across the barriers that divide people there is the hope that drives men on: the hope of better living, of better understanding, of peace and international friendship. For all these things the Commonwealth ideal of 'the brotherhood of man', offers a good starting point. That is the message of 'the little green flags' played by Pipe Major Angus MacDonald MBE at Edinburgh Castle. The inclusion of African voices led by John Mwesa, the tabla and sarod of India played by Kamal Kant Sharma and Promod Shanker (compiled by courtesy of the BBC Radio Scotland) add significantly to the message, emphasising the words of Prince Philip at the inauguration of The Green Pennant Awards.

Little green flags 'cross barriers of class,
Colour and creed, of wealth and of caste.
Little green flags let everyone know,
Symbols of peace wherever you go.

Little green flags on ships or on 'planes,
On long dusty roads, on buses and trains.
Little green flags ever onward until
The long journey ends on memory's hill.

Little green flags for the best things in life,
An end to our fears, an end to our strife.
Little green flags for the old and the young,
The lonely, the poor, for everyone.

Little green flags for twenty long years,
The sign of our laughter, our joy & our tears.
Little green flags like a light shining bright,
A lighthouse beam on a dark stormy night.

Little green flags on ships or on planes,
On long dusty roads, on buses and trains.
Little green flags ever onward until
The long journey ends on memory's hill.

(The last four lines are sung to the first part of the melody, softly and gradually fading.)

THE LONG DUSTY ROAD

The tradition of recording the saga of Comex 'in verse' (with actions) began during Comex 5, in a teashop on the road between Ankara and Istanbul, and continued thereafter with a few verses added after each expedition. The teashop version - of the first thirty-five verses - is recorded here to set the scene, declaimed by Kevin Lacy who helped in perform the same act at Glastonbury after the Queen's Jubilee Comex 8. The final version of 66 verses can be found in Journey of a Lifetime.

TOGETHER UNAFRAID

The title speaks for itself; the lyrics describe the United Nations Asian Highway where Together Unafraid was heard across the deserts and mountains of this ancient land-route sung by the Comex choir led by Chris Nicholls. It was played by the Coldstream Guards outside the home of the Head of the Commonwealth, and by the 2nd King Edward V11's Own Goorkhas as a Commonwealth march. In the Malvern Hills, 900 children of The Chase High School picked up the challenge by recording the song for their peers throughout the Commonwealth.

Where the sands of the desert touch the sky,
And the mountains rise to heaven from the sea,
Where the wild green earth with its rivers and its streams
Speak for freedom and for liberty.

Chorus

Together Unafraid, over land in the air and on the sea,
Together let us march hand in hand my friend,
And ring the bells of victory.
Together Unafraid, for a hundred nights, a hundred days,
Together let us go where the Green Pennant flies,
And friendship's banner raise , TogetherUnafraid.

Chorus

Where a dozen different nations raise a hand,
And smiling faces kill hostility,
Where kindnesses like moonbeams silver bright
Overflow the bowls of hospitality.

Chorus

Where the rhythmic beat of drums evokes the tune,
And every village dance a story tells,
Where the hills echo sounds of laughter and song
And sunset falls on temple bells.

Chorus

Where the saddest sadness lives and hope is gone,
And dreams may never see the light of day,
Where poverty's forgotten and wealth survives,
And the future seems so far away.

Chorus

TIYENDE PAMODZI

The African equivalent, meaning Forward Together, was introduced to Comex by the then President of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda. To make the point, he included the words Comex Tiyende (Forward with Comex). The singing is by Zambian members of Comex, led by Kenneth Kaunda, and accompanied on the tabla and sarod by Kamal Kant Sharma and Promod Shanker.

Tiyende Pamodzi ndim'tima umo,
Tiyende Pamodzi ndim'tima umo,
Tiyende Pamodzi ndim'tima umo,
Tiyende Pamodzi ndim'tima umo.

A yuthi tiye Limbo moyo, A yuthi tiye Limbo moyo,
Tiyende pamodzi ndim'tima umo.

A yuthi tiye Limbo moyo, A yuthi tiye Limbo moyo,
Tiyende pamodzi ndim'tima umo.

Tioloke Limpopo ndim'tima umo,
Tioloke Limpopo ndim'tima umo,
Tioloke Limpopo ndim'tima umo,
Tioloke Limpopo ndim'tima umo.

