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Home TV Radio Talk Where I Live A-Z Index

Search

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Text only  
BBC Homepage  
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## SATURDAY LIVE: Meet the Poet

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PROGRAMME  
FINDER:

A-Z Directory  
Listen Again  
Download/Podcast  
What's On Listings  
Presenters

PROGRAMME  
GENRES:

News|Curr't Affairs  
Arts and Drama  
Comedy|Quizzes  
Science  
Religion|Ethics  
History  
Factual

TOP PROGRAMMES  
THIS WEEK:

The Archers  
Today Programme  
Woman's Hour  
In Our Time  
You and Yours  
Front Row  
Afternoon Play  
Book of the Week  
The Now Show  
Saturday Live

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## Matt Harvey



Poet, columnist, enemy of all that's difficult and upsetting, Matt performs up and down the country at festivals, cabarets, conferences and colleges and shares his thoughts with the world on his [Wondermentalist](#) blog.

The Guardian described him (accidentally) as "one of Britain's leading poets", the Dorset Echo as "fabulously understated", and the Times as "a word-based organism from Devon." The Independent called him "a pale man in a suit". His latest book is *The Hole in the Sum of my Parts* "It's a tiny treasure - not only funny, but tender and true" (William Cook, The Guardian).

## 5 May 2008

## When Anger Management Wears Off

Louis Vitton designer policemen  
Escort Naomi down from the plane  
Which takes off soon after, without her  
Cos she's flown off the handle again

In an airport in middle America  
Straight-backed, and lonely as hell  
There's some unclaimed emotional baggage  
Going round a carousel

**Sonnet celebrating the elegance, ingenuity and sheer cerebral power of Darren Crowdy's creative use of Schottky Groups to complete the Schwarz-Christoffel formula so that it works with irregular shapes and**

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**those with holes.**

You're clever, you. Far out. You're *way out there*  
 Beyond the bozone layer where we reside  
 You plot the line fantastic in the air  
 Where Ancient Greek and Modern Geek collide

You do Jazz Geometry – it can't be taught –  
 Express yourself in dancing neuro-glyphs  
 Placing in brackets things that can't be taught  
 Then multiplying by their absent widths

You're out there where the holy grail or chalice is  
 Where mathmatics like me can hardly breathe  
 Then with applied complex analysis  
 You bring it down to Earth – just for a wheeze

You're far out. So far out. And so, so clever  
 Yet when you say *Eureka!* we say *Whatever...*

**1 March 2008****10,000 Cracks in Market Rasen, Lincolnshire**

A thundery under-grumble  
 Spoke of doom and melodramas  
 Made dream-steeped people stumble  
 To the street in their pyjamas  
 Perplexed, bewildered, lost  
 In the February frost.

A magnitude of 5.3  
 An aftershock of 1.8  
 Enough to spill a cup of tea  
 To make cake crumble on its plate  
 It would have done - but it was late

And midnight lovers in the throes  
 Of passion and distress  
 Said, 'You know that question that you pose...  
 ...well tonight the answer's Yes!'

**Ultra Lite Verse**

To travel unencumbered  
 Liberated, unimpeded  
 Not impoverished nor lumbered  
 With kit you never needed  
 Tripping lightly cross the tundra  
 With an ultra sense of wonder  
 Feeling far closer to nature  
 Than you did when you were younger  
 And you forked out for the clobber  
 And it really used to costure

**BBC Radio 4**  
**Excess Baggage**

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**World Weather**  
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Meanwhile your backpack-lacking back  
 Has a relaxed and upright posture  
 As you leap from tuft to tussock  
 With the contours of each buttock  
 Silhouetted in the sunset  
 Cos there's nothing in your pocket

Travel lightly, travel sprightly  
 With so very little outlay  
 To carry nothing hefty  
 Cock a snook at health and safety

To the uber ultra-liter outlay's outré

But I'm not an ultra vulture, I don't go for ultra culture  
 Ultra-this that or the other – I like staying under cover  
 A quilt cover with some weight in,  
 That a man might hibernate in  
 with a serious tog-rating

If I'm looking for adventure And I'm feeling pretty hardy  
 I'll pop down the shopping centre In a thin acrylic cardy  
 Okay, I'm fat and pasty But I like my health and safety  
 But if, for you, it's obsolete –  
 Then go ahead –  
 You have nothing to lose but your body-heat...

