Old Music

By Tim Aydelott

The first notes of “Hunkadola” remind me how old this music has always sounded
Benny Goodman in the nineteen thirties

But this morning driving myself to a walk the cd my parents must have bought 30 or 40
years ago bops with joy confidence youthful energy

It’s a Big Band in the middle of the Great Depression exuding prosperity luxury
in syncopated rhythms from drums and staccato piano trumpet blasts sassy slide
trombones and Goodman’s effortless swirling riffs

Young people heard it got up to dance move in rhythm with the music with each other

Before I know it I’m tapping a foot nodding my head in time wondering

Did my grandparents raised on “Sweet Adeline” and “A Bicycle Built for Two”
tell them it was too wild made them nervous and to turn that damned thing down?
How did my parents barely teenagers hear it first?

They never knew the Great War and couldn’t know the next one that lay ahead

But they knew that moment and this new music this swing told them it’s good
to be American and young to soak in the rhythms of the sped-up world faster
than ever before how heady they must have felt my mom maybe fourteen years old
in a Berlin blue sweater that matched her eyes the wing feathers of a jay the day
she first heard Benny Goodman on the big living room radio so many possibilities
within her grasp

And my father at thirteen newly out of knickers and now in wide legged corduroy
and his umber brown suit coat his eyes a shade lighter hearing from Tommy
at school about Benny G. saying come over today we’ll listen on our living room radio

And a few thousand feet over the North Atlantic a zeppelin made its easy going way
to America a few dozen passengers spending a few days aloft in luxury
eating drinking smoking sleeping their way across the sea sailing sometimes
through clouds

Maybe it was that same day in May the day the zeppelin caught fire and crashed
when my parents first heard Benny Goodman first got a notion about swing first felt
the meaning of the rhythm

The clarinet is not so cool these days we know Led Zeppelin better than we know
the Hindenburg but those rockers sound old now too to my parents’
great-grandchildren who never knew this century’s early wars

Today there’s news of new war old music can’t keep it away
What are my grandchildren hearing? What would Benny Goodman play?