Roger McGough (November 9 - 1937)

McGough was born in Litherland, Lancashire, to the north of Liverpool, the city with which he is firmly associated, and was educated at the University of Hull at a time when Philip Larkin was the librarian there. Returning to Merseyside in the early 1960s, he worked as a teacher and, with John Gorman, organised arts events. After meeting Mike McGear the trio formed The Scaffold, working the Edinburgh Festival until they signed to Parlophone records in 1966. The group scored several hit records, reaching number one in the UK Singles Chart in 1968 with their version of "Lily The Pink". McGough wrote the lyrics for many of the group's songs and also recorded the musical comedy/poetry album McGough and McGear.

McGough was also responsible for much of the humorous dialogue in The Beatles' animated film, Yellow Submarine, although he did not receive an on-screen credit. At about the same time a selection of his poems was published, along with work from Adrian Henri and Brian Patten, in a best-selling paperback volume of verse entitled The Mersey Sound, first published in 1967, revised in 1983 and again in 2007.

On March 2, 1978, McGough appeared in All You Need Is Cash, a mockumentary detailing the career of a Beatles-like group called The Rutles; McGough's introduction takes so long that he is only asked one question ("Did you know the Rutles?" to which McGough cheerfully responds "Oh yes") before the documentary is forced to move along to other events.

One of McGough's more unusual compositions was created in 1981, when he co-wrote an "electronic poem" called Now Press Return with the programmer Richard Warner for inclusion with the Welcome Tape of the BBC Micro home computer. Now Press Return incorporated several novel themes, including user-defined elements to the poem, lines which changed their order (and meaning) every few seconds, and text which wrote itself in a spiral around the screen.

McGough won a Cholmondeley Award in 1998, and was awarded the CBE in June 2004. He holds an honorary MA from Nene College of Further Education; [citation needed] was awarded an honorary degree from Roehampton University in 2006; as well as an honorary doctorate from the University of Liverpool on 3 July 2006. He was Fellow of Poetry at Loughborough University (1973-5) and Honorary Professor at Thames Valley University (1993).

In 2006, he appeared on an episode of the BBC Television quiz show.
Beguiling

She is so beguiling
That when she beckons
I can run a mile
In twenty seconds.

Roger McGough
Cake

i wanted one life
you wanted another
we couldn't have our cake
so we ate eachother.

Roger McGough
First Day At School

A millionbillionwillion miles from home
Waiting for the bell to go. (To go where?)
Why are they all so big, other children?
So noisy? So much at home they
Must have been born in uniform
Lived all their lives in playgrounds
Spent the years inventing games
That don't let me in. Games
That are rough, that swallow you up.

And the railings.
All around, the railings.
Are they to keep out wolves and monsters?
Things that carry off and eat children?
Things you don't take sweets from?
Perhaps they're to stop us getting out
Running away from the lessins. Lessin.
What does a lessin look like?
Sounds small and slimy.
They keep them in the glassrooms.
Whole rooms made out of glass. Imagine.

I wish I could remember my name
Mummy said it would come in useful.
Like wellies. When there's puddles.
Yellowwellies. I wish she was here.
I think my name is sewn on somewhere
Perhaps the teacher will read it for me.
Tea-cher. The one who makes the tea.

Roger McGough
Goodbat Nightman

God bless all policemen
and fighters of crime,
May thieves go to jail
for a very long time.

They've had a hard day
helping clean up the town,
Now they hang from the mantelpiece
both upside down.

A glass of warm blood
and then straight up the stairs,
Batman and Robin
are saying their prayers.

* * *

They've locked all the doors
and they've put out the bat,
Put on their batjamas
(They like doing that)

They've filled their batwater-bottles
made their batbeds,
With two springy battresses
for sleepy batheads.

They're closing red eyes
and they're counting black sheep,
Batman and Robin
are falling asleep.

Roger McGough
Kinetic Poem No.2

with love
give me your hand
some stranger
is fiction than truth

without love
I'm justa has
been away
too long in the tooth.

Roger McGough
Let Me Die A Youngman's Death

Let me die a youngman's death
not a clean and inbetween
the sheets holywater death
not a famous-last-words
peaceful out of breath death

When I'm 73
and in constant good tumour
may I be mown down at dawn
by a bright red sports car
on my way home
from an allnight party

Or when I'm 91
with silver hair
and sitting in a barber's chair
may rival gangsters
with hamfisted tommyguns burst in
and give me a short back and insides

Or when I'm 104
and banned from the Cavern
may my mistress
catching me in bed with her daughter
and fearing for her son
cut me up into little pieces
and throw away every piece but one

Let me die a youngman's death
not a free from sin tiptoe in
candle wax and waning death
not a curtains drawn by angels borne
'what a nice way to go' death

Roger McGough
Mrs Moon

sitting up in the sky
little old lady
rock-a-bye
with a ball of fading light
and silvery needles
knitting the night

Roger McGough
I join the queue
We move up nicely.

I ask the lady in front
What are we queuing for.
'To join another queue,'
She explains.

'How pointless,' I say,
'I'm leaving.' She points
To another long queue.
'Then you must get in line.'

I join the queue.
We move up nicely.

