

THE GOON SHOW: THE STARLINGS

First broadcast on August 31, 1954. Script by Spike Milligan. Produced by Peter Eton. Announced by Andrew Timothy. No music, no audience. Transcribed by anon, corrections by Mark Wallace and Peter Olausson.

When broadcasted by Radio 4 in 1989, the show was introduced by Spike, explaining the background of the show:
...This show, unlike comedy shows of its day, 1954, had no audience. It was written as a satire on the efforts of the Ministry of Works, to get rid of starlings on public buildings. The devices they used were hilarious, including the exploding bird lime [*laughs*]. All this I've captured in a show called *The Starlings*. The BBC thought so little of us, that when producer Peter Eton asked for a studio that did plays, which in fact *The Starlings* was, they said they couldn't release a studio of anything so insignificant as a 'Koon Show'. Wow! Likewise, an inscent comic mention of the OBE, the sort of adult oval teeny badge, caused outraged phone calls, whereupon the BBC edited out the mention. Big brother, hmm? At the time, I had thought it original enough to enter for the Prix Italia, but bureaucrats going for OBE:s don't risk that sort of thing! To record the show, we were deported to Newcastle on Hadrian's Wall. I think the BBC wanted us on the other side of it! However, backing from people like John Snagge we succeeded. And now - tataratarataa! - here it is!

Andrew Timothy:

Ladies and gentlemen, we present a radio programme in English. From time to time actors will be heard. The author has fled the country.

Orchestra:

[Dramatic theme, still playing as Andrew speaks]

Timothy:

1954. A world overshadowed with doubts, fears, uncertainty. Of Indo-China, the Suez, Cyprus, East and West German strife, the H-Bomb explosion, and yet to come the unbelievable power of the cobalt bomb [*Music ends*]. But our own governors are not unaware of these dangers. At this moment, the House of Commons are debating serious matters.

Secombe (old politician):

Starlings, they're ruining St, Martin's!

Fairfax:

There are far too many starlings in Trafalgar Square...

Secombe:

Err, hear, hear!

Milligan (old politician):

We must... We must get rid of these disgusting creatures! We must...

Fairfax:

Well said!

Secombe:

Yes, hear, hear!

Crun:

Yes, get rid of them! Get rid...

Minnie Bannister:

What?

Crun:

Well said!

Secombe:

Yes, yes, get rid of them!

Crun (talking over Minnie):

Get rid of them!

Secombe:

Yes!

Minnie Bannister:

Here, let's all have some tea.

Omnes:

[Cheers and applause, carries on in background while Andrew speaks]

Timothy:

Yes, Parliament was aroused. On the terrace of the House of Commons during the tea break, back-benchers gave voice to their feelings.

Grams:

[Land of Hope and Glory sung by crowds, followed by applause and cheers]

Timothy:

The inventive genius of the country was called upon, and for three years the starlings were attacked with a series of frightening devices.

Sellers:

Stuffed owls!

Secombe:

Wriggling rubber snakes!

Milligan:

High frequency sound beams!

Sellers (female voice):

Little round things that went "knick, knick, knick".

Bloodnok:

Rice puddings fired from catapults!

Timothy:

A recording of a female starling in trouble!

Sellers:

A recording of a female starling not in trouble!

Milligan:

Trained cats!

Bloodnok:

Rice puddings fired from catapults, mark 2!

Secombe:

Flashing lights and Chinese crackers!

Milligan (grand voice):

Large things dropped from a great height, and vice-versa!

Bloodnok:

Failing that, rice puddings fired from catapults!

Timothy:

For some inexplicable reason all these devices failed. The starlings remained.

Sellers (undertaker's voice):

The inventors were filled with remorse, and in sack cloth they marched the streets...

Grams:

[Footsteps marching slowly to a drumbeat]

Orchestra:

[Despair music; cast sobs behind]

Timothy:

At the same time at the Ministry of Grit, Filth and Exportable Heads, the Secretary, Mr Ned Bladok was handed a vital bird statistic.

Fx:

[Paper being rustled]

Seagoon:

Are you sure this figure is correct?

Throat:

Yes.

Seagoon:

Have you had it checked?

Throat:

Yes.

Seagoon:

You mean that there are 30 million starlings roosting in Trafalgar Square?

