

Monday 1st September 2014

Dear Customer,

Are you back from your lovely holidays ? I guess our Farmaround kiddies are all back but our 'no-kids-at-homers' are packing their cases again. I hope you've had a lovely summer whatever you have been doing. Things are getting groovy again here now – the purple haze carrots are back and in the bags – something nice to chomp on while we're waiting for the first nuclear missile to land. And we have our first organic sweetcorn for you to sizzle on your barbecue before having to run indoors to hide from the anthrax and bubonic plague which we are told are coming our way soon. So lots of exciting things to look forward to this autumn. And last but not least, Jonnie Watson's leeks, sweetheart cabbages, broccoli and Nicola potatoes – in this week from his garden of Eden as he calls it. He thinks our new packing depot in Harmby is a lean-to against Hadrians Wall. The tomatoes-on-the vine are from Sicily because noone else does it like them. Here are a couple of (actually pretty boring now I look at them - especially compared to a nuclear war) recipes you could try this week:

Leek and Broccoli Soup

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| <i>olive oil</i> | <i>1 onion, finely chopped</i> |
| <i>2 leeks, trimmed and finely chopped</i> | <i>3 small potatoes, chopped</i> |
| <i>head broccoli, chopped</i> | <i>1.5 litres stock</i> |
| <i>sea salt and freshly ground black pepper</i> | <i>fresh herbs – parsley or basil</i> |
| <i>croutons (chop bread into chunks, dip in olive oil, season and place in the oven at 180C for 10 minutes, turning half-way through)</i> | |

In a large pan, add a dash of olive oil and cook the onion for 5 minutes or until soft and golden. Add the leeks and cook for another few minutes. Add the potatoes, cook for a few more minutes then add the broccoli. Cook for a couple of minutes then add the hot stock and bring to the boil. Simmer for about 20 minutes until the vegetables are all tender. Blitz in a food processor or mash by hand. Season to taste and scatter with croutons and fresh herbs.

Buttery Cabbage (for beginners)

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| <i>head of cabbage</i> | <i>few pats of butter or margarine</i> |
| <i>little splash olive oil</i> | <i>sea salt and freshly ground black pepper</i> |

Shred the cabbage into 1-2cm thick ribbons. Place a frying pan over a medium heat. Add a splash of olive oil and dab of butter or margarine. Add the cabbage just when the butter starts to froth. Sprinkle with some salt and pepper. Cook gently, adding a bit more butter, margarine and/or oil, until the cabbages is softened and has a glossy shine. Taste and season further. Delicious piled in a jacket potato with cheese and balsamic vinegar dressed tomato salad.

Yes, I'm afraid it's music again. I can't think of anything to say about vegetables. We are now onto song number 6 in the studio, target 10, so have been hard at it. One of those 6 is my new one which I can't stop playing, partly in disbelief that I could still scrape one together after 20 years of not playing a note and partly because I love it. I told Ernest the other day that after 4 hours in the studio, I feel absolutely burnt out and that of the 6 songs none were completely finished. He looked concerned then said

" Don't you think that rather than starting any more, you should maybe just try and finish, say 3 of them. Then if you do completely burn out, at least you'll have something to show for it ".

I proudly sent my brother the new song with my vocal on, stating, as he well knows, that it is just a guide vocal for a session singer. He can not find enough words to describe how much he loathes my voice. The first song I sent him, he said he couldn't listen to it as my voice was too off-putting. This one, he started going on about how my vocal drags on the verses and needed to be 'crisper' so I told him again that it was just a guide vocal to build up the instrumentation and dynamics of the song and it would then be sung by someone else, in this case, boys. He wouldn't let it rest, and said that whilst there might have been other singers who sang like me in the nineties, that my voice sounds wrong today. I told him I was not a pop singer, I was doing indie music, it wasn't mainstream. I reminded him that the person who signed me and who now manages Lang Lang said I could have been another Maria Callas. He found that notion ridiculous. Then he got onto the songs themselves – he said I'd told him that only brilliant would do, that nothing else would cut it. "Well I don't think they are" he said. I felt very deflated when I came off the phone – he must see his brotherly role as tempering my ebullience, hammering my expectations into the ground.

I sent the track of my new song to my friend who works for the Musicians Union and her reaction was:

"I love it. OMG really catchy, honestly it is brilliant !!! I can imagine hearing it on the radio. Lyrics are fantastic, really poppy sweet tune that you can pick up instantly. You have a superb voice Isobel, honestly had me tapping my toe and smiling from the start. It has given me a much needed lift actually, the sort of song you could put on repeat ".

My brother is of the opinion that friends' comments have no validity. Diane's got one of the songs on her phone now, she calls it 'her' song, she really loves it. "She would say that", he told me.

I know I'm a good songwriter, but am I a great songwriter ?..... probably not. In fact....I'm starting to think my brother is right, maybe I'm not even a good songwriter. I'm not doing this for the sake of it and if I can't make a breakthrough with the publishers I will stop it as quickly as I started it. I made the mistake of googling the music publishing industry as I am so out of touch and it made difficult reading. And blogs.... so many tales of woe. I think I'm statistically more likely to win the lottery. I don't think I'm totally delusional, I was signed to Warner Chapel before, home of Burt Bacharach, Michael Jackson and Barry Gibb and the rest. I have to remind myself that in their office in Paris back then, a song I was releasing as a single in France, before the record company folded, they said was the best song they had heard all year and this was in late autumn. Lang Lang manager who became a big figure in the industry said I was the most naturally talented songwriter he had known. But that was all a long time ago. Time will tell and maybe I am now as lousy as my brother makes out.

When I've finished the ten, I'll put some on Youtube for a couple of weeks so you can hear them if you're interested, but you mustn't email me and tell me they're crap.....oh ok, you can.

I made two serious mistakes in my house when I had the extension and all the work done 5 years ago. One was to paint a spare bedroom a Farrer and Ball sage green, I thought I was being clever. But it has wound me up for 5 years, I hate it. As of last week it is

a glorious haven of white. The other mistake was to put an en-suite bathroom into the beautiful master bedroom which has French doors and a balcony which look over to the Yorkshire Moors and another set of French doors which open onto a large terrace with the same glorious views out over Richmond castle. Putting the en-suite in created a dark corridor and made the bedroom smaller and boxy. I have hated it to the extent that I had to move into another bedroom. On Wednesday the en-suite is coming down and I'm painting it all white. I can't tell you how excited I am – a new world is opening up upstairs.

Kind wishes,

Isobel