

I LOVE PARIS IN THE SPRINGTIME

It has always been one of my greatest ambitions to be rich. To achieve this, I have often earned money. The various methods used have included sticking stamps on envelopes, playing the accordion for the BBC World Service, driving trucks, teaching religious education, investing in holiday chalets on the Isle of Sheppey, acting in Colditz Story and working at Harwell on the "Seafreeze" project.

Whilst watching a television programme some months ago, I discovered that an English violinist was earning £200 a week by busking on the Paris métro. Clearly, this was a method to be attempted.

There was one slight drawback—my violin playing was nowhere near good enough for solo performances. However I was very fortunate in obtaining as a partner the young maestro—violoncellist Graham Waterhouse, whose ambition was also to become very rich. Having a common aim and a reasonably common means of achieving it, we commenced our concert career by performing Beethoven's string duos in Portobello Market one



sunny October morning last autumn.

A modestly eventful start was achieved in this new venture—we were recorded and interviewed for American radio, photographed by hundreds of Japanese tourists, almosted arrested for causing obstruction (our audience was blocking a "public right of way"), filmed by a young lady from Ecuador "my husband he plays the violin too". An added bonus was the fact that we earned £8 in one hour. A few weeks later we performed again, with even greater success. With two experiences such as this, we were ready for the big one—Paris.

The choice of date, winter half-term, was not very fortunate. It coincided with the France-Wales rugby international, which took place in Paris. Our overnight trip from Victoria to Paris was therefore not uneventful. Whilst attempting to sleep in the luggage compartment on the ferry, we felt beer dripping over us and heard loud, foul language for so long that even I was shocked. A move was called for. The only memories I have of the train journey from Dunkerque to Paris was that of a drunken Welshman urinating in the corridor of the overfilled train. It was sad to see humans behaving like animals. The experiences we had on that journey will not be forgotten in a hurry.

Morale was low on arrival in Paris. It was cold and cloudy. We were desperately tired and hungry, and had nowhere to sleep that night. After trying unsuccessfully to arrange for free accommodation we

decided to head into town for our first musical engagement. Châtelet station had been recommended as a good one by the French Tourist Board. It was there that we set up our stands, music pinned with clothes pegs and portable stools. The repertoire was to consist entirely of French music, of course, composed by the distinguished Parisian violinist Ferenc Mazas. Within minutes of starting, it was clear that Mr. Mazas was going to do very well even 100 years after his death. The coins were rolling in thick and fast and several times I missed a bar of music, or got lost altogether, as I caught a glimpse of a beautiful French girl smiling at us or a note floating into the violin case. Our success was assured. We were often surrounded by 20-30 people at a time. We played for Welsh rugby supporters who thought we were French, and photographed us as a "typical Parisian scene". The French aristocratic ladies were particularly impressed with the young maestro's violoncello technique "...vous êtes au conservatoire?... Non?... Anglais?... C'est incroyable!..."

How Paris greeted us! How marvellous we felt! A dream come true. Parisians were paying for us to stay in their town. And so it was. We earned enough money to pay for our journey, our cheap lodgings and food. What a weekend—what a half-term!

It was with some interest that we discovered on our return that during our performance on Châtelet station a Welsh rugby supporter was being murdered on the next station along, and that a young Frenchman was murdered on another station a few days later....