Throat:

Yes.

Seagoon:

Thank you, Miss Perch.

Throat:

Right.

Seagoon (to himself):

30 million starlings! Hmm. Mr. Thynne!

Fx:

[Footsteps running towards microphone]

Grytpype:

[Before arriving, during sound effect] Yes sir! Yes sir! Coming Sir! Ahh! *[arrives]* Did you so much as call me, sir?

Seagoon:

Ah yes, Mr. Thin. Call a meeting of all the people we keep especially for meetings!

Orchestra:

[Trumpet fanfare]

Seagoon:

[Loud voice] Gentlemen, I have called this meeting to declare war on the starlings in London!

Grams:

[Audience response as to Hitler's speeches]

Seagoon:

Thank you. The question is, how to get rid of them?

Bloodnok:

What about rice puddings fired from catapults?

Seagoon:

No, no, no, no. We've had that.

Bloodnok:

Have we?

Seagoon:

Yes.

Bloodnok:

Oh, I say, look here! I remember a fashion out during the first world war for lasting peace. I remember after a heavy artillery barrage there were no signs of birds for months after.

Seagoon:

I don't think that is at all relevant.

Bloodnok:

If we could draw up 200 regiments of artillery, in Trafalgar Square, and let off a non-stop barrage for a month, I am sure that...

Seagoon (interrupting):

No, no, no, Major... Wait a moment!

Bloodnok:

What?

Seagoon:

You've given me an idea!

Bloodnok:

I have?

Seagoon:

Yes.

Bloodnok:

Ugh!

Seagoon:

Look, it all boils down to making a noise.

Bloodnok:

A noise?

Seagoon:

Just a noise.

Bloodnok:

Yes, yes?

Seagoon:

Now, if we can get volunteers just to kick up a noise then..!

Bloodnok:

Gad! You're right! Ah, perfect! I'll ask Field Marshall Clinical Foot to let us have three brigades of guards at Trafalgar Square at dawn on Monday!

Grams:

[Soldiers marching and commanders shouting out orders]

Bloodnok:

What a magnificent sight! Aughhhh!

Timothy:

Good morning, err, Major Bloodnok?

Bloodnok:

The same.

Timothy:

I'm Mr. Cringing-Nut, of the Morning Flight.

Bloodnok:

Oh yes, you're one of the observers aren't you?

Timothy:

That's right, Sir.

Bloodnok:

Yes, yes, yes. Well I'll tell you briefly what's happening. The whole of the square mile of Trafalgar Square has been cautioned off.

Timothy:

Is it now a curfew area?

Bloodnok:

Yes. Only curfews our allowed in. All these squads marching in here are to kick up a din and in so doing, you see, they drive the starlings away.

Timothy:

What does the noise making equipment consist of?

Bloodnok:

Sergeant Steinbacker!

Secombe:

Sir!

Bloodnok:

Explain the noise equipment to this gentleman, would you?

Steinbacker:

Yes sir! Four men entering this area are headed with the following items: Iron bath tub with beater, football rattles, whistles, tin cans, dustbin lids, gas stoves filled with iron bolts, bagpipes, dinner gongs, kettle drums, thunder sheets, and other various noise making gear, for the uses of.

Timothy:

Thank you.

Bloodnok:

Ah, I see that Lance-Colonel Sockclencher is going to address the men now.

Sockclencher (speaking into megaphone):

Men! At ease chaps! Now, I'm going to put you into the picture. In a short time we will be commencing the noise for the uses of. So lets have a little practice first, yes? Right. Now first, let's hear from the dustbin lids.

Fx:

[Dustbin lids being banged together]

Sockclencher:

Well done. Thank you. Yes, thank you. Now, whistles and rattles.

Fx:

[Whistles and rattles]

Sockclencher:

Good show, whistlers and rattlers. Thank you, that's enough. I know you all like music so there'll be time enough for that in a few moments. So now, take your positions; and according to our information the starlings are due in ten seconds from now. So, let's have complete silence.

Timothy:

Gad Carruthers! Action at last!

Sockclencher:

Yes, well, it had to come.

Grams:

[Several seconds of silence, followed by starlings arriving, flapping wings and whistling]

Sockclencher (on megaphone):

Right men, noise commence!

