

DALE JONATHAN WINTON

TV presenter, disc jockey and entertainer

22nd May 1955 - 18th April 2018

Tribute taken from ceremony conducted on Tuesday
22nd May 2018, at One Marylebone, London NW1 4AQ
By Rupert Morris, Humanists UK

Even to those who hardly knew him, Dale Winton was a bringer of joy. He connected with people of all types and all ages, all over the English-speaking world, communicating a flirtatious yet fundamentally innocent love of life – and laughter. It is hard to say the name, or even think of him, without smiling.

Dale Jonathan Winton was born in North London on 22 May. His father, Gary Winner, was a Jewish businessman in his forties, more than 20 years older than his mother Sheree, a beautiful and glamorous woman who had just embarked on a showbusiness career that was to bring her TV appearances alongside Terry-Thomas and Frankie Howerd, as well as parts in several British films. Dale was named after Dale Robertson, the handsome star of the TV western series Wells Fargo.

Young Dale had quite a conventional upper middle-class upbringing, with a nanny, then a succession of au pairs. They had holidays at Cannes on the French riviera. At the age of eight, Dale was sent to prep school, initially as a boarder, which he hated. He was rather a chubby

boy with no interest in team games and little enthusiasm for academic study. He would have preferred to spend more time hanging around the film studios where Sheree was getting work. This was around the time that Sheree got a part in the first Beatles film, *A Hard Day's Night*, and young Dale was soon starstruck. He had caught the showbiz bug.

Later in life, a great friend of Dale's was the showbiz legend Cilla Black. They had first met when Dale was working on Radio Trent in the late seventies and she gave him an interview, in the course of which Dale said "Cilla, we have something in common." He was leading up to saying that they were both Geminis, but Cilla looked closely at Dale's face and burst out: "Yes! We've both had nose jobs by Percy Jay." Which was true. It was the beginning of a great friendship, which took Dale to Bobby and Cilla's place in Spain quite a few times, led to Cilla leaving champagne in Dale's dressing-room on the evening of the Royal Variety Performance in 2001 – which Vinnie Jones and Frankie Dettori snaffled "to soothe their nerves" – and led to a memorable Valentine's Day dinner at the Ivy with Cilla and Martine McCutcheon in 2002. Dale was among those who were hit hard by Cilla's death in August 2015, and in her honour, Claire Sweeney is now going to sing 'Alfie' – which of course Cilla recorded in 1965.

Song: Alfie, sung by Claire Sweeney

First reading: WHAT SHOULD LIFE BE? (Anon), read by Martine McCutcheon

What Should Life Be?

Neat and orderly?
or messy and chaotic?

Quiet desperation,
even quieter compromise?
or daring thrills,
creative experiments?
Walking carefully along
looking down at
gray sidewalks
to avoid crack or pebble?
or leaping from peak to peak
across gaping canyons
looking down
from dizzying heights?

No one should decide for another.
One can only live what one believes.
If you ask, we believe:

Life should **not** be
a methodical journey to the grave
with the goal being sure, safe arrival
in a well-preserved body,
but rather to skid in sideways,
flute of champagne in hand,
screaming "What a Ride!"

As it happens, that last line of Martine's reading leads very nicely into the story of how Dale met Mark Linsey, who became, as he put it, "the brother I never had".

Mark and Dale met on Radio Trent and hit it off straight away. One evening soon after their first meeting, they went for dinner after Dale's show and Mark got into his VW Golf to follow Dale in his Vauxhall Carlton. They were making their way through the Lace Market in Nottingham when two shadows dashed into the road. Dale caught one a glancing blow and he ran off, whereupon the other jumped on Dale's bonnet, flashed his badge, got into the passenger seat and ordered him to "Follow that man – and put your foot down." A high-speed chase ensued before they caught up with the fugitive, Dale pulled over and the copper dashed off in pursuit. He returned a few minutes later to thank Dale and assure him that everything was under control – which was a relief to Mark, who hadn't seen him flash his badge and had feared that his new friend was being abducted! Dale, of course, just loved being part of a real-life cops-and-robbers episode. It certainly gave them plenty to talk about over dinner – and was the beginning of a deep and lasting friendship. There were more adventures on the road, in broadcasting, with Mark as producer and Dale as presenter, and a shared ambition to make in onto primetime Saturday evening TV.

Their friendship deepened after Mark got married to Sarah and had a family. In due course, Dale became godfather to Josh, Ben and Louis, and Mark's family became Dale's family. They went on holidays in Europe, Florida and elsewhere. They spent Christmases and other holidays together, including the Easter just gone.

TRIBUTE by Josh, Ben and Louis Linsey

Now it's time to mention Dusty Springfield, one of Dale's first and most enduring passions.

"Dusty's music," wrote Dale in his autobiography, "has been with me through all my good and bad times and there's always a track that hits exactly the right spot and sorts me out. There is not a single one of the 280 she recorded during a career that lasted almost 36 years which I do not know."

Yet Dale and Dusty never met, despite many opportunities. Dale interviewed her by phone from Radio Trent to Los Angeles. He went to see her many times in concert and saw her in a West End nightclub, but was too shy to introduce himself. A few years later he met Dusty's driver who told him of an occasion when Dusty had come to Soho and spotted Dale. He was famous by then, and she knew that he was one of her biggest fans, but when the driver suggested saying hello, she said: "No, I'm too shy."

