

Of sounds and snooker

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Owen in China

Hello everyone, this is Owen and this is my podcast for Friday 22nd June, 2018. How are you all? I've had a busy month and I'm looking forward to the summer. Does anyone have any exciting summer plans? I'm not sure what I'll be doing yet, I'm still weighing [1] my options.

Today, I'll be talking about the sounds of cities and my love of snooker.

When I was in Bhuj in India, I met a traveller from Switzerland. He was staying at the same guesthouse as me. We exchanged stories about our travels and experiences in India and we agreed that of all the places we have visited Bhuj is one of our favourites. We talked about our time in Bhuj and whether we could actually imagine living there. I said that I could definitely imagine spending more time there and fully immersing [2] myself in local life. The Swiss guy wasn't so convinced. 'Absolutely not! There's no way!', he said. And then he added: 'Because of the noise.' He thinks the constant noise of the cars and motorbikes and scooters would drive him crazy. All the beeping [3] and honking [4] is really annoying of course. It's a loud place and if you're having a bad day, the last thing you want is someone driving behind you beeping all the time. It's a real test of patience. I've seen tourists in India who walk around with earplugs [5]. Bhuj is certainly a loud place and all the motorbikes and scooters are a big reason why. There are other more pleasant sounds though. I was staying next to a Hindu temple and every morning I was woken by the sound of hundreds of little bells ringing. It was like a lovely alarm clock. Then there's what I would describe as sizzling [6] silence. During the hottest part of the day, when it can reach 42 degrees, everything and everyone goes quiet and you're just left with the sound of the scorching [7] heat. After talking to the Swiss traveller about the sounds of Bhuj, I started to think about other cities and their sounds and noises.

You may remember that in Kunming I lived next to a zoo. The sound in Kunming that I'll never forget is the sound the peacocks made. The peacock enclosure [8] was maybe 100 meters from my bedroom and before I lived there I had no idea how loud peacocks can be. Before I moved to Kunming, I lived in Beijing for a while. When I started to think about Beijing I couldn't really think of any specific sound at first. But then I suddenly recalled the narrow streets in the old part of Beijing and a very unique [9] sound. The first time I heard it I was very confused. I was living in the old part of Beijing where there are lots of small, narrow streets and no tall buildings. I was walking down one of these narrow streets one day when I heard a strange whistling [10] sound. The whistling sound would get louder and then quieter again like it was circling me. The streets were empty and I couldn't see anyone or anything until I looked up into the sky. There I saw a large flock [11] of pigeons flying in one big circle. I had part of my answer. I now knew where the sound was coming from but I still didn't understand how or why these pigeons were whistling. I later found out that some of the locals in that part of the city keep pigeons. They build cages for the pigeons on top of their buildings. Some of them must have had up to 100 pigeons. Every day they'd let the pigeons out for some exercise. The pigeons would fly in perfect circles over the old streets of Beijing until their owners would wave a red flag, at which point they all returned to their cages. Now, normally pigeons don't make that much noise but in Beijing they attach little whistles to the pigeons' tails. I've never seen these outside of Beijing but they call them pigeon whistles and they're made of wood. They make a slightly eerie [12] sound that comes and goes as the pigeons fly around you. It's quite a monotonous sound but strange and mysterious. I hadn't thought about it for a long time but I can hear it now so clearly. It's so interesting how sounds and smells can transport you to another place and time.

My return to the UK from India coincided with the start of the World Snooker Championship. Snooker is similar to pool or billiards. However, in snooker the table is bigger and the balls and pockets are smaller. The World Snooker Championship takes place in Sheffield every year. Snooker is a very British game and most of the top players are from the British Isles but there are now a few top players from China amongst other places. Snooker matches can take a very long time to play. The tournament itself takes 17 days to

complete and the final is played over two days. I can totally understand that most people find the idea of watching snooker incredibly boring, but I'm fascinated by it. There's something about sports tournaments on television that I find hard to resist [13]. I got completely hooked [14]. It's a great game to watch on television. It was the first sport they showed on the BBC when they switched from black and white to colour and it's still very popular in the UK. They get great camera angles and it's visually [15] very attractive because of the colours. There's an elegance and precision to the game as well. I find it quite hypnotic. The whole game, of course, feels very old-fashioned [16]. The players have to wear shirts and waistcoats [17] and bow ties [18]. They look like waiters in posh [19] restaurants. I started watching snooker at a young age and it's strange to see some of the same players still competing. The two finalists this year have been playing professionally since 1992. The players look old now but they looked old then as well. Snooker players have somehow always looked old and unhealthy. The game never really seems to change. One thing has changed though. In the past the players would drink and smoke during games and a lot of the sponsoring came from breweries [20] and tobacco companies. Now the players only drink water during games and they've had to find new sponsors. Because the game is becoming more and more popular in China, a lot of the sponsoring now comes from China. One of the sponsors happens to be a brand of Chinese bottled water. So all the players now have Chinese advertising on their waistcoats and they drink this particular brand of Chinese water. The funny thing is, you can't actually buy that brand of water in the UK.

That's about all from me for this month. Thank you for listening and for your comments. Gerry and I will be interviewing each other after the summer, so if you want to ask either of us a question, please do so. You can find all our episodes on our website podclub.ch or by downloading our app. You can also download our vocabulary trainer and you can find me on Instagram using the hashtags #PodClubOwen and #oweninchina. Gerry will be back in two weeks and my next podcast is on Friday 20th July. Goodbye!

Glossar: Owen in China

[1] **to weigh:** here: to consider carefully

[2] **to immerse oneself in sth.:** to spend most of one's time doing sth.

[3] **to beep:** here: to make a short loud noise by pressing the horn on a vehicle

[4] **to honk:** here: to make a loud noise by pressing the horn on a vehicle

[5] **earplugs:** small pieces of plastic or rubber that you put in your ears to keep noise out

[6] **sizzling:** the sound meat makes when it's cooked in a hot pan could be described as sizzling

[7] **scorching:** extremely hot

[8] **enclosure:** an area surrounded by a fence or wall

[9] **unique:** not the same as anything else

[10] **whistling:** produced by blowing air through a small hole

[11] **flock:** a group of birds (or sheep or goats)

[12] **eerie:** strange and slightly frightening

[13] **to resist:** to stop yourself from doing sth. that you would like to do

[14] **hooked:** here: absorbed, captivated, almost addicted

[15] **visually:** related to the appearance of sth.

[16] **old-fashioned:** no longer modern or fashionable

[17] **waistcoat:** a piece of clothing without sleeves that is usually worn over a shirt

[18] **bow tie:** a piece of clothing that is tied around the neck in the shape of a bow

[19] **posh:** exclusive and expensive

[20] **brewery**: a company that makes beer