## **2 February 2008**

### **The price is right**

Okay, suspend him from the Commons  
 Then there's money to repay  
 And of course now he won't be standing  
 Come re-election day

But it's what Dave Cameron did that's worst  
 That's the highest price to pay  
 Because it really hurts a Tory  
 When you take their whip away...

### **The Company of Leeks**

Down through the generations  
 We've been venerating leeks  
 We've not won *all* the prizes  
 But we've had our winning streaks  
 Won enough to furnish houses –  
 We've had fewer troughs than peaks  
 In the company of leeks

Rosettes, I've had a few

And then some honourable mentions  
 To see a leek you, yourself, grew  
 Receiving plaudits and attentions...  
 When that leek in peak condition  
 Wins a Best Leek Competition  
 You feel so cock-a-hoop  
 It calls for cock-a-leekie soup  
 Although it isn't Mum's leek pudding  
 ...It'll do

For what is a leek – what is it like?  
 Let's sneak a peek – let's take a look  
 A cylinder of bundled sheafs  
 Tortilla wrap of Welsh motifs  
 A spring onion on steroids  
 Upside down Olympic flame  
 Close relation of the onion  
 They are Garlic's kissing cousin  
 They're en eco-party-popper in freeze-frame  
 Or pagan Barbie  
 A little bit ineffable  
 A heavy metal daffodil  
 It makes me feels so affable  
 The company of leeks

So you can keep your Spanish beach  
 I'll stay where leeks are within reach  
 The tasty part of vichyssoise...  
 Beneath the undemanding stars  
 While the world around me sleeps  
 I'll keep company with leeks

**19 January 2008**

### **Magpie Messiah**

In factories and offices  
 there's talk of Geordie prophecies  
 the king who it is said would come  
 then go again  
 and then come back  
 then go again  
 And then, a third time  
 come again, yes, here he is  
 the Magpie Messiah  
 to kindle their fire  
 to love them  
 to lead them  
 so high up the league  
 and redeem them  
 King Keegan  
 has come  
 as prophesied  
 and I have seen the banners say:  
 we're going all the way  
 – to Wembley, to Europe and to Heaven

so there you go  
no pressure, Kevin

### **Quantum poem**

The wondermental things apply  
as quirky quantum time goes by

it's quirky *and* it's quarky  
and it's kind of like a doorkey  
to a world so charmed and murky  
only physicists can visit it  
and handle its vicissitudes

it is a most absorbing thing  
to watch electrons orbiting  
to sit there and imagine them  
without a hope of catching them  
the fundamental particles  
like toilet rolls and smarticles

they're smaller than bacteria  
but in no way inferior  
though they occupy less area  
they're infinitely eerier  
and scarier

so much that even physicists  
can hardly grasp that they exist

they have 'non-local' properties  
exist as probabilities  
as possibles and parallels  
as parables and dizzy spells  
a neo-nano-nothingness  
attention-seeking emptiness  
an absence with an aftertaste  
a ripple in a state of grace

for some the sub-atomic's  
both a riddle and a tonic

east of reason, shy of rhyme  
the quantum world confirms that time  
is circular and cyclical

on top of that it speaks of why  
the wondermental things apply  
as quarky quantum time goes by...

**22 December 2007**

**Merry Christmas Everybody**

You can keep your bah humbugs  
 I'm not playing Scrooge  
 Don't wince at my tinsel  
 I'm not in the mood

Because no man is an island  
 No woman is an isthmus  
 And people are people wherever you go  
 So have a Merry Christmus

### **I Prefer Ibupfen**

Life is so much easier with effective analgesia

The purpose of pain is to say to the brain:  
 Ow! Houston we've got a problem...  
 But once we've got the message we don't need it again  
 and again...

What do we want? Symptom Relief!  
 When do we want it? Now!

