

The Catchiest Tune



George rocked back in his chair. That raised the front legs three inches off the music room floor.

“George, dear, keep your chair flat on the floor,” said Miss Sing, the music teacher. “You could tip over and hurt yourself.”

Miss Sing sat behind her piano. George had a view of her high brown hair, round head, and sloping shoulders. He was wondering what the rest of the teacher looked like, when—*slam!*—he fell backward.

“George, dear, are you all right?” Miss Sing called out. “What did I tell you about leaning back in your seat?”

George stood, rubbing his bottom. “Gee!” he exclaimed. “Gee!” He had to endure the gibes and snickers from his classmates as he righted his chair.

Next the music teacher held up a long, thin

vinyl case. “Today, boys and girls, we begin playing the recorder,” she said. “When you get your new instrument, leave it in the case until I give further directions.”

George was delighted. Ever since first grade he had dreamed of playing the recorder. Every year he listened to the third-graders in the music room play “Frère Jacques” and “Lightly Row.” Now it was his turn.

After receiving his recorder, George pulled it from the case and blew into the mouthpiece. Out came a squeal like a puppy in pain.

The music teacher looked over her piano. “George, dear,” she said. “What did I tell you about playing your instrument?”

For the next half-hour Miss Sing showed the third-graders how to hold a recorder and how to cover the holes with the pads of their fingers. At last she said, “Now, boys and girls, place the mouthpiece between your lips. Don’t blow, say ‘Tuh-tuh-tuh.’ Cover the top three holes, say ‘Tuh-tuh-tuh,’ and you’ll hear a soft G note.”

Soon the music room filled with squeaks, squeals, and an occasional G.

“That’s all for today, boys and girls,” Miss Sing said. “Return your instrument to its case, and you may go to recess. Do not play your recorder on the playground.”



But George's recorder remained in his mouth. He marched across the music room playing G G G right out the door.

G G G he played down the hall to the playground.

G G G he played as he tramped past the Playground Lady, who wasn't sure whether to blow her whistle or not.

G G G he played from the slide to the monkey bars and back again.

Finally George lowered his recorder. "I think I know G well enough," he said. "Maybe Miss Sing will teach me another note. I want to learn every one of them from A to Z." So George played G G G all the way back to the music room.

The room, however, was vacant. He was about to leave when a videotape on top of the piano caught his eye. The label read:

LEARN TO PLAY THE RECORDER IN ONE E-Z LESSON.

"Just what I need!" George exclaimed. "If I watch this video, maybe I can become the best recorder player in the school."

He took the tape to the VCR in the rear of the room. He pushed the ON button and inserted the tape in the proper slot. After the FBI warning, a fancy room appeared on the screen. Tall windows with golden curtains lined the walls. Crystal chandeliers hung from the ceiling.



In the middle of the room stood a piano. A boy of about twelve sat on a bench playing it. He wore a ruffled shirt and knee breeches not unlike the pants an NFL quarterback might wear. A powdered wig with a short pigtail covered his head.

George was enjoying the piano music when the boy suddenly stopped playing. He stared straight at George. “Hello, George,” he said. “That was a piano piece I wrote. It’s called Sonata in G.”

George was stunned. How could a video be talking to him?

“Sonata in G?” he said. “Why, I can play G on my recorder.”

The boy grinned. “So I’ve heard, George. And you play it very well.”

George scuffed the floor with the toe of his sneakers. “But that’s all I know so far. And I’m getting tired of it.”

“I imagine the whole school is,” said the boy. “But now I can be your teacher. And before I begin your lesson, let me introduce myself. My name is Wolfgang.”

“Wolfgang?” said George. “What an odd name. Kids must make fun of you with a name like Wolfgang.”

“Unfortunately, I’m rarely around children. I spend my time composing music and playing piano for kings and queens.”

“Gee,” said George. “I can’t even play ‘Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star’ on my recorder.”

Wolfgang nodded. “Ah, yes, ‘Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.’ That’s a tune I play often.” He played the melody on his piano, first slowly, then quickly with a bouncy beat.

George snapped his fingers and tapped his toes. “That’s very catchy,” he said. “It makes me want to dance. A tune like that can get stuck in my head for hours.”

“Yes, it can,” said Wolfgang. “So imagine what would happen if you heard the Catchiest Tune.”

“The Catchiest Tune?” George asked.

