Those Were The Days

by

*Eyes Right*

**Springfield, VA –** About 3 AM the other night shortly after awaking from a bad dream. I had an earworm. As far as I can recall, I this was the first time I experienced this particular song on a continuous loop in my mind. But there it was, *Those Were the Days*, with Mary Hopkin’s voice just as clear as when I first heard her sing it in 1968.

The origin of the song is complicated. It was originally composed by a Russian, Boris Fomin, using a very old traditional romance tune with words based on a poem by fellow Russian poet, Konstantin Podrevsky. An American musician and playwright, Eugene Raskin, put new English lyrics on it. (Interestingly, Raskin also wrote three books on architecture and taught at Columbia University). Both Raskin and his wife, Francesca, played the international circuit as balladeers and at least once a year sang at the Blue Angel Club in London. Coincidentally, the Beatle, Paul McCartney, often visited this club and after hearing the Raskins perform *Those Were The Days* several times, secured rights to the song. Based upon the recommendation of his friend, the model, Twiggy, McCartney hired a young Welsh singer, Hopkin, to record it on his Apple label. It became an instant success and was ultimately recorded in over 20 languages by many recording artists. When released in the U.S., *Those Were The Days* rapidly rose to the Hot 100 number two but never reached number one due to the Beatles *Hey Jude*.

Raskin lived comfortably off the royalties for this one song for the rest of his life (he also enjoyed proceedings from a novel, a play, and his architecture books). Ironically, Raskin had illegally copyrighted both the music and the lyrics in his own name, but apparently, he was able to make it stick since the Russians were long dead.

One never knows where one’s work will be used. In 1969, the President of Equatorial Guinea, ordered over 150 persons he accused of plotting a coup to be publicly executed in the National Stadium while Hopkins version of *Those Were The Days* was being continuously played on loudspeakers!

McCartney hired a fellow Brit, Richard Hewson, to do the arrangement for Hopkins vocals and used Russian and Central European instrumentation, including a balalaika, a hammered dulcimer, and a cimbalom along with a children’s choir to give the song the feel of a Yiddish folk dance. All I know is that Hopkin’s version had been buried in the deep recesses of my mind for over 50 years only for the words and tune of the chorus to suddenly appear as phoenix rising from the ashes.

The lyrics are easily found online, along with several videos of Hopkin singing the song, including her appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show (one of her many appearances on his show). Hopkin had several other hit songs and had a long successful career as not only a singer but an actress, composer, and even rapped with Robin Williams. Recently, in her 70’s, she has released an album with her daughter containing new material and covers from Dire Straits and the Beatles.

So join me in a fit of unrepentant nostalgia capturing those lost, and maybe not so innocent days of youth while singing along with a wry smile reflecting on “those were the days”…

***Once upon a time there was a tavern***

***Where we used to raise a glass or two***

***Remember how we laughed away the hours***

***And think of all the great things we would do?***

***Those were the days my friend***

***We thought they’d never end***

***We’d sing and dance forever and a day***

***We’d live the life we choose***

***We’d fight and never lose***

***For we were young and sure to have our way.***

***La, la, la, la, la, la***

***La, la, la, la, la, la,.la***

***La, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la…***

I thought you might like to know.

E-R