Fx:

[Noise commences]

Timothy (speaking over quietened noise):

Diary of Operation Cacophony.

Secombe:

March the second, third week of operation. Starlings undisturbed. But two thirds of guard brigade stone deaf.

Milligan:

April first. Still no effect on starling. All rather annoying, really!

Sellers:

December the first, very cold. Noise makers were augmented by the bagpipes of the Highland Brigade. Starlings still undisturbed. The population of London dropped 10,000 overnight.

Grams:

[Bagpipes join the rest of the noise]

Timothy:

December the third. Deep snow. Starlings sleeping peacefully. Noise continues. Field Marshall Plunch sends the brigade a Christmas greeting. He receives in return a Christmas Pudding, with a rather disturbing message, and then...

Orchestra:

[Dramatic chords and tune]

Timothy:

February the thirty-second. All troops withdrawn. Operation Cacophony abandoned.

Sellers:

A military disaster! Those responsible were clad in sack cloth and once more walked the streets!

Grams:

[Footsteps marching slowly to a drumbeat]

Orchestra:

[Despair music; cast sobs behind]

Omnes:

[Shouting angrily, Neddy trying to keep order]

Seagoon:

I admit that Operation Cacophony cost £160,000, and was a complete and utter failure, but these little mistakes will happen!

Fairfax:

You made a muck of it!

Milligan:

Bravo!

Seagoon:

Honourable members, it was not an absolute failure. I mean, that is to say, though the starlings were not removed from Trafalgar Square, they were... err... well... rearranged!

Minnie Bannister:

Rubbish! Rubbish!

Bloodnok:

You should have used rice puddings fired from catapults!

Seagoon:

Nonsense!

Timothy:

I suggest the honourable member applies for the Chiltern Hundred.

Seagoon:

I refuse to get in that queue! In any case, I have already taken steps to ensure that the starlings are removed from London!

Milligan:

Lies!

Seagoon:

I have, this day, inserted an advertisement in the paper asking for suggestions that will rid us of this pest!

Fairfax:

Well, we'll give you one more chance. Now then, lads, who's in for a quick round of pontoon?

Omnes:

[Applauds and shouts out encouragement, fades out]

Fx:

[Typing being done very slowly]

Seagoon:

Good morning, Miss Perch. Working late again?

Throat:

Yes.

Seagoon:

Good girl. Any replies to the advert in the papers?

Throat:

Yes, this bloke here's been waiting for you.

Seagoon:

Oh! Ha-ha.

Bluebottle:

Yes! Hee-hee! I have been waiting to speak to you, mr. Clum-Thrut-Knid-Sproo-Theckran-Bludge-Sprathatan.

Seagoon:

Mr. Bladok's the name.

Bluebottle:

Yes, that's it! I knew it was something like Clum-Thrut-Knid-Sproo...

Seagoon:

Please, please. Well, will you come in please?

Bluebottle:

Thank you.

Fx:

[Door opens and shuts]

Seagoon:

Now, Mr.... umm...

Bluebottle:

Umm, my name is, um, Jim Bluebottle Tiger-Nuts. It is an unusual name.

Seagoon:

Yes, I suppose it is. *[Polite cough]* Still, a rose by any other name, you know?

Bluebottle:

No, I do not know any roses by any other names.

Seagoon:

Ha-ha-ha. *[Polite cough]* Err... cigarette?

Bluebottle:

I do not smoke. Too expensive.

Seagoon:

It's no expense to the Ministry. I could have you one rolled within the hour!

Bluebottle:

No, thank you.

Seagoon:

Right, now to business. What is your invention?

Bluebottle:

It is an artificial explodable bird-lime.

Seagoon:

What a fascinating start. Continue.

Bluebottle:

Thank you. Well, I have managed to compound a mixture that looks exactly like bird-lime. Now then, this bird-lime can be put down anywhere where there are starlings.

Seagoon:

Um-hum.

Bluebottle:

Then, simply by pressing a remote control button, all those little blobs of bird-lime can be exploded!

Seagoon:

Good heavens!

Bluebottle:

Yes. It is all done by sound waves!

Seagoon:

You really mean it would drive the starlings away?

Bluebottle:

Yes!

Seagoon:

Gad! What a saviour he is! Here, have an OBE!

Bluebottle:

Oh, ta!