When you've had enough of it there's just no need to  
 suffer it  
 Just pop a little caplet and Ibuprofen will buffer it

I've had a go with Aspirin, Codeine and Paracetamol  
 With Solpadeine, Co-codamol, with Anadin and Ultramol  
 I love them all, I really do, but I prefer Ibuprofen

There are other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs  
 around  
 Your NSAID's these days are quite thick on the ground  
 There's Naproxen, there's Nabumetone  
 and, of course, there's Indomethacin  
 Each with much to offer us. But I prefer Ibuprofen

I love the way the compound sticks its cheeky little hand  
 in  
 The way it blocks the enzyme that creates the  
 prostaglandin

Reducing fever, inflammation, and mild to moderate pain

Yes I know it isn't curative, in anyway preventative  
 But to dwell on what it doesn't do is anally retentative  
 I *know* it doesn't treat the cause, the cause will still be  
 there  
 But it lends a hand, it puts the 'pal' back into palliative  
 care.

It does exactly what you'd expect it to say it would do if it  
 came in a tin

**1 December 2007****Evel Knieval**

Showman, frontman, stunning stuntman  
In a tight white leather jumpsuit

Celebrated, sequinned, scarred  
Evel flew, and landed, hard

He knew triumph and disaster  
He knew bandages and plaster

So rev the revs, the engine roars  
Knieval leaps, Knieval soars

Let's leave him freeze-framed in the air  
His name synonymous with Dare

They called him 'Elvis on a motorbike'  
Ladies and gentlemen, Evel has left the building

**The Kipper**

Lying there like leatherwear, eyes glazed just like a teddy bear  
Familiar, yet foreign, like a smooth, flat, smelly sporran

You can serve yourself a kipper on a tasteful brekky platter  
You can mash it in a paté you can serve with toast and butter  
With a little bit of pepper it's the perfect kind of tucker  
Put a little bit of kipper on the corner of a cracker...  
...You can call it kipper canapés  
Mmmmmm

And should you come a cropper, slip or trip and drop your kipper  
There's no need to agonise about the kipper's injury  
Mix it up with egg'n'rice and call it kipper kedgeriee

It's got such versatility; DHA oil; Omega 3  
In parts of middle England kippers qualify as currency

A kipper in a jiffy bag can liven up a postal strike  
Or pop one in the pannier of a diplomatic motorbike

If you're feeling moody  
You can happy-slap a foody

When they hang like golden ladies they are aromatic bunting  
They can lay false trails for hounds so you can sabotage the hunting

[Which is where the term 'red herring' originally comes from]

They enrich the English language  
And they're quite nice in a sandwich

So let's make a bumper sticker that will stick up for the kipper  
And say: "A kipper is for life – not just for breakfast"

### **17 November 2007**

#### **St Pancras**

We've all been where you're standing, we've stood there,  
St Pancras  
Stood empty and friendless, neglected and thankless

And you've stood forlorn as the powers-that-be scorned  
you  
Both persons of rank and us ordinary punters  
How you must have hungered and hankered, St Pancras

For the life you have now for arrivals, departures  
For lovers to linger beneath your grand arches

But now you're emerging, refurbished, resurgent  
Your platforms buffed up and washed down with detergent

And you welcome us all, from near and from far  
To your cathedral grandeur, your new champagne bar

St Pancras – you know what you are  
You're a star.

#### **Magical Memories – a regrettably forgettable yet unforgettable love poem**

I remember the dress that you wore when we met  
The dress with the dots – how could I forget  
Two hundred and four – none exactly the same  
I counted them all as you came through the door  
...I gave each one a name

We walked out together, beneath a lumpy grey sky  
I see it so clearly now in my mind's eye,  
The pavement, the drizzle, the cars grumbling by...  
Ford Mondeo, blue, N76 RBT  
Toyota Corolla, white, C213 XPL  
Citroen Picasso, red S79 YAE

You kissed me. I missed one. But I didn't mind.  
We were young. We had time.

The restaurant. We held hands. Once more we kissed.  
 And whispered sweet nothings - well, you did,  
 I whispered the whole set menu and wine list...  
 [And what's really nice is:  
 I can still recite it, including the prices]

And then back to your place, your face stuck to my face  
 While my eyes memorised your cd's  
 I noticed a book there beside the computer  
 The abridged Kama Sutra (for the hurried lover)  
 And took a quick look – in two minutes, I'd read it – from  
 cover to cover  
 You said, Hey do you seriously think that kind of thing can  
 impress me?  
 And I closed the book, and my eyes, and said, Test me.

