

NOTES ON LISTENER CROSSWORDS: NUMBERS 2001 – 2500

Crossword No. 2338: Hunt the gowk by Salamanca

Unrelated to this puzzle, the following correspondence was published concerning the decision not to publish a crossword every fourth week.

Our crossword (starting 3 APRIL 1975)

SIR: Consumer Viewpoint: We want our Crossword!

BARBARA SIMON

Saltburn by the Sea, Cleveland

SIR: As one of those unfortunates who buy THE LISTENER primarily to attend to the crossword, I deprecate the lack of a puzzle in the 20 March issue. Having been deprived of my accustomed hebdomadal mystery tour of the English language, I have been obliged to spend the *entire* weekend doing long overdue house redecoration: I write to register my disapproval of your omission only because you may receive a letter from my wife applauding it.

A. A. WHITE

Caterham

We have had several letters and 'phone calls regretting the omission of the Crossword from the issue of 20 March. In future, 'Consumer Viewpoint' will appear once every four weeks, replacing the Crossword. In those issues, the solution to the Crossword of a fortnight previously will be published. The reputation of the Crossword in THE LISTENER is deservedly high, but a monthly report on consumer affairs, arising out of the consumer programmes on radio and television, must claim a small share of the limited space available.

Editor, THE LISTENER

Crossword No. 2361: Orienteering by Salamanca

The following was printed with the solution:

"Readers will be sorry to learn of the death, in January this year, of Mr R. L. Trapp ('Utdtu'), to whom this puzzle is acrostically dedicated, via the initial letters of the clues."

From *Ad Lib* by D.A.N. Jones, 10 JUNE 1976

This particular article – the series was more or less weekly – was devoted to a meeting with Leonard Bernstein, whose book *The Unanswered Question* had just been published. The following excerpt is relevant.

"I know Bernstein is fond of THE LISTENER crossword (Stephen Sondheim gives him THE LISTENER as part of his Christmas present) and I wondered if he ever attempted our mathematical puzzles, since the technicalities in his book suggested that he had mathematical leanings. But no: he says he has mathematical leanings but is not mathematically astute—so he merely reads the rules of the contest, and marvels. 'I like words better than numbers. I like words nearly as much as I like notes.' Bernstein and Sondheim claim that they get THE LISTENER in batches, at irregular intervals, from some sort of tramp steamer."

Crossword No. 2394: ‘Mastermind’ with Apex

This puzzle provoked the following letter on **11 NOVEMBER 1976**.

Obscure encyclopaedia

SIR: I would appreciate it if you could allow me space in your columns so that I can apologise for all the unnecessary frustration caused by my ‘Mastermind’ crossword puzzle (No 2,394), which appeared in THE LISTENER on 9 September.

Apparently, Norwich was in a tizzy, Plymouth was ransacked and harassed librarians telephoned THE LISTENER in a desperate and vain attempt to locate ‘Jude’s Obscure Encyclopaedia’.

As all the names used in the puzzle were very well-known and all the other words could easily be found in the dictionary which I always recommend, with all the ‘Mastermind’ questions being so nonsensical, I could not resist the temptation to recommend what I considered would be the most appropriate reference book for the occasion, in the hope that solvers would appreciate the joke.

I did not expect anyone to take an ‘Obscure’ encyclopaedia seriously, but now, having established the need for such a volume, perhaps some enterprising publisher will see fit to, humorously, satisfy the demand.

APEX

Croydon

Letter, 14 OCTOBER 1976

Clued-up but clueless

SIR: For many years I have been utterly mystified by your crosswords. Even when presented with the solutions I am none the wiser. I have never met anyone who knows what they are all about, far less can work out a clue.

Perhaps you could publish an explanatory article for the benighted.

RICHARD J. LETTERS

London NW3

Letter, 28 OCTOBER 1976

Clued-up but clueless

SIR: Courage, Mr Letters! (14 October) I cannot even understand the setters’ declarations of intent—let alone the solutions to the clues.