Seagoon:

In England's darkest hour one always appears. First Cromwell, then Fred Clute, and now you. Now, Mr. Tiger-Nuts, you have the formula for this artificial exploding bird-lime?

Bluebottle:

Yes, I have.

Seagoon:

Good! Let me have it and I'll get the Woolwich Arsenal to make it up!

Bluebottle:

Here.

Seagoon:

This little invention of yours will save the day *[Fade out]*

Grams:

[Fades in: cauldrons bubbling]

Seagoon:

[Speaking over Grams] Well, gentlemen of the press, there it is. 40,000 liquid tonnes of artificial explodable bird-lime!

Timothy:

Wonderful! Absolutely marvellous!

Seagoon:

Not too close, gentlemen, ah-ah! Mind you don't fall in!

Milligan:

Ah, terribly sorry!

Fairfax:

It looks like the real thing.

Seagoon:

Well, it has to. These starlings must not suspect for a moment, Mr. Fairfax. After all, they know the real thing.

Fairfax:

Of course, of course.

Timothy:

When will it be ready?

Seagoon:

Well, the head of the department tells me the mixture will take ten days to cool.

Milligan:

That's not bad at all.

Seagoon:

No. Then it is to be given artificial colouring and forced into tubes ready for squirting on to the buildings.

Milligan:

Oh, brilliant!

Seagoon:

All in all, about two weeks, I should say. By then the inaugurating ceremony will be ready.

Timothy:

What inauguration ceremony?

Seagoon:

My dear sir, the exploding of the artificial bird-lime recusetates the pressing of a button. And it is common law that all cutting of tapes and pressing of buttons must be carried out with due ceremony...

Milligan and Sellers:

Of course, of course...

Seagoon:

...As it will be in this case.

Timothy:

Can I quote you on that?

Seagoon:

You can quote me as saying it, but no more.

Timothy:

What will be the date of the ceremony?

Seagoon:

Err, three weeks from now. The BBC are covering the occasion.

Timothy:

They would! *[Voices and Grams fade out]*

Timothy:

This is London. And now it's time for our special outside broadcast from Trafalgar Square. Today the great experiment Operation Explodable Bird-Li... err, Bird Mixture... is about to commence. For the first part of our broadcast, let us go over to Brian Ginstone.

Grams:

[Crowd atmosphere]

Ginstone:

[Speaking over noise] Hello listeners, Brian Ginstone here, and I'm speaking from the roof of St. Martin's. The roof of St. Martin's where, for the past week, workmen have been spreading the artificial explodable bird mixture. So, to tell us a little about it, let's have a word with the foreman. Pardon me sir.

Bert:

Eh?

Ginstone:

I'm from the BBC.

Bert:

I'll punch you in the flipping ear 'ole!

Ginstone:

[Laughs politely] Well, I wonder sir, if you'd like to say a few words to the listeners.

Bert:

Don't they get enough chat from you lot?

Ginstone:

[Laughs politely] Tell me, how long have you been putting the mixture round the ledges of this building?

Bert:

Oh, err, about ten days, on and off.

Ginstone:

What do you mean, "On and Off"?

Bert:

Well, some of us keep falling off.

Ginstone:

[Laughs politely] What jolly fun.

Bert:

Yes.

Ginstone:

Now, tell us, you've been working on this job for ten days on and off, what do you think of the idea and its chances?

Sellers:

Well, you know, I...

Ginstone:

...Err, Thank you. Now, as the workmen take down the last of the scaffolding, I see that the ceremony in the square below us is about to begin; so, over to Richard Dimbleby *[fade out]*

Grams:

[Crowd atmosphere, continued throughout]

Sellers:

[Impression of Richard Dimbleby, speaking over crowds] Here, in the Great Square of Trafalgar; which, as we all know, takes its name from the great underground railway that runs directly beneath its ancient flagstones; here all is in readiness for the great explodable bird mixture inauguration. To my right rises the great wooden old platform from which this solemn ceremony will be perfumed. The entire Square is a great mass of banners. Banners from the great Society of Pest Control, all waiting to see the result of this experiment.

Fx:

[Siren added to crowd atmosphere]

Dimbleby:

Yes, there goes the great siren, telling us that all the workmen are clear of the buildings. That is to say St. Martin's, the National Gallery, Africa House, and all the other buildings that have been treated with this wonderful explodable bird mixture.

