

Hemo the Magnificent

My window to the world was a battered Ampex tape recorder. The Ampex used two seven-inch plastic reels. You put a full reel on a spindle on the left side, pulled the end of the magnetic tape through a recording "head", stuffed the end of the tape into an empty "takeup" reel on the right side, turned the "go" switch, and it played whatever was on the tape, or if you pushed a red button, it would erase the old music and record something new, such as us kids singing silly songs.

The machine had three speeds, so we could record ourselves on $3\frac{3}{4}$ feet per second, play it back on $7\frac{1}{2}$, and sound like "chipmunks." Or start on fast speed and then play it back at $1\frac{7}{8}$, turning our kid voices into brontosaurus. Dad also gave us a tape on which he had recorded classical and big-band music. The latter was very precious, even though the first several feet of tape was stretched and weird-sounding, as we sometimes launched it on fast forward by mistake.

First on the tape was the finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. We heard stretchy strairy cellos and basses scrambling everywhere - but suddenly they halted for a very huge man who sang out what sounded like "Oh-kla-HOOOOOH-MA!!!" to me, except that it was actually "Joy" in German – *O Freude!* – but sung "oh-fra-HOOOOI-da!" and then lots more German syllables. Wow! We were off on an adventure in a music world beyond the imagination!

The Huge Man argued musically with the cellos, like a tug-of-war, and finally won! He started a new song inviting us to a delightful, sunny place full of jingly bells, a marching band, and a chorus of happy singers. Soon you heard what had to be a drinking song -- you could see the jovial crowd swinging their steins in the air; yet it was about God. It was filled with God. I could make out the words "Alle Menschen" -- *ALL MANKIND. EVERYBODY.* Also, "Gottesfunken" God's divine spark (*funk* is akin to *punk*, which gives you the spark for fireworks) is for everyone! This was the song we sang on church, "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee". Beethoven's 9th was about God's love, which should be among all people!

Across town now, to school! Science was the best class, because they had movies. In between the endless delays from film breaks, we watched two guys in white coats bore us to gray death telling us about something called a "double helix." But once in a while we saw films by Bell Telephone Company, and they were *something else*. The greatest, the all-time classic, was *Hemo the Magnificent*. Hemo, which means "blood" in

Greek, was a cartoon Red Blood Cell who explained our circulatory systems. He would say "98.6 degrees" and in the background you saw a beach in Florida. He showed us animals from whale to mosquito, playing the sound of their heartbeats, from slow thunder to a vibration so fast you could hear a musical tone! Multimedia at its 50's best!

But one section of "Hemo" changed my thinking forever. Hemo took us on a journey through the blood vessels, starting at the heart, the blood magnified hundreds of times so you could see individual cells. This was wonderful enough, but what made it great was the musical background -- Beethoven's Ninth! It began at the heart, an energetic dance as the blood poured into the freeway of the aorta; then as the vessels continually narrowed, the music got smaller and crowded, too. Then, the most sacred, mysterious part of the music: the miracle of Absorption - that tiny miracle that keeps us fed, watered and changed! Round red blood cells filed singly through the stricture of capillaries to deliver their life, while soft, unearthly harmonies slowly shifted, like sunlight through thin clouds. Then, having given their all, the cells took homeward flight through the veins as the choir burst into "Alle Menschen" -- "All People!" Joy! Joy! Joy in God! I was not a committed Christian then; only a churchgoer - but to see this miracle! I knew there was a God, a creative God.

"There is Power in the Blood!" goes the old song. Do we have any idea how wonderful blood is? Have we analyzed the Blood of Christ into a mere formula, a creed of orthodoxy; or is His blood alive and renewing us daily, as the organs of every creature sing out? As the trees and rocks and waves sing out? I vote for God the Magnificent, Creator - and giver - of *Hemo*, of life!