

IF YOU COULD HAVE DINNER WITH ANYONE IN THE WORLD, ALIVE OR DEAD, WHO WOULD IT BE?

In some ways, this is a very difficult question, and, in other ways a simple one. It is the 'alive or dead' element that adds complexity. For example, if I chose a character who was from centuries ago, it would probably be that she or he would have to explain so much about life in their times in order to contextualise any answers that they gave. If it was someone from a long time ago, it would probably be of more interest to them to discuss the changes that have been made since they were on the Earth than it would be for me to understand the world in which they lived, not that it would not be fascinating both ways. It has to be 'a given' that there would be a translator for any interactions with non-English speakers, although given the magical time-travelling element implicit in the story, it should be assumed that we would be able to understand each other, as we conversed across time.

If I were to travel back in time, would I have to choose a famous person? Otherwise, how would I know their name? This might contravene any interest I have in knowing about the lives of ordinary people. But is this even true? I could choose to have dinner with an ancestor. That would be particularly interesting, given that, as for most people, my knowledge of my ancestors is limited or non-existent. It would be fascinating to turn that black-and-white photograph into a person, or, even more magical still, to meet someone I had not even heard of, or, if I had heard of them, someone I had not seen a pictorial representation of. As with many things, it was the rich who had the privilege of having their portraits painted, but did they really look as beautiful and as handsome as they were portrayed?

Returning to my family heritage, I know that part of that heritage is Irish, and I might say that the clue is in my surname, McDermott, but DNA profiling tells me that I have some Viking ancestry. I wonder if that stems from my ancestors in Castlebar, as it is a known fact that the Vikings attacked the north and west of Ireland, and Castlebar, in County Mayo, on the west coast of Ireland would, therefore, have been an obvious target. Wouldn't it be fascinating to have dinner with a Viking, although, given their reputation, perhaps not!

If it were to be someone famous, then some candidates would be William Shakespeare, Galileo Galilei, Harriet Tubman and George Eliot, all of whom

achieved fame through their own efforts and talents, rather than having been born into fame by reason of birth, as is the case with monarchs.

The original question referred to one person, and, whenever I have been asked this question before, I have come up with the same answer: Kate Bush. As in many cases, one associates music with a particular time in one's life. I remember working on a kibbutz in Israel in the summer of 1978. I had gone there with my friend from Sweden, Dave Crocker, and he and I were very much focussed on music. I can remember that we learnt a number of Beatles songs and gave a concert, accompanied by two female backing singers, for the whole of the kibbutz, Kibbutz Tsuba.

Without doubt, the dominant song from my time on the kibbutz was 'Wuthering Heights', written, sung and performed by Kate Bush, who had reached the grand age of 20 when I arrived in Israel, but who had been only 19 when the song was released. Coincidentally, I have since discovered, Kate Bush shared a birthday with Emily Bronte, who wrote the novel upon which the song is based. Kate Bush was the first female solo artist to top the UK album charts and the first female artist to enter it at number one, and at such a young age, as well! Kate Bush's talent had been spotted by Dave Gilmour, of Pink Floyd fame, who had helped her produce a demo tape for EMI records. Pink Floyd come from Cambridge, a city that holds a special place in my heart.

There are so many aspects to Bush's talent. As well as writing such unique songs, she sings them beautifully and dances mesmerically. Many great song-writers and performers over the years have been part of a duo, the most obvious in the modern world being Lennon and McCartney who, as we know, come from my family's home town, Liverpool. Kate Bush's genius is that she wrote so many absolutely unique songs, and wrote them alone.

'Running Up That Hill' is another of her great songs. It has gained popularity more recently when, in 2022, it was featured in the fourth season of the Netflix series 'Stranger Things'. As in many cases, a return to fame has brought an artist's talents to the attention of a new generation, who, otherwise, might not have heard of them. My other favourite Kate Bush songs include 'Babushka' and 'The Man with the Child in His Eyes'.

And what questions would I ask Kate Bush if I met her? Where would I start? Perhaps I could begin with the most obvious of questions, and that would relate to the inspiration for her songs, and whether her Irish mother was a great influence on her. Does her inventiveness have Celtic roots? For me, she shares a creativity with Enya, another great songstress, who is Irish, of course, and from a similar generation. But that is someone else's story. Perhaps I should finish with the deluded notion that everyone who has Irish roots has an in-built creativity. But that would be revealing something of a bias, would it not?