ALAN MARTIN HARVEY

Watford, Herts.

Letter, 18 NOVEMBER 1976

Clued-up but clueless

SIR: Unlike your correspondents, Mr Letters (14 October) and Mr Harvey (28 October), I look forward to the challenge of the weekly LISTENER crossword, being neither baffled by most clues, nor mystified by the setters’ instructions. However, once every four weeks, you publish a totally unmanageable teaser called ‘Consumer Viewpoint’. With this puzzle, I always have great difficulty distinguishing clues from preamble, can never find the grid in which to insert my answers (even if I were able to solve the clues), and so have never been able to complete one for myself. Furthermore, I know of no one who has. Couldn’t we have a more normal LISTENER crossword instead, please?

DONALD SARTRE

London NW1

Letter, 25 NOVEMBER 1976**Clued-up but clueless**

SIR: I am deeply touched by the plight of your readers who miss a crossword once a month and are reduced to searching for clues within ‘Consumer Viewpoint’ (Letters, 18 November). Why didn’t you tell me sooner? There really is no problem in making the British economy more of a puzzle.

ELIZABETH SMITH

London N5

From *Ad Lib* by D.A.N. Jones, 6 JANUARY 1977

“The songs [in the show *I Gotta Shoe*] include good new material by Brahms and Sherrin and two of the cast, but also excellent work by Harold Arlen, Gershwin and Sondheim. This reminds me that, since Ned Sherrin seems to be in good form, I must try to see his other show, *Side by Side with Sondheim*, at Wyndham’s.

Stephen Sondheim appeared on *The Lively Arts* (BBC2), last Sunday, and remarked, in the course of some valuable remarks about the musical theatre, that he was addicted to the LISTENER crossword. He managed to tell the world that ‘Cinerama’ is an anagram of ‘American’ before André Previn could steer the discussion away from these esoteric matters.

‘Why haven’t the maintenance men been given roles in Sondheim’s show?’ This is a clue in a crossword I received, as another Christmas present, from Eric Chalkley, who sets LISTENER puzzles, under the name of ‘Apex’. This skilful puzzle is dedicated to certain favoured solvers—who are named in the clues. For instance: ‘Would Bernstein use the tot when conducting an Oriental Symphony?’

Last year, Eric Chalkley sent me a personal crossword. Certain letters had been omitted from each answer. When set out, they spelt ‘D. A. N. Jones: Ad Lib’. He also sent me an ingenious clue to my own name. I responded with a clue to ‘Eric Chalkley’—‘*I ache with clerkly contortions.*’ Get it?

One may well think of these puzzles as a waste of time, merely a way of showing off to a tiny audience. But many games are like that—and it is reassuring to remember that brilliant musicians are playing the same game. Have crosswords and musical composition anything in common?”

Crossword No. 2408: Lost Rivers by Alexis

This puzzle provoked the following letters.

10 MARCH 1977**Singing Reed**

SIR: Since when has a flute been a reed instrument? See LISTENER crossword No 2,408 (‘Lost Rivers’), solution published 27 January.

J. BOWIE

London NW1

‘Alexis’ replies:

Do you demand I get the boot
For fixing false reeds in a flute?
The modern flautist, I concede,
Can never split a faulty reed.

But *autres temps* had *autres moeurs*.
 In ancient Greece, for instance, there
 Were reeded double flutes galore.
 Excuse me, please, if I'm a bore:
 Seek *aulos* in your lexicon,
 Translated 'flute' by everyone.

24 MARCH 1977

Singing Reed

SIR:

Alexis, sir, I summon you to Styx
 For getting flutes and oboes in a mix.
 'Tis well known by musicologists
 That auloi players gripped their lips
 O'er reeds—that lexicographers
 Are wrong and, fuddled by their needs poetic,
 Translators battling with the verse Hellenic
 All ignorant of reeds and *embouchures*
 Of vertical and transverse tubes
 Caused havoc worse
 Than this poor verse.