Comex Tiyende, Limbo Moyo, Comex Tiyende, Limbo Moyo,
Tioloke Limpopo ndim'tima umo.

Comex Tiyende, Limbo moyo, Comex Tiyende, Limbo moyo,
Tiyende pamodzi ndim'tima umo.

BABA NOMA OR CRYING DRUMS

One of the early songs on the Comex repertoire, Baba Noma, came from Ghana. The words were just sounds, meaning nothing in particular, apart from a cry to mother for help when things went wrong – which seemed to fit the bill and not only in Ghana! The English words were approved over lunch with the Ghanaian High Commissioner in Delhi before the song was given a public airing at an entertainment hosted by the British High Commissioner, John Freeman. The lead singer on that occasion was Eddie Torgbor, a Ghanaian law student in Edinburgh, who appeared on stage in a kilt. In this recording, Chris Nicholls leads the Comex choir, followed by an African version led by John Mwesa and the Heritage Singers of Zambia.

Baba Noma, Alla Muta
Baba ici ano luka,
Ke mazumba itchawalele
Ke mazumba zumba o-i-eh.

Chorus:

Chimame chumbulumba, Chimame chumbulumba
Chimame chumbulumba o-i-eh-eh
Chimame chumbulumba, Chimame chumbulumba
Chimame chumbulumba o-i-eh

Crying Drums, everywhere,
Their moaning sets a rhythm on the air,
If the good life ever really is to matter,
Time to pause a while and start to care.

Chorus

Crying Drums, everywhere,
Echo sadnesses that everyone must share,
But the drums of hope will sound again tomorrow,
When we start to build new bridges and to dare.

Chorus

FAITH HOPE AND CHARITY

It was not until Comex had come face to face with the ups and downs of ordinary people in the wilderness of human relations that our own songs began to emerge expressing the experiences we shared. How these would be received called for faith in ourselves, hope that all would turn out well, and that audiences would take a charitable view of what we had to offer. Celia Congdon's voice was well suited to just such a purpose, and once the audience had heard her approval flowed in abundance - not least at the inauguration of The Green Pennant Awards. Lydia Lufungulo sings the Zambian version of Faith, Hope and Charity. The style is different but the meaning the same.

KENAKI

Kenaki is an anagram of 'ki kehna' meaning 'what can I say.' It is an expression of excellence associated with Comex in India. Its popularity spread and was well received everywhere especially in the Punjab. Two versions of the song are offered here: on the road, led by with Chris Nicholls, and at the inauguration of The Green Pennant Awards with The Chase High School Malvern, led by Chris Nicholls and Celia Congdon.

Day dawns with fresh resolution,
Sifting hope from the ash of yesterday,
Offering again the occasion to laugh, to sing, to dance, to pray.
Hope fades with evening shadows, Victim of life's decay
As pleading, wailing, tears unavailing -
The body journeys on to meet its clay.
Give us faith; give us hope; give us charity.

Faith lives, guardian of tomorrow and life itself will never end,
'Til outliving life and all that thrives upon it -
Man curious to see in God his friend.
Swept forward on perilous wings of fortune,
To gamble on the battlefields of chance,
What hope is there of faith surviving,
When death looks out from every glance.
Give us faith; give us hope; give us charity.

Charity glows through the blinding darkness,
Anchored in life's stormy seas,
A golden straw for clutching fingers,
The healing touch to painful reveries.
A last reprieve from chains of anguish,
A way through jungles of despair,
A kindly voice to whisper softly -
The elixir of life still fills the air.
Give us faith; give us hope; give us charity.

Where do they come from and where do they go,
The fruit and the flowers, the rain and the snow?
Who presses the button, who 'plies the brakes?
Who gives the orders; who makes the dates?
For the summers to warm, and the winters to cool,
The grass to grow green, and the leaves to gold.
For fishes to swim, and birds to fly,
Children to play and lovers sigh,
Kenaki, kenaki, kenaki.

From the deserts of hate, to the mountains of love,
From the gutters of living, to the heavens above,
Relentlessly onwards, these footsteps don't change,
Deaf to all pleading, they pass out of range.
But the summers still warm and the winters still cool
The grass grows green, and the leaves turn gold,
Fishes still swim, and birds still fly,
Children still play and lovers sigh.
Kenaki, kenaki, kenaki.

