

Let the music play on (originally written in 2017)

Feel it in your heart and in your soul... Apologies if you now have the Lionel Richie song, *All Night Long*, in your head as accompaniment to everything you do today, but that in itself makes my point very well - that music has an extraordinary ability to stay with us, to be a part of us, it's a very powerful thing.

Music has always been there in the back beat of my life. For me, like books, music has a wonderful ability to conjure up images, to transport me to new places and invoke memories of past times and places. It can also be a wonderful muse.

A few weeks ago, my husband and I went to another phenomenal concert by the fabulous folk singer, Kate Rusby and, as I sat there, her voice filling every part of my being, it got me thinking... Anxious not to waste a moment of the concert, however, I parked the thought in my brain's blog post compartment ready to revisit at another time.

Like books, songs have a tale to tell, and that night I was reminded of a time many years ago when I suddenly found a piece of music whose story I wanted to tell and, more importantly, a piece of music that wanted to tell my story. My dad had just bought the album, *Tubular Bells 2* by Mike Oldfield, and as it played in the background the track *Tattoo* came on. I need to take you back in time a little here because when I was in my teens, and through into young adulthood, I read a lot of fantasy books: David Edding's *Belgariad* and Terry Brooks' *Shannara* series being my favourites. I had started a novel of my own (it's still in a drawer somewhere) and I found myself having the most amazing dreams, the theme of which was all very similar – the triumph of good over evil. I'm a green-eyed redhead so maybe it was my ancestry at work, but I liked nothing better than to rampage over castle ramparts, brandishing a flaming torch ready to take on the baddies. I always won, I was utterly invincible. So, back to *Tattoo* – at this point you probably need to go away and listen to it and then come back and see if you agree with me – but suddenly, there it was, the perfect piece of music for my little army of characters to vanquish all evil. This was the piece of music where good triumphed, where my near-defeated characters found strength in numbers, and where they became invincible. The scene wrote itself like a dream, in every sense of the word.

Now, back to the Kate Rusby concert which featured songs from Kate's latest album, *Ghost*. The title track is a haunting tale of a girl who falls in love with a ghost. Every night he comes to her and every morning he leaves her, yearning for a love she can never have. It's a song that Kate wrote herself and from the very opening bars of music the tale starts to tell itself, so powerful is the arrangement. The music is the story. Kate has such a beautiful voice, and listening to her I knew without a doubt that if I ever needed to write a scene dealing with the pain of lost love, I need only listen to this track and I'd be nine tenths of the way there to writing it.

With these thoughts in mind, I listened to the album *Ghost* again recently, and, let's just say, if you're a woman with revenge on her mind listen to the last verse of 'The Outlandish Knight'...

So when you write, what's your accompaniment? Do you sit in total silence, or is the radio burbling in the background? Is Meatloaf belting out *Bat out of Hell*? Or is Tchaikovsky's piano concerto soaring all around you? Do you even care? Is it simply a question of noise, or no noise, or do you deliberately choose an accompaniment? I think from now on I might pay closer attention to what music I listen to, or, more importantly *when* I listen to it. Music I've found can be a wonderful muse.