

Threepence on the Carpet

by David Whittet

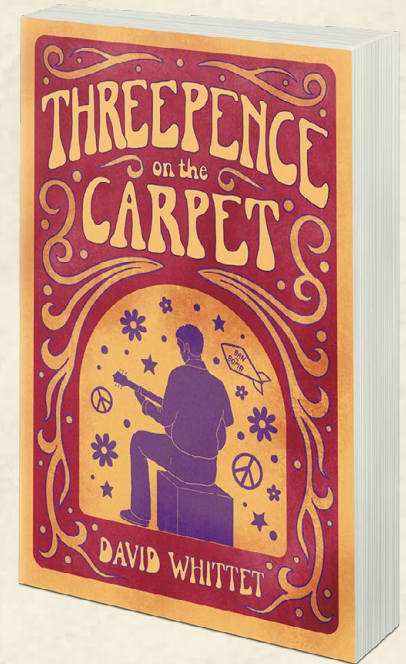
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An unexpected inheritance from a long-lost uncle could be the lifeline Tommy needs... or a Pandora's box about to implode. For a folksinger touring the UK in the swinging sixties, life was a kaleidoscope of love, truth, and high hopes for Tommy Trevelian - until it all went up in a puff of incense and bitter betrayal. But Tommy's tune changes when his long-lost uncle dies and leaves him a bequest. Is it a treasure trove of riches? A vault of family secrets? Or something stranger?

Review by: Jo Belgrave

Having spent much of my life in Europe and Aotearoa New Zealand, the former as a music teacher and performance musician, I was looking forward to exploring Tommy's narrative. There were so many parallels between his story and my own, so I was fascinated to see what David Whittet had woven with his material. I was not disappointed. So many references were evocative of my own life experiences. I particularly enjoyed the descriptions of London, a city I know well, and the music festivals.



The technique of flashbacks and flashforwards is one that takes a little getting used to, but the inclusion of some chapter titles and the occasional unexpected line drawing was a useful guide for the reader - especially at those times when I put the book down to resume reading only several days later.

Although it is ostensibly Tommy's story, I would like to have seen Ollie featured more. He is much more than a secondary character, but there are long stretches of the story where he does not appear at all. In view of his vital role towards the end of the book, I would have welcomed learning more about him and his musical journey.

I would also have appreciated the inclusion of the music for some of the songs. Lyrics that are meant to be sung rather than spoken as performance poetry often do not have the same resonance. I found as I read the words that I was trying to sing them - and this did not really work! The melodies could have been included as an appendix; the music need not have been orchestrated. A melody line would have sufficed - as with the "Oranges and Lemons" graphic in Chapter 17. Alternatively, there could have been a hyperlink in the book to pre-recorded tracks online.

The Punch and Judy segments are a pure delight. I have never seen a show in Aotearoa New Zealand, but I did attend several in England and also in Spain and Ireland. Although they can be regarded by many as inappropriate and certainly not PC, the young audiences loved them and showed their enthusiasm by shouting and clapping. Whittet captures the essence of the shows beautifully in his descriptions; they are among the highlights of the book.

Having attended rallies while in Europe, and joined in some of the protest marches, I was also impressed by the accuracy of the accounts of Tommy's involvement. As in Tommy's story, there were those who disapproved and would do anything to stop the popular voice. This included, but was not restricted to, physical attacks on demonstrators, arrests, and confiscation of personal property. This disapproval could extend to family members and so-called friends who would disown the activist on principle.

Finally, I am impressed by the amount of supporting detail that has been included in Tommy's story. The representations of rest homes, substandard rental properties and boarding houses, homelessness, the mechanics of a recording studio, and the prejudice of entitled people in positions they should never have been elevated to - all are evidence of the amount of research the author has undertaken to ensure that the end result is credible as well as entertaining. This is one book I will probably read a second time.