The pendulum swinging to the passage of time,
The wheel of life turning, mile upon mile,
Like streams flowing out to the wide open sea
Men pass on to eternity.
But the summers still warm and the winters still cool
The grass grows green, and the leaves turn gold,
Fishes still swim, and birds still fly,
Children still play and lovers sigh.
Kenaki, kenaki, kenaki.

ANOTHER DAY

The arrival of large numbers of Canadians to join Comex called for something special. A few hundred men and women crossing the Atlantic to help restore 'old friendships eroded by time and neglect' is not an everyday occurrence. The 2nd King Edward VII's Own Goorkhas were alerted to this historic event, minds were bent, discussions took place and then, as nearly always happens, a simple solution presented itself. In addition to the well known expression 'no problem', our Canadian cousins had a habit of saying 'another day' for something unimportant that could be put off till tomorrow, and we had a song for Canada. Comex veterans were 'recalled', Brenda Stevens led the singing, and Major Ben Bently conducted the Goorkhas at Queen Elizabeth Barracks, courtesy of the Commanding Officer.

VILLAGE LIGHTS OR GAON KI JYOTI

There are more than half a million villages in India, and the hospitable face of that great country is to be found in her villages. This ballad is an attempt to capture the atmosphere and spirit of an Indian village. The English words are given in full elsewhere in the narrative. The song was sung on the road (in Hindi) by Jane Boston, Celia Congdon and Chris Nicholls. But, as a special feature for the 40th anniversary of Comex, Gaon Ki Jyoti is presented here by **Comex in India** with Depak Samson (Recording), Vachaspati Sharma (Arrangement), Gulfam Ahmed (Sarod), Kailash Sharma (Flute), Pallavi Laxman (Lead Singer), Poonam, Payal Sharma and Sharmishtha Singh (Vocals), and Vinod Kumar Babli (Synthesizer). Co-ordination: Tabla Master Kamal Kant Sharma. Introduced by Marjory Lyon.

Another day, another dream come true
For everyone; for me and you.
The sun will shine, the clouds will drift away,
Your dream, my love, is the dawn of each new day.

And on and on, as the seasons go their way
Be sure, my love, They're coming back one day.
All else my fail, But this at least is true,
The dawn of each new day Is dream come true.

Stand high, my love, and all your hopes renew
Reach for the stars, and they'll belong to you.
And the world will smile, While sweet winds kiss your brow,
And you'll know, my love, that the time to dream is now.

Repeat all three verses - and end

Chorus: Mere gaon ke die oyare pyare
Jaise nandan se jharte suman dhartipar
Jhilmil gagan ke sitare

Is gaon ka prakash kar andhere ka nash
Har-a rahi ko rah dikhata
Ko-i is desh a ko ho ya pradesh a ka
De to sab ko hi ghat paonchata
Yeh to deta h-a aram sare (repeat)

Kard man ka hare jag ko jagmag kare
Asa milta ha ba hen pasare
Is ke andar sanjoya hride gaon ka
Kukh ke sukh ke sapne sajae
Man ki ha kalpara, dur ki joyna,
Sabko apne hride se lagae
Kahin dipak se man ko ujare (repeat)

Mombatti bane, lamp torch bane
Kahin nanha kiya ban pukare
Yeh to darzi ha ya pansari hai ya,
Bechta phal ya chat banata.
Khimcha ha kahin, tandur kahin
Bechta gurrh ya pan lagata
Kahin bathe hon mil peneh sare (repeat)

Yeh to sabko barabar ujjagar kare
Aer sabki hi bigari sanvare
Mere purvaj yahan, unke purvaj rahe,
Sabke gorav ke yeh git gati.
Bhula bachpan jahin, phula jivan yahin,
Unke vaibhar ke gaya sunati,
Pran jab tak dhara par banare (repeat)
Gaon ki jyoti, awax jo desh kit
Jagmagati rahe panch sare.

MY FRIEND

Some things just happen, and adopting the bullock-cart driver as the symbol of friendship is a good example. Moving on his endless way, as his ancestors had done for a thousand years, the bullock-cart driver makes unhurried progress at two to three miles an hour; but he has been known to gallop! His singing – whether to keep himself awake, ward off evil spirits, or simply to communicate with his maker – is a feature of life on the Grand Trunk Road. His drinking habits are modest; his response to the roar of modern traffic, a friendly smile. As the link between the villages of India he is the friend of everyone. This song, sung at the inauguration of The Green Pennant Awards by Chris Nicholls, is dedicated to the bullock-cart driver and his colleagues.

