

Childhood Memories

The insufferable school discos, complete with cheesy music galore, sickeningly sweet strawberry laces, and small clutches of boys and girls at opposite ends of the hall, were not exactly a part of my ideal Friday night. The perpetual odour of sticky sweat engulfed the large crowd in the hall, as we jostled our way to the sweet counter through the seemingly infinite number of bodies that had accumulated, or in my case, to the toilets, to gain a couple of minutes respite from the bath of heat that was the swarm of dancers, all of whom appeared to be enjoying themselves so much more than I was.

It was a hall of many guises, very much at the centre of my primary school, and was where all of the vaguely interesting events took place. Perhaps that's why it prompts so many memories, so much nostalgia. The annual productions, which we worked up to for an entire year, were the pride of the headteacher – the entire school was involved, from the tiny snowflake dancers to the hundred-strong choir. There was a lasting sense of adults making an effort to comprehend, even enter, the world of small children, as they squeezed into the miniature chairs that lay in perfect rows. They were usually unsuccessful. After all, the world of a child can be so much more complex than the few, idyllic photographs you possess in your memory when reminiscing on infancy, the sunshine constantly perfect, the grass smelling fresh and delicious, the snow ideal for sledging. Why is it that we always seem to forget the May when it rained every day, or the snow that turned to slush an hour after it fell?

Having said that, the most traumatic, and nerve-racking incidents are often the ones I remember. In the same hall, I recall shaking like mad, completely unable to contain my emotion from bubbling over. I knew it was unnecessary; that no one was judging me, and that there was nothing to worry about, but my sapphire eyes were continually hidden beneath a continual frown, the deep azure giving no suggestion of what lay behind. No, it was the quivering legs that gave that away; as I gingerly mounted the stage, my heavy breathing was the only sound to be heard in the parallel universe I inhabited. Ironically, I can't remember actually singing the song; only the lead-up to it, and the sheer delight and pride in having finished, once the last traces of fear had finally evaporated (or perhaps, simply been stored away for another time).

That one performance gave me a lasting taste for singing: time after time, I enthusiastically volunteered for solo performances – it was only later that I would remember the pure fear that preceded the joy, the sense of achievement, in having performed to hundreds of people. I treasured the satisfaction in that performance, and in every other; somehow, it can make you feel ecstatic – important – as if you are on top of the world.