MADEAU STEWART

BBC London W1

Crossword No. 2456: Around the table by Apex From *Ad Lib* by D.A.N. Jones, 20 APRIL 1978

The 200th anniversary of the birth of William Hazlitt, on 10 April 1778, was cryptically celebrated in THE LISTENER crossword 2,456. The solution is published today, on page 523. 'Apex', the crossword setter, has flattered this column by including my own name, alongside those of Michael Foot, Dennis Potter and J.B. Priestley, as well-known admirers of Hazlitt. This is very gratifying: it might even induce crossword-solvers to glance at some of the other pages in our journal.

Letter, 30 NOVEMBER 1978

Now Read on

SIR: I see the crossword-setters' annual dinner has brought on the customary rush of blood to the head of their guest, D.A.N. Jones (THE LISTENER, 16 November). His paternalistic exhortation to read all of THE LISTENER, not just the crossword page, reminds me of my dad, who told me years ago: 'No pudding if you don't eat your cabbage.'

Fie upon your Mr Jones! Say I find the pages of THE LISTENER make a satisfactory underlay for the lino in my lavatory, I will use them thus, read or unread. That privilege comes of my spending the 25p that helps keep him in business, crossword or no crossword.

MILNE POSTLETHWAITE

Borehamwood, Herts

Crossword No. 2500: Floreat in Aeternum by Ploutos, Babs, Sam, Apex, Klick, Zander

This puzzle was accompanied by an article by Jonathan Crowther (Azed). This provoked a letter from E.M. Holroyd, who set two puzzles for THE LISTENER, under his own name. The letter was published on 7 June 1979.

Crossword Jubilee

SIR: I enjoyed the article by Jonathan Crowther (THE LISTENER, 24 May) in celebration of Crossword 2,500, and I was particularly pleased that he referred to crossword-making as an art. For too long the crossword has been the art that dare not speak its name, unacknowledged as such even by its devotees.

There are three principal elements which may contribute to the artistic success of a crossword, the first being the clues. For an example of elegant clueing, which avoids invidious comparisons between present-day setters, consider the final trio of rhymed clues to LISTENER Crossword 911 by Afrit:

When tale wraps it up inner meaning you need (ENTAL)
 Dick whose Fancy was Day although Eve might succeed (DEWY)
 I read to myself: I have plenty to read (TOME)

As Mr Crowther implied, the geometrical structure of the diagram and the method of entering the answers has been an area where LISTENER setters have shown great originality and ingenuity. Provided this structure is not too contrived, it is capable of contributing a major artistic element which can add considerably to the solver's enjoyment.

However, the clues and the structure, however elegant, are not, in my view, sufficient to make a crossword wholly satisfying. The remaining necessary ingredient, and the one on which any claim for the crossword as an art-form must, I believe, largely rest, is a unifying theme or quotation to be discovered by the solver. Ideally, the solution of each clue should itself contribute something towards the discovery of this 'figure in the carpet', giving the solver's task a unity and coherence deeper than that arising from the mere interlocking of the words. It is in the development of this type of crossword that LISTENER setters have particularly led the way.

Of course, not all crosswords, even in THE LISTENER, achieve, or even aim at, the kind of artistic success I have tried to describe, and it may be that some setters and solvers would dismiss what I have said as pretentious, but I hope that many would agree that a good crossword is an artistic crossword. We all owe a great debt to THE LISTENER. May we hope that you will encourage the further development of the crossword as an art-form, not only by continuing to publish outstanding examples, but also by occasionally providing space for their discussion and criticism?

E. M. HOLROYD

Eversley, Hants.

[Further letters were published under this title, but all were devoted to examples of humorous definitions in *Chambers Dictionary*, culminating in a lengthy 'historical' letter from a senior figure in that publishing house.]