My friend, we have met a thousand times,
And your image comes vividly to my mind.
With unaltering pace, patience personified,
You journey on content, and I am left behind.
The creaking of your cart, the bumps, the grinding wheels,
The rhythmic footfalls of your bulls portend
The tenor of an endless way
Beneath your gentle hand my lonely friend.

My friend, hark to the modern chase,
And its message demanding you give way,
In homage before the mood of passing time,
And end the thousand years, that went before today.
The blinding scourge of dust, from traffic roaring by,
Provokes your anger, wins a kindly smile,
Comforting your bulls, now briskly coaxing,
You journey on forgiving, for yet another mile.

My friend, when heart and limb are tired,
And your hopes lie stilled within your breast,
Lay aside your reins, and put your trust in God,
And ask of Him the blessing of some rest.
The hurricane lamp swings, and gently beckons still,
Symbol of comfort, of hope and of light,
Scatter your doubts and fears forever,
Forever shining brightly through the night.

My friend, it's time to say farewell,
We shall meet again but parting I confess,
Of all the things you see and others miss,
I treasure most, your memory timelessness.

HOW MANY

A song inspired by the qawals (minstrels or street singers) of India. It deals with the events of every day that rise up to heaven from God's constituency on earth. Like medieval minstrels they carry news of war and peace, and offer good advice – with predictions if required! Summoned to perform at a grand house no opportunity is lost of praising the master thereof. Two versions are sung here: one by Chris Nicholls, with Jane Boston, Brenda Stevens and the Comex choir on the road, and the other on African soil by John Mwesa and the Heritage Singers.

How many babies will be born today?
How many lives will fade away?
How many hearts will laugh or cry?
How many hopes will fade and die?

Chorus:

How many of these O lord will there be?
How many of these O lord?
How many of these O lord will there be?
How many of these O lord?
How many of these O lord will there be?

In the day we offer today to thee
How many words in anger or kindness?
How many decisions in vision or blindness?
How many rebukes, How many smiles?
How many journeys, How many miles?

Chorus

How many dreams are meant to come true?
How many old make way for the new?
How many ideas will take root and grow?
How many winds of change will blow?

Chorus

How many deeds will have been in vain?
How many bridges will be built again?
How many sins, How many prayers?
How many worries, How many cares?

Chorus

TABLA WALLAH

The tabla player, with his two little drums that make music as no other, follows a strict pattern of 'thals' (rhythms) and there can be no deviation – which makes it a difficult song to sing – but Comex friends in India are working on it. Of course, the presence of a Brahman tabla player lends an air of distinction to the image of Comex, while the lyrics themselves point to those events where his presence is essential. In this recording, Kamal Kant Sharma plays the tabla and Brenda Stevens sings, accompanied by Promod Shanker on sarod.

Yours is the humblest corner, your place is to squat on the floor,
And your smile is the mark of your fortune –
It asks for a smile and no more.
Your reward is waiting in heaven, And your place secure in the sun,
Let your hands touch those haunting, wild rhythms,
And play 'til the day is done.

Chorus

Tabla wallah, play your drums;
Play them fast, play them slow,
Play them high, play them low,
Play them everywhere you go,
Play your drum; play your drum,
Play your drum, play your drum, play your drum.
Play when the people are weeping,
Play when they dance and they sing,
Play when the seasons are changing,
Play when the temple bells ring.
At the time when your drumming is over,
And the time for the final beat comes,
Leave behind their lingering echoes,
To rise from eternal drums.

Chorus

The snow melting high on the mountains,
The winds sweeping over the plains,
The mist floating up through the valleys,
The roar and the splash of the rains.
Play on 'til the last ounce of courage;
Play on for the laughs and the sighs;
Keep playing 'til the sound of your magic,
Fades out to live in the skies.

Chorus

SILVER TRAIN

For the Queen's Silver Jubilee a convoy of twelve silver vehicles left the Royal Marines base in Deal bound for the Nilgiri Hills (Blue Mountains) of South India in response to an invitation from the people of Ooty to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the Head of the Commonwealth. This was Comex 8, which followed an itinerary agreed in advance with governments en route including Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. It was in Baghdad that the convoy, escorted all the way by outriders from the Syrian-Iraqi border, was dubbed The Silver Train. Mary Abendroth was a member of the Silver Train, and together with her husband Paul Wilson and the Folk Music Ensemble in Minnesota (Mary - vocal, Paul - vocal and guitars, Sarah Anderson – bass, and Arnold Anderson – whistle) recorded Silver Train on behalf of the United States of America. The contrasting version is by The Chase High School.