## 20 October 2007

### England Expects...

The scrum, the ruck  
 The pack, the maul  
 Bulkied up bodies  
 A misshapen ball  
 A red rose  
 On a blood-stained shirt  
 Oggi... Oi! Oggi... Oi!  
 Oggi Oggi Oggi – Ow! That *really* hurt!

### If I said you had a bit of a problem would you hold it against me?

Alcohol. It's magical. It works its hocus pocus  
 Makes all of us attractive, turns the shy ones into jokers

It's the precipice poured from a bottle  
 The gateway to heaven and hell  
 It's the portal that leads to a chortle  
 And a few other places as well

But while it makes the sour sweet it turns the sweet  
 things sour  
 And ask yourself who's really smiling during Happy Hour?

Because there's  
 Hinge-drinking - oils the social levers, eases you out of  
 your shell  
 Binge drinking – leaves the shell well behind, heaves you  
 out of your skull  
 Whinge-drinking – downing measures of wine at your  
 pitious condition  
 Cringe-drinking – throwing out the baby of dignity with  
 the bathwater of inhibition

Is one of these you?

Don't be like the sopping wet pharaoh who said with a smile  
"I just like a drink. I am not in denial..."

It's a soft, slow slide down a slippery slope  
And no, you can't have ice with that  
I mean the sort of slope it'll take twelve long, hard steps  
to climb back up...

Sometimes the Path of Least Resistance  
Leads to the Place of Least Existence...

Don't let excessive moderation grind you down  
But think before you drink before you drown

**22 September 2007**

**(Doing the) Northern Rock**

you put your savings in  
you take your savings out  
in  
out  
your high anxiety account  
you're not okey-dokey  
you are insecure  
even though they reckon they've bailed it out  
Oi!

You're not okey-dokey  
You're not okey-dokey  
You're not okey-dokey

pointy finger  
blame blame blame

**Portrait Poem**

Hold still.  
I'm going to paint you.  
Yes, with words.  
A 'poetrait' – very good, I see what you did there.

Clothes on is fine.  
I won't be doing unflattered flesh, mauves pinks and blues  
Depict your body as a kind of bruise

Just arty similes – word art  
So, sitting comfortably? Hold still. I'll start...

*Her forehead is a wide beach at low tide  
Eyebrows two Swedish forwards way offside*

*Prosthetic crab claw fingers clutch her cardy  
Their nails glimpses of ice cubes in Bacardi*

*Her eyes pools – No, wells – No, open invitations (yes!)  
To be accepted without guilt or shame – good  
Tch! you moved!  
um...her eyes are invitations to a booth  
to openly review a recent claim*

*Her breasts are... glad thought bubbles... that insist they  
be expressed...  
You moved again! You did! I've lost my thread!  
...breasts....um ...coastguards in souwesters – no! tch!*

Okay, touch up the eyes:  
*....eyes two blank forms each yet to be filled in  
her jaw a door on a post-war public building (great)*

That's it. Yes, have a look. Don't be annoyed.  
I know I'm not Lucian Freud – or Beryl Cook  
I beg your pardon – what did you say?  
"I don't know much about art but I know what I weigh?"  
Don't be like that! Anyway it's not about you –  
It's about challenge, technique, form and composition.  
And also you kept changing your position.  
I didn't take you for a philistine.  
Oh, can't talk now – got Sotheby's on the line...

### **Self-Made Man**

He picks his palette up, and starts to paint  
Invests the canvas with expressive oils  
The tight off-white stretched cloth absorbs the daubs  
And out of dull chaos a face takes shape  
It's recognisable, sharp and severe  
His brush fulfils its brief, portrays the traits  
The early random-looking lines cohere  
By increments an image constellates

My father's mother, as once drawn by him  
In brown felt tip when I was in my teens  
Beneath today's still life the play of genes  
Beneath the leaf - the twig, the branch, the limb

He's traced me back, revealed the family tree  
The embedded dna in dynasty

Next session's strokes will see this overlaid  
With features I can claim as just my own  
The part of me that passes for self-made  
Fresh-grown from seeds so very long since sown  
In quiet fields which never quite lay fallow  
Which never quite wake up, nor ever sleep

Perhaps the me that's me is just skin deep  
 I hope he doesn't make me look too shallow

**14 July 2007**

**Our Queen is *not* a Drama Queen**

That apology from the BBC:  
 We're sorry Ma'am – we meant no harm  
 One did not flounce out  
 Nor did one pout  
 And someone's chances of a knighthood  
 Are seriously up the spout...