So they never met – but Dusty's songs endured, and Dale must have given them more air time than any other DJ, so they did each other plenty of good. To remind us of that bond between them, Claire Sweeney is about to sing one of a number of songs that will always be associated with Dusty Springfield.

Song: GOING BACK, sung by Claire Sweeney

Second reading: IF YOU GO, written by Jacques Brel and Rod McKuen, read by David Walliams

If you go away on this summer day
Then you might as well take the sun away
All the birds that flew in the summer sky
When our love was new and our hearts were high
When the day was young and the night was long
And the moon stood still for the night bird's song

If you go away, if you go away, if you go away

But if you stay, I'll make you a day
Like no day has been or will be again
We'll sail on the sun, we'll ride on the rain
We'll talk to the trees and worship the wind
Then if you go, I'll understand
Leave me just enough love to hold in my hand

If you go away, if you go away, if you go away

But if you stay, I'll make you a night
Like no night has been or will be again
I'll sail on your smile, I'll ride on your touch
I'll talk to your eyes, that I love so much
Then if you go, I'll understand
Leave me just enough love to hold in my hand

If you go away, if you go away, if you go away

If you go away, as I know you must
There'll be nothing left in this world to trust
Just an empty room, full of empty space
Like the empty look I see on your face
Oh, I'd have been the shadow of your shadow
If it might have kept me by your side

If you go away, if you go away, if you go away

Please don't go away!

Now before Paul Jackson, former Head of BBC Entertainment, tells us more about Dale in his pomp, we should perhaps remind ourselves what a struggle he had getting there. There were eight years between the end of his time at Radio Trent in 1985 and the first series of Supermarket Sweep in 1993 – years when his confidence was fragile, his bank account overdrawn and his prospects negligible.

More than once, the pitching skills that Merrill mentioned had to be deployed on various bank managers – notably in 1992 or 1993 when Dale was in his late 30s, no longer a bright young thing, living in a little rented flat in North Harrow, having downsized his car from a cherished Audi to a workaday Nissan. He was £7,000 overdrawn, with no collateral and receiving ever more threatening letters from the bank. His only asset, Dale thought, was a demo tape he had just received for a pilot show called 'Personals' – which never got made. In desperation, he dashed round to the manager of NatWest in Hatch End and thrust the tape into his hand, urging him to give Dale one more chance. Amazingly, the manager watched the tape, was impressed, and gave him just enough breathing space. Then along came Supermarket Sweep and Dale was back on track.

TRIBUTES by Paul Jackson, TV producer, and Jon Culshaw, impressionist and entertainer

We've heard of some of Dale's abiding passions. Now let's remind ourselves that he was always interested in what he called "good pop music", something with a catchy beat, good vocals and appealing performers.

The turn of the millennium brought us the boyband called Blue, who over the next two years took the UK charts by storm with albums entitled 'All Rise', 'One Love' and 'Guilty'. Dale fell for them instantly, and promoted them every chance he got. So here they are again, performing in Dale's honour, with their classic song One Love:

Song ONE LOVE, performed by Blue – Antony Costa, Duncan James, Lee Ryan and Simon Webbe

I hope you all feel we've done Dale proud. It's no more than he deserved. All of you here were lucky enough to know him as friends or colleagues – and for all the shock you felt when you heard the news of his death, and the deep sense of loss you feel now, you must also feel privileged that he played a part in your lives and you in his.

You weren't the only ones. Just think of all those gameshow contestants, who will talk about Dale Winton for the rest of their lives; the TV and radio staff and technicians; the interviewees and other showbiz acquaintances; the millions of TV viewers; and random members of the public who bumped into him and were charmed by him.

As it happens, my wife was one of those. About 10 or 15 years ago, she was driving westwards along the Westway, a few hundred yards from here, in quite heavy traffic when she looked across at the car next door and who should she see but Dale Winton, at the wheel of what looked like a brand-new Bentley Continental. They caught each other's eyes and Dale mouthed the words "New car" and waved his arms happily, while Kitty waved and smiled – which they carried on doing for a while as they kept drawing abreast of each other in the traffic. It made her day, and from all that I've heard and read over recent weeks, it was entirely typical of someone who could think of nothing nicer than to make someone's day – in a distinctly un-Clint-Eastwood kind of way!

Dale Winton was, as he himself acknowledged, a born game-show host. Actually, he was a lot more – a skilled interviewer, an aficionado of pop music, a witty and clever improviser, an all-round entertainer.

I'd like to close with a very short poem by another great entertainer of a different era, Joyce Grenfell. This is what she wrote:

If I should go before the rest of you,
Break not a flower, nor inscribe a stone,
Nor, when I'm gone, speak in a Sunday voice,
But be the usual selves that I have known.
Weep if you must:
Parting is hell,
But life goes on

So sing as well!

We are now going to say our last farewells to Dale. To accompany him on his way out, we're going to hear one of his absolutely favourite songs from 1969, sung by Andy Fairweather Low – and please do sing along if you feel like it.

Exit music: IF PARADISE IS HALF AS NICE (Amen Corner 1969)

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