Chorus: Silver Train on lonely highway
Silver train, silver train.
Silver Train on sun-parched desert
Silver train, silver train.
Silver Train on snow-capped mountain
Silver train, silver train.
Silver Train through flooding water
Silver train, silver train.

Hear the engines roaring, as they drive the wheels a-rolling
And the radios crackle crisply in the air.
The light beams up and flashing brightly through the landscape
passing,
And the horns alerted start to toot and blare.

Chorus

Let it storm and let it thunder, there's a reason and no wonder,
For the devil's army marches in the night.
The rain will wash the blackness and the lightning light the darkness
Till the sun comes up to put the night to flight.

Chorus

The miles have gone behind us, far away but still remind us
That some journeys have a beginning, but no end.
'Til that final destination, every man and every nation
Learns to call his wayside brother, blessed friend.

Chorus

GREGORY'S FROLIC

Singing and dancing go together, but Comex had little of the latter to offer apart from joining in a wild Sikh Bangra or two in Punjab, and an occasional Scottish reel. That matter was put right by persuading a few individuals to have a go at a 'jig'. It was called Gregory's Frolic because Greg was responsible for the choreography and damaged his Achilles' tendon in the process – later operated on by a Sikh surgeon. The sequel to the story is that while still incapacitated Greg was invited on stage to join in a Bangra (later dubbed the Bangra Fling) at Ludhiana University – a challenge he survived, on one leg, with the help of powerfully built Sikh dancer. Gregory's Frolic was also performed at the Inauguration of The Green Pennant Awards by the same Comex dancers. The piper was Tom Lewin of Comex 10.

THE LIVING

Travelling the Asian Highway, far removed from the stress and strain of normal life, tends to focus the mind, and not least on the kindness and goodness of one's fellow human beings. There are also the living creatures that we take so much for granted: camels and donkeys, squirrels and crickets, and birds of every feather. The Living is sung by the children of The Chase High School at the inauguration of The Green Pennant Awards led by Chris Nicholls. The African version is by Lydia Lufungulo and the Heritage Singers.

Swans glide on the water so majestically.
Birds of every feather flying high and free.
Butterflies flaunt their beauty on the summer breeze.
Squirrels scamper wildly 'mong the autumn leaves.

Chorus O the living, living, living that surrounds me,
On the land, in the sea and on the air.
O the living, living, living that astounds me,
In every little corner everywhere

Corn fields bowing lowly for the harvesting.
Flowers give up their colours and their scents to spring
Orchards heavy laden, and the fruit hang ripe.
Hopfields and the vineyards add a spice to life.

Chorus

Elephants and the tigers and the kangaroo,
Lions, giraffes and monkeys in a common zoo,
Reptiles lie in waiting in the marshy lands,
Camels move in silence on the desert sands.

Chorus

Dwelling in the rivers and the deep blue sea,
Crabs and fish and oysters live in harmony
Whales are raising fountains, sharks await their prey
Still the world keeps turning through another day.

Chorus

Insects chorus loudly when the day is done.
Crickets dance a pibroch to the setting sun.
Frogs croak evening vespers as they go to bed.
Life still goes on living, though the world seems dead

Chorus

THERE MUST BE A REASON

This song was inspired by a Franciscan Priest, Joshua Sterk, Headmaster of St Francis School in Quetta - built out of the rubble of the 1930s earthquake. When the Silver Train was passing through Baluchistan there was some objection to the presence of an Indian (Kamal Kant) on board. Joshua's intervention helped to resolve the matter. His comment at the time that there must be a reason for everything became a song: it was first sung at the Green Pennant Awards in Delhi (in Hindi) by a female choir from the university, organised by Kamal Kant. It is recorded here by the Heritage Singers. For the contrasting version comes from Delhi (see Gaon Ki Jyoti).

LET'S SING A SONG

When Comex 4 embarked on the Sir Lancelot for Penang it was with the avowed intention of rehearsing the programme for Malaysia and Singapore on board. But that was before a buoyant ship and a turbulent sea sent all members below deck to their bunks. The journey down the peninsular was less eventful, but Comex sang and danced with enthusiasm and earned a generous accolade from Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew: 'Comex is an adventure with all the excitement with which the Commonwealth began. Long may it continue.' Sailing back to Calcutta on the Sir Galahad (later lost in the Falklands) the Captain, James Foster, and his Crew were challenged to a duel in song, which continued late into the night. Let's Sing a Song is a tribute to Malaysia and Singapore – and the ships that carried Comex there. (A Green Pennant Award was presented to the new Sir Galahad at the awards ceremony at State House in Lusaka.)