**Poem Inspired by the Wearing of Bees**

Today Philip McCabe is wearing an all-over apiary  
 ensemble  
 That offers that warm swarm feel  
 With the fuzzy feudal buzz of clinging bee  
 – Combines high tog-rating with ease of sloughing off –

Elsewhere in the Entomological Eco-Outfitters Catalogue:  
 Why not try our Exoskeletal Erotica?  
 There's the Ladybird Lingerie line  
 – When they feel the flames of passion they fly away  
 home -  
 Or Stag Beetle Boxers – They're perfectly safe,  
 though they might nip a little and some say they chafe –

We have a range of symbiotic styles to fit every level of  
 integration and intimacy

Evening wear:  
 The Lepidopteral Lounge Suit  
 Sharp as Moss Bros, cut from Moth Cloth  
 It's not made-to-measure but it settles to fit  
 Gets a little fluttery under the streetlamps  
 But it's lovely and rustly when they're sleepy  
 Though some will say it's creepy, we say:  
 Hey, it's also crawly

So sleep tight, mind the bugs don't bite (really)  
 And remember:  
 Never mind the quality, feel the itch...

**Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD)**

He stands the far wrong side of safety's door,  
 Must pick the lock to be allowed back in.  
 For him the minefield is no metaphor –  
 Breathe in. Breathe out. Hold still. Now, breathe again.

Here is the warrior with the gentle touch,  
 A soldier's courage and a surgeon's care.  
 Adrenalin enough, but not too much.  
 Fear is a friend. But still he has to dare.

Each movement is an act of conservation,  
 The moment's taut meniscus can't be broken.  
 Forced calm of concentrated concentration –  
 The demon in the box must not be woken.

Cells brace against the latent darkening blast,  
 The first mistake you make will be your last.  
 Move slowly. Look. Inbreath. Feel. Prod. Outbreath.  
 Rising relief... ..Not today, Mr Death

### 16 June 2007

#### **Feral Beast**

Darling? What's that snarling? Oh, that'll be the media  
 I don't know, I think it just gets nastier and seedier  
 It's out there prowling, scavenging scurrilous scraps on  
 which to feast  
 At least Saturday Live shows the sensitive side of this  
 ravenous feral beast..

#### **Let's Hang**

They hang in the air with the greatest of ease  
 Those aesthetically pleasing and relaxed young women on  
 their stationary trapeze-i

They hang there like bats do in caves or in trees  
 With gorgeous red welts on the backs of their knees

Without stars or spangles or greasepaint or glitter  
 They dangle at angles and slowly get fitter  
 (It's not true 'you only slim when you're swinging'...)

But though plainly as gainly as those in tight clothes  
 Who swing to and fro for the punters below

They will never be caught by a muscle-bound boy  
 Like some lycra-clad sequinned executive toy

They hang there asserting a cool independence  
 Like calm hanging baskets, post-feminist pendants

They hang there quite humbly, not seeking applause  
 On their stationary bar not too far from the floor

They strike graceful poses though no-one can tell  
 Which herbivore's that- it's quite like a gazelle...

They dream of being super-heroes – Batgirl, or Catwoman  
 In fact any one will do so long as it doesn't turn out to be

Splatwoman...

### **Ballad of the Tropical Systematic Botanist**

He's a plucker, he's a picker  
He's a cutter, he's a snipper  
He knows too much about ginger and when given room to roam  
He gathers great big armfuls of brand new botanic samples  
And he presses them and logs them and he brings them all back home

It's the only form of logging ecologically acceptable  
He doesn't care if each new leaf's disgusting or delectable  
Toxic, psychotropic, soporific or medicinal  
His quest is non-judgmental and completely unconditional

When he turns over a new leaf it's always pretty literal  
"Ooh, not seen that one before..."

With his eyes on the horizon and his hand around a rhizome  
You'll see him bleed but you won't hear him moan  
With his ankles cut by switchgrass, far from home and Alan Titchmarsh  
He's a foliage-focused Indiana Jones

Yeah he's a mild-mannered tropical systematic botanist  
But at the end of the day  
He's a pretty determined-looking mild-mannered tropical systematic botanist  
So don't get in his way

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