“A perfect melody. A tune so catchy you can *never* get it out of your head.”

“Gee, that would be something,” said George. “But there couldn’t be such a thing as the Catchiest Tune, could there?”

“Indeed there could, and I am the composer who composed it,” said Wolfgang. “One evening as I was playing a minuet on my piano, the melody popped into my head. I knew at once it was the perfect tune. Believe it or not, George, it has only three notes. The first note is G.”

“G? That’s the note I know,” said George. He played G G G on his recorder as a reminder. “So maybe, please, could you, would you teach me the other two notes?”

Wolfgang played some scales on his keyboard. “Well, I don’t know, George,” he said. “Playing the Catchiest Tune could be dangerous.”

“Oh, come on, Wolfgang. If I could play the catchiest song in the world I’d never need to learn any other.”

The boy drew a wooden recorder from his pocket. “I’ll teach you my tune on one condition,” he said.

“I’ll do whatever you say,” George promised.

“You must follow my directions exactly.”

“No problem,” said George.

Here Wolfgang pulled two tufts from his powdered wig. He stuffed them into his ears. “I will teach you how to play the Catchiest Tune if you promise never to listen to it,” he said. “You must plug your ears as I do whenever you play it. Agreed?”

“Gee. Agreed.”



“Then block your ears and watch my fingers,” said Wolfgang. “Copy what I do.”

George pulled a Kleenex from a box on the reading table. He wedged half a tissue into each ear and returned to the video. He had no problem following

Wolfgang’s fingers as they moved on and off the holes of his recorder.

“That’s it?” said George after a minute of practice. “That’s the whole song? But it’s so simple.” With his ears blocked, his voice sounded loud and hollow. He removed the Kleenex to hear Wolfgang’s reply.

“Some of the greatest works of art are the simplest, George. Now you must excuse me. The king is waiting for my concert. But before we part, I must ask again. Are you sure you’ll follow my directions about the Catchiest Tune? If you play it, you must never hear it.”

George nodded and restuffed his ears. By the time THE END appeared on the video screen, he was already out the music room door.

Back on the playground, George stood by the jungle gym. He held up his recorder. “Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to play a song for you,” he announced. “Here, live on our playground, is the

W. T. Melon Elementary School premiere of the Catchiest Tune.”

After checking that the tissue wads were firmly in place, George raised the instrument to his lips. “Tuh-tuh-tuh,” he said. Up and down went his fingers as Wolfgang had shown him. “Tuh-tuh-tuh. Tuh-tuh-tuh.”

The result was instant. The result was astonishing. All movement on the playground—the chasing, running, swinging, and sliding—suddenly ceased. As if in a trance, everyone from the first-graders to the Playground Lady stared at George.



George pointed his recorder toward the sky and played the tune again. His audience started tapping their toes and bobbing their heads. They all snapped their fingers and flapped their elbows like chickens. When George played the tune a third time, the dancing began.

Some third-graders playing dodgeball waltzed in a circle. First-graders by the swings did the Mexican Hat Dance. Second-graders at the four-square court square-danced, while others leaped and twirled around a tetherball pole like ballet dancers. Even the Playground Lady did an odd sort of twist, leaning far back and twirling her silver whistle around her finger.

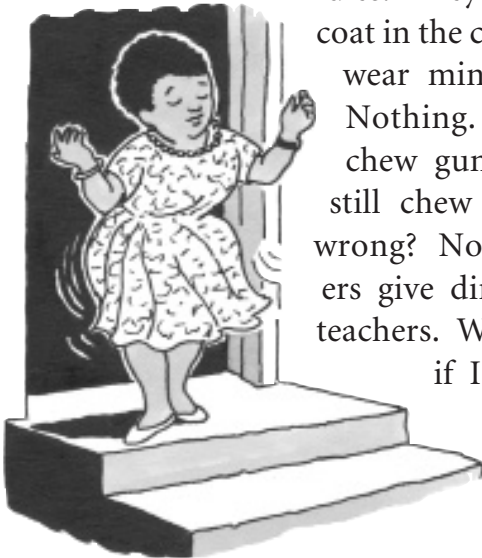
Look at everyone go, thought George. Wolfgang was right. This song must be the catchiest one ever written. And he played the tune again.

Now Mr. Principle, the school principal, and Miss Take, the secretary, walked onto the playground. The instant they heard George's music they faced each other and began doing the cha-cha by the flagpole. Two teachers in the Teachers' Lounge tap-danced, while Miss Sing, listening from the doorway, did the hula-hula.