There must be a reason - but who can tell you why -
For men to be born, and for men to die;
A place and a purpose that makes it all clear,
Where the end of the journey is the end of doubt and fear.

For if there's no reason - it surely will seem -
This life is a nightmare, or at best a bad dream,
And a better tomorrow, ever one day away,
But without that tomorrow there's no hope anyway.

So there must be a reason - and all we need know -
A day is a lifetime, nothing less - nothing more,
And fill all the hours with joy and with love,
And leave the rest of the matter to the Heavens above.

Repeat once more from the beginning.

Chorus:

Let's sing a song, what shall we sing,
The birds and the bees and the flowers in spring,
Let's sing a song, what shall we sing,
The moon and the stars and everything.
Let's all sing it together,
The weak hand in hand with the strong,
Let's all sing it together,
The choice of a sword or a song.

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,
The idea is a thousand years old.
So a heart that is warm, the riddle might add,
Is worth more than one that is cold.
Extending the moral and widening the theme
A smile is worth many wise frowns,
As judges, politicians, parsons and kings
Achieve less in their labours than clowns

Chorus

Cheery words, laughter, kind thoughts and deeds,
Are worth more than the opposite kind,
But they need reinforcing with something more fluid
Than the spirit that flows from the mind.
Deeds are worth more than words galore,
Action is decision and thought,
But the bird in the riddle is the word in the middle
And one that can never be bought.

Chorus

THE MINSTRELS' SONG

The Minstrels' Song was meant to greet our old friends in Australia, although Comex – apart from a few individuals - never made it there. The Sir Lancelot had carried Comex 4 as far as Malaysia, and that was generous enough; to have pushed the boat out further with a request to sail on to Australia and New Zealand would not have been a good idea. So the Minstrels' Song had to suffice; and of course there is as much adventure in singing a song, if one has never sung in public before, as in climbing a mountain – or crossing an ocean! The Minstrels' Song is a modest offering to Australia from the wardroom of the Sir Galahad en route to Calcutta from Singapore.

Come minstrel sing a happy song, a song for every day;
Let your voice rise bold and clear,
Evoke goodwill, arouse good cheer and wing them far away.
Mix wisdom with a merry wit, let memory rest awhile,
Pitch the moral far ahead among the living not the dead,
Our willing hearts beguile.

Chorus

As quickly does tomorrow come to drive away today,
Fears and doubts and misery belong to yesterday,
So dreamers dream your wondrous dreams
Take heed of what I say:
A life well lived forever is no more than just today.
The moral of this thought is not original or mine;
Let's take a cup of kindness for the sake of auld lang syne.

Chorus

Minstrel, ponder well this point; A seed once sown must grow,
So raise your harp and pluck a string
Release your voice and let it sing a theme of long ago.
Don't let this moment pass unsung, it warrants true your praise;
The summèd total of such things
As beggars, sinners, saints and kings leads us to better days.

ON WINGS OF LOVE

New Zealand – where the Green Pennant Awards were endorsed at the 1995 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting - was a less challenging prospect and the solution lay in a Malay song Rasa Sayang (thoughts of love). Comex 4 had learnt to sing that song which led as naturally as night follows day to On Wings of Love dedicated to New Zealand, and sung by Annie Gregory and Chris Nicholls at the inauguration of The Green Pennant Awards

On wings of love you'll fly to peace when nightshades fall
On wings of love
On wings of love you'll reach the heights each time they call
On wings of love
On wings of love you'll ride the storms that rage without
On wings of love
On wings of love you'll make your bow when time runs out.
On wings of love, On wings of love.

On wings of love you'll make your way towards the stars
On wings of love
On wings of love you'll build a life of golden hours
On wings of love
On wings of love you'll need no guide to find the way
On wings of love
On wings of love you'll move a little every day.
On wings of love, On wings of love.

On wings of love you'll touch the sunbeams as you go
On wings of love
On wings of love you'll stop at every place you know
On wings of love
On wings of love you'll reach the goal at rainbow's end
On wings of love
On wings of love you'll make a thousand million friends,
On wings of love, On wings of love.

