

London; 21 February 2017

This programme opened with the *Ying Tong Song*, a prelude to **The Goons - an evening with John Repsch**, chairman of the Goon Show Preservation Society.

The Goons (Harry Secombe, Spike Milligan, Michael Bentine and Peter Sellers) met during and after the Second World War. At convivial meetings in the Grafton Arms in Westminster (now bearing a plaque commemorating them) ideas for an irreverent, madcap radio comedy were discussed and developed. The BBC was famously sceptical ("what is this go-on show?") and it got off to a shaky start. Bentine would stay for only the first two series. It got into its stride when each edition became a single story with musical interludes. There were eight principal characters: Neddy Seagoon (a gullible idiot), Eccles (the original goon), Bluebottle (a young boy scout), Henry Crun (a crumbling old man), Minnie Bannister (living in sin with Crun), Hercules Grytpype-Thynne (a suave cad), Count Moriarty (his lackey) and Major Dennis Bloodnok (a coward and scoundrel).

The *Goon Show* ran from 1951 until 1960. At its peak it attracted audiences of seven million. There were ten series and 250 shows of which about 160 survive. John summed up the appeal of the programmes as logical twaddle and gave us some memorable extracts to illustrate the point, notably *What time is it, Eccles?* We heard Sellers' account of how he found the voice for Bluebottle and Milligan describing how the pressure of writing a weekly half hour show led to his nervous breakdown; and we listened to examples of different facets of the Show's appeal: the novelty of the stories; the extensive use of sound effects; and the fine orchestrations of Wally Stott.

The Goons can still induce helpless laughter. John's relaxed style, un-phased by some technical hitches and less a presentation than a conversation between friends, proved a highly effective way of demonstrating their enduring appeal.

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