Roger McGough
Soil

we've ignored each other for a long time
and I'm strictly an indoor man
anytime to call would be the wrong time
I'll avoid you as long as I can

When I was a boy we were good friends
I made pies out of you when you were wet
And in childhood's remembered summer weather
We rough and tumbled together
We were very close

just you and me and the sun
the world a place for having fun
always so much to be done

But gradually I grew away from you
Of course you were still there
During my earliest sexcapades
When I rough and tumbled
Not very well after bedtime
But suddenly it was winter
And you seemed so cold and dirty
That I stayed indoors and acquired
A taste for girls and clean clothes

we found less and less to say
you were jealous so one day
I simply upped and moved away

I still called to see you on occasions
But we had little now in common
And my visits grew less frequent
Until finally
One cold bright April morning
A handful of you drummed
On my father's wax worked coffin

at last it all made sense
there was no need for pretence
you said nothing in defence

And now recently
While travelling from town to town
Past where you live
I have become increasingly aware
Of you watching me out there.
Patient and unforgiving
Toying with the trees.

we've avoided each other for a long time
and I'm strictly a city man
anytime to call would be the wrong time
I'll avoid you as long as I can

Roger McGough
Survivor

Everyday,
I think about dying.
About disease, starvation,
vigence, terrorism, war,
the end of the world.

It helps
keep my mind off things.

Roger McGough
The Identification

So you think its Stephen?
Then I'd best make sure
Be on the safe side as it were.
Ah, theres been a mistake. The hair
you see, its black, now Stephens fair ...
Whats that? The explosion?
Of course, burnt black. Silly of me.
I should have known. Then lets get on.

The face, is that the face mask?
that mask of charred wood
blistered scarred could
that have been a child's face?
The sweater, where intact, looks
in fact all too familiar.
But one must be sure.

The scoutbelt. Yes thats his.
I recognise the studs he hammered in
not a week ago. At the age
when boys get clothes-conscious
now you know. Its almost
certainly Stephen. But one must
be sure. Remove all trace of doubt.
Pull out every splinter of hope.

Pockets. Empty the pockets.
Handkerchief? Could be any schoolboy's.
Dirty enough. Cigarettes?
Oh this can't be Stephen.
I dont allow him to smoke you see.
He wouldn't disobey me. Not his father.
But that's his penknife. Thats his alright.
And thats his key on the keyring
Gran gave him just the other night.
Then this must be him.

I think I know what happened
... ... ... about the cigarettes
No doubt he was minding them
for one of the older boys.
Yes thats it.
Thats him.
Thats our Stephen.

Roger McGough
The Leader

I wanna be the leader
I wanna be the leader
Can I be the leader?
Can I? I can?
Promise? Promise?
Yippee I'm the leader
I'm the leader

OK what shall we do?

Roger McGough
The Lesson

Chaos ruled OK in the classroom
as bravely the teacher walked in
the nooligans ignored him
his voice was lost in the din

'The theme for today is violence
and homework will be set
I'm going to teach you a lesson
one that you'll never forget'

He picked on a boy who was shouting
and throttled him then and there
then garrotted the girl behind him
(the one with grotty hair)

Then sword in hand he hacked his way
between the chattering rows
'First come, first severed' he declared
'fingers, feet or toes'

He threw the sword at a latecomer
it struck with deadly aim
then pulling out a shotgun
he continued with his game

The first blast cleared the backrow
(where those who skive hang out)
they collapsed like rubber dinghies
when the plug's pulled out

'Please may I leave the room sir? '
a trembling vandal enquired
'Of course you may' said teacher
put the gun to his temple and fired

The Head popped a head round the doorway
to see why a din was being made
nodded understandingly
then tossed in a grenade
And when the ammo was well spent
with blood on every chair
Silence shuffled forward
with its hands up in the air

The teacher surveyed the carnage
the dying and the dead
He waggled a finger severely
'Now let that be a lesson' he said

Roger McGough
The Sound Collector

A stranger called this morning
Dressed all in black and grey
Put every sound into a bag
And carried them away

The whistling of the kettle
The turning of the lock
The purring of the kitten
The ticking of the clock

The popping of the toaster
The crunching of the flakes
When you spread the marmalade
The scraping noise it makes

The hissing of the frying pan
The ticking of the grill
The bubbling of the bathtub
As it starts to fill

The drumming of the raindrops
On the windowpane
When you do the washing-up
The gurgle of the drain

The crying of the baby
The squeaking of the chair
The swishing of the curtain
The creaking of the stair

A stranger called this morning
He didn't leave his name
Left us only silence
Life will never be the same

Roger McGough
The Time I Like Best

The time I like best is 6am
when the snow is 6 inches deep
which I'm yet to discover
'cause I'm under the covers
fast, fast asleep.

Roger McGough
The Trouble With Snowmen

'The trouble with snowmen,'
Said my father one year
'They are no sooner made
than they just disappear.

I'll build you a snowman
And I'll build it to last
Add sand and cement
And then have it cast.

And so every winter,'
He went on to explain
'You shall have a snowman
Be it sunshine or rain. '

And that snowman still stands
Though my father is gone
Out there in the garden
Like an unmarked gravestone.

Staring up at the house
Gross and misshapen
As if waiting for something
Bad to happen.

For as the years pass
And I grow older
When summers seem short
And winters colder.

The snowmen I envy
As I watch children play
Are the ones that are made
And then fade away.

Roger McGough
You And I

I explain quietly. You hear me shouting. You try a new tack. I feel old wounds reopen.

You see both sides. I see your blinkers. I am placatory. You sense a new selfishness.

I am a dove. You recognize the hawk. You offer an olive branch. I feel the thorns.

You bleed. I see crocodile tears. I withdraw. You reel from the impact.

Roger McGough