Repeat first verse, then end: On wings of love.

DO IT IN STYLE

Barbados was represented on Comex 11 across Canada by Parro Mahabir of Bridgetown and Eugenia Weekes of St Michael. Other West Indian participants came from Manchester and London. The song was later incorporated into the musical Kenaki at the Theatre Royal Stratford East. The plan was for Barbados to give a lead by recording Do it in Style. In the event two recordings were made: one with Mary Abendroth accompanied by a West Indian steel band, and the other by the Heritage Singers in Zambia

The windmill is turning and the harvest is ripe,
Birds will be mating as spring bursts with life;
Flowers will be blooming and strangers will smile
If you wave as you're passing and do it in style,
Do it in style, do it in style,
If you wave as you're passing and do it in style.

Depress-ed and weary and the pressures won't stop;
The party is over and the curtain won't drop;
It's a struggle to finish yet another hard mile
But do it, my friend, and do it in style.
Do it in style, do it in style, do it, my friend, and do it in style

The rain keeps on raining and the sun will not shine
The beer' s turned to bitter and you can't afford wine
Progress is bewildered and is limping awhile;
The cure is to gamble and do it in style.
Do it in style, do it in style,
The cure is to gamble and do it in style.

The carts are in front and the horses behind;
Burnt up with aggression the world is unkind;
Two courses of action your senses beguile,
Choose the bolder with courage and do it in style.
Do it in style, do it in style,
Choose the bolder with courage and do it in style.

Hope springs eternal to the end of the ride
With your gloves in one hand and your hat on one side
Cock a snook at the pundits and do it in style.
Do it in style, do it in style,
Cock a snook at the pundits and do it in style!

LIFE IS EMPTY WITHOUT LOVE (*Nikola's Song*)

An early entry on the Comex repertoire, Life is Empty Without Love, is dedicated to the memory of a Croatian postman, Nikola Vrbos, who made it his duty to shepherd Comex through the Old Yugoslavia because 'he liked Comex'. His daughter, Nena, studying at Zagreb University was invited to join the Cambridge contingent of Comex 3. The song expresses some of Nikola's thoughts. (He was awarded a Green Pennant in 1997 at a reception for Commonwealth Heads of Government in Edinburgh, but was too ill to attend. When told about the Award he remarked: 'Ah! They have not forgotten me.' Nikola later died and his Green Pennant now has a place of honour in the Holy Land (on the Comex 1 route) with Nena, now a teacher in Jerusalem.)

To think, unable to express your thoughts;
To dream, and never have a dream come true;
To feel, and have to stifle all your feelings;
To know frustration and its allied anguish too.
To laugh, but hear no sound or echo;
To weep, and find you weep alone.
To hope, and watch your hopes all turn to ashes;
To discover loneliness in your own home.
To ask, and have each wish rejected;
To seek, and never, ever find;
To pray without your prayers being answered;
To see with eyes that might as well be blind.
To stand firm before each pressing challenge;
To have the will and never to give in,
To know defeat, having pitched your might against it;
To submerge the final virtue into sin.
To want to die, afraid to go on living;
To shed all faith in heaven above;
To try and try and try, forever failing;
To discover life is empty without love.

TIHA NOCI (*Quiet Night*)

Nena brought Tiha Noci to Comex. It is a lullaby meaning the night is silent, about a mother pleading with the Nightingale to sing softly because her baby sleeps. Comex often sang the song - which pleased our Croatian hosts very much. This recording, by Comex on the road, is quite different from the original sung by friends of Comex in its native country.

Tiha noci moje zlato spava,
Blijedi mjesec nebo obasjava.
Tiho pojte maleni slavuji,
Da se moje zlato ne probudi!

Sjecaš li se zlato noci one,
Kadje mjesec nebom zaplovio?
Kadje mjesec nebom zaplovio,
Ja sam tebe, dušo, zagrlio.

Pala si mi, ah na grudi moje,
Ja poljubih medne usne tvoje.
Ja poljubih medne usne tvoje,
Sjecaš li se, zlato noci one?

AH! HO!