As George played he had a thought. How come everyone gets to enjoy the music but me? Sure, Wolfgang told me not to hear it, but teachers are always making up silly

rules. They say don't wear a coat in the classroom, but I still wear mine. What happens? Nothing. They say never chew gum at school, but I still chew some. What goes wrong? Nothing. No, teachers give directions just to be teachers. What could happen if I heard Wolfgang's song? Not a thing.

George lowered his recorder



and pulled the Kleenex from his ears.

“Play it again, George! Let her rip!” the people on the playground called to him. “Come on, George, blow that thing!”

George returned the recorder to his lips and said, “Tuh-tuh-tuh.” This time he heard the G. He heard the next note and the next note as well. Gee, this song is catchy, he thought. And he started doing a quick jig right there by the slide.

He played the song some more and he jiggled some more. He played and jiggled around the jungle gym. He played and jiggled in and out of the swing set. He played and jiggled from one basketball hoop to the other.

Meanwhile, the fourth grade filed from the school in a long conga line. The fifth grade came out doing the bunny hop. By now the playground was a mass of teachers and students dancing the can-can, the rumba, the fox-trot, the funky chicken, the tango, and a Native American rain dance. A circle of teachers stood by the bicycle rack doing the hokey-pokey.

All this time, as George played, he jiggled. By now his legs were weary. His fingers ached and his lips were numb from saying “Tuh-tuh-tuh” so many times.

“OK, that’s enough,” he told himself. “Time to stop the music.”

To his surprise, however, he repeated the Catchiest Tune anyway and went on jiggling.

“Now I really must stop this song,” George said in his head. “My legs are ready to fall off their hinges.



The bottoms of my sneakers must be worn right through.”

But he still played, and he still jiggled.

That was when George realized something dreadful. He couldn't lower his recorder. He couldn't stop saying, "Tuh-tuh-tuh." He was hooked. The tune was so catchy he had to hear it over and over. Even worse, since he couldn't stop playing the Catchiest Tune, he couldn't stop jiggling.

Shivers swept up George's spine as he jiggled toward the baseball diamond. Would he keep dancing for the rest of the day? he wondered. For the rest of the year? He didn't think he could jig one more minute.

Kicking up dust, he jiggled from second to third base. Oh, how his legs suffered. His feet were on fire. He jiggled to home plate, on to first, and back to second. *Help! Help!* he wanted to call out. But he couldn't. He could only repeat the tune for the twentieth time.

Fortunately, at that moment Mr. Leeks, the school janitor, came riding around the corner of the school on his lawn mower. He was planning to mow the soccer field. The mower was noisy, so he couldn't hear George's tune. Mr. Leeks had been working at W. T. Melon a long time and had seen many strange things. So when he saw George playing his recorder and the entire student body and staff dancing, he knew better than to turn off the lawn mower.

Cranking the throttle up full speed, the janitor



directed the lawn mower toward the baseball diamond. “Charge!” he cried.

Like a knight on a steed, he raced toward George



as he jiggled around the bases. Without stopping, Mr. Leeks reached out and snatched the recorder from his hands.

George instantly stopped dancing. He dropped to his knees, breathing hard. “Gee,” he sputtered.

Across the playground the twisting, fox-trotting, and belly-dancing stopped as well.

“What in tarnation is going on here?” Mr. Leeks called to George.

George rubbed his feet. “I-I was just playing my recorder,” he said. “And this boy Wolfgang on a video taught me a catchy tune.”

Mr. Leeks kneaded his scratchy chin. “Just play-

ing your recorder, eh?” he said. “Taught you a tune, eh?”

“Wolfgang told me never to listen to the tune if I played it,” George went on. “And I guess I didn’t follow directions.”

The janitor, who knew George well, handed back the recorder. “Same old song and dance, eh, George?” he said. Then he revved up his lawn mower and sped toward the grass.

At that moment the end-of-recess bell rang. As if nothing out of the ordinary had happened, the students and staff headed for the school doors.

George ran toward the school. He entered the hallway at a full trot.

“Walk in the hall, George,” the Playground Lady called out.

George peered toward his classroom at the end of the hall. “What could possibly go wrong if I ran?” he asked himself. But he didn’t run. He followed directions and walked all the way.