Despite Kenaki, How Many, Gaon Ki Jyoti, and Gregory's Frolic, our Punjabi friends would have been seriously displeased had we failed to do a song exclusively for them – hence this Comex 10 extra produced within an hour of going on stage at the All Indian Post Graduate Institute of Medicine in Chandigarh. The applause was thunderous enough to reach the ears of patrolling trishaws who dutifully picked up the tune to entertain their passengers with spontaneous versions of their own. A few years later His Justice K. S. Garewal (a member of Comex 10) sang the song – in convivial mood - at the wedding of his daughter, Harpriya, who had been present with her parents at the original performance. Here it is then sung by the Heritage Singers on stage in Chandigarh.

Ah - ha - ha, Ho - ho - ho,
Ah - ha - ha, Ho - ho - ho,
Ah - ha - ha, Ho - ho - ho,
Ah - ha - ha, Ho - ho - ho.

Hey Jalebi, you're a baby and the apple of my eye,
Hey Jalebi, don't say maybe and I'll love you till I die.
Hey Jalebi, let the game be if you're going to make me cry
Hey Jalebi, don't betray me with a devastating lie.

A RAGA FOR THE COMMONWEALTH

It was in Punjab State (where 'the little green flags' are embroidered) that the tune 'little green flags' was played as a raga in the presence of an audience of 2,000 medical students – on the same occasion as Ah! Ho! It was a brave attempt to point the way to the future of The Green Pennant Awards by identifying them with an ancient form of classical music that has inspired, and continues to inspire millions. Kamal Kant Sharma and Promod Shanker were encouraged to play the raga again on African soil during Comex 13/14. Greater musicians and wiser counsel will no doubt make their views felt about this infant project with its origins in a simple tune for bagpipes. But the real significance of the matter is that 'the little green flags' (nannhey hary dhvaj), and all that it symbolises should have found its way into a Raga for the Commonwealth bearing the same distinctive name.

COMING HOME

It was at the Gaiety Theatre in Simla (founded in 1887 and still going strong) that Coming Home was sung for the first time during the Comex Musical Kenaki conducted by the late Stephen Burnett and recorded by the late Gordon Partridge (Canadian members of Comex 9), to both of whom Coming Home is here dedicated. This version of Coming Home was recorded in a gesture of comradeship by Canadian members of Comex across Canada from studios in Vancouver and Toronto on 'Thanksgiving': Alistair Eagle and Ken Stewart in Vancouver; Judy and Fiona Burnett, Victoria Hadden, Elizabeth Tucci, Joy D'Souza, Joyce Mino, Duncan Parker, Kiera Brown-Lyons, and Luyse Groulx in Toronto. Produced by Chris Brown-Syed of Toronto and the University at Buffalo, and engineered by Bernie Cisternas at Number 9 Sound, Toronto. And, finally, a 'live' recording by Gordon Partridge from the Gaiety Theatre in Simla, of the well known ballad **The Captains of the Road** in tribute to friends of Comex: the Sikh drivers of heavy vehicles on The Grand Trunk Road.

Chorus: I'm coming home home,
Coming home,
To the things I love and they belong to me-e,
I'm coming home.

To the bosom of a cherished hamlet,
To smoke clouds rising in the sky.
To the music of a rushing stream,
To the sound of a breathless sigh:

Chorus

To comrades long ago forgotten,
To memories in a glass of wine;
Roasting coffee beans and baking bread,
Footsteps on the sands of time:

Chorus

To churchbells on a winter's morning,
To trees stripped bare of autumn leaves.
To the signs of early spring returning
To the sparrows nesting in the eaves:

Chorus

To the happy sounds of song and laughter,
To the company of so many trusted friends.
To the early frosts and misty evenings,
To the place where every journey ends.

Chorus

LITTLE GREEN FLAGS (BAGPIPES AND ZAMBIAN CHORAL) AND TOGETHER UNAFRAID

After 40 years, 'the little green flags' has become an award 'identifying the spirit of adventure with crossing the barriers that divide people,' inaugurated by Prince Philip in London, endorsed in Auckland, New Zealand, presented in Canada, Delhi, and Lusaka, and most recently at the 1997 summit in Edinburgh in the presence of Commonwealth Leaders who were invited to be the guardians of The Green Pennant Awards. The Story of Comex in Song ends with an expression of gratitude to the late Pipe Major Angus MacDonald MBE, to President Kenneth Kaunda and The Heritage Singers of Zambia, and to the band of the 2nd King Edward V11's Own Goorkhas.

IF YOU ARE PART OF THIS STORY PLEASE DOWNLOAD COPIES FOR YOUR FRIENDS - ED