Grams:

[Soldiers marching and shouting commander in background added to crowd atmosphere]

Dimbleby:

Now then, to my right, up the right side of the square, I can see the bright, scarlet and pink tulips of the Royal College of Herald's, as they march majestically up to the base of the great platform. *[Soldiers Grams stop]* They are, of course, waiting to sound the traditional fanfare Tedium Vitae which will announce the arrival of Duchess Winifred Boiledusspudswell, the well-known human being.

Grams:

[Horses and chariots join crowd atmosphere]

Dimbleby:

And as I speak, I see the Third Battalion of the First Regal Household Cavalry, so-called as every member is a householder, and yes, there they go, their great white hooves, swords, snorting at the reign, and fie, and lifting the dust as they pass the base of Nelson's great column, that column so nobly erected here in 1672 to commemorate Lord Nelson's victory at Balaclava, over the combined Egyptian and Turkish cavalry...

Grams:

[Crowd starts cheering]

Dimbleby:

And those cheers are for the leader of the Household Troop as he dips the Union Jack, the national flag of the union of Jack.

Orchestra:

[Trumpet fanfare]

Dimbleby:

That great fanfare announces the arrival of the great television coach bearing the Duchess by arrangement with Richard Winnick and Mark Loodman.

Grams:

[Commander shouts "Present arms!", followed by sounds of presenting the arms]

Dimbleby:

The Guard of the Tender Plumage Haddockurs presents arms and we all stand to attention for the anthem of the great Bird Pest Control.

Orchestra:

[Anthem of the Great Bird Pest Control]

Dimbleby:

What a lovely tune that is, from the pen of the marcher of the Archer Street roles. And now, yes, now, here comes the Duchess Boiledusspudswell followed by the venerable City Fathers, Mothers, Sisters, Mothers-In-Laws and all the other great traditional hangers-on. Now the Duchess approaches the great charcoal and bulsar staircase that leads up to the rostrum, and at the same time leads down again. She mounts the great steps, her great cape of Northern Weevil scrabbling across the ancient planks of the high Grantfordloo.

Orchestra:

[Trumpet fanfare]

Dimbleby:

And with that the Herald sounds the Turk Voluntary, the Voluntary so well beloved by the Swahili dust-group of Westminster. And now she reaches the great gold and bronze microphone to make her declaration. But first the master of the rolls and leather goods pledges his allegiance, also the quanti-denorum, so let us listen to it.

Grams:

[Speech being made on microphone, breaking up every few words]

Dimbleby:

He appears to be having trouble with the great microphone of state, the same great microphone used ever since 1672, hand beaten and foot slapped in gold and silver surmounted by two Burmese cherubs, and fashioned by the great sculptor Ben Venuto Selinae and his brother Fred. Oh and now I see the great engineer of state with the great state screwdriver adjusting the mace screws on the great microphone.

Milligan:

[On microphone, blows a few time] Hello... testing, testing.. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 testing... yes it's all right now.

Dimbleby (master of the rolls, on microphone):

My lords, ladies and gentlemong. Pray silence for the Duchess Boiledusspudswell, Deme of the Empire, and at the present appearing in a television "That's your lot", "Where's your bond?", "What's up now?", "Who's your dad?", "Why have you come?" and other edifying panel games. She appears by permission of the makers of Footo, the wonder boot exploder.

Dimbleby:

With that great dignified ringing across the great square, she steps up to the great microphone...

Duchess (sounds like the Queen; speech breaking up):

Ladies and Gentlemen. It is ----- pleasure that I have come --- today to give my ---

Milligan:

[Blows into microphone a few times] Hello... hello... testing... 1, 2, 3, 4.... Yes, it's all right now.

Duchess:

Ladies and Gentlemen. It is my privilege and privilege to name this experiment Operation Explodable Bird Mixture, and may all who stand on it perish.

Dimbleby:

She steps forward to press the great button. She presses it. And so, for the final result, over to Brian Ginstone on top of the National Gallery...

Grams:

[Mild explosions continues throughout speech]

Ginstone:

And all around the cornerses of St. Martin's the bird mixture is exploding and the starlings are being driven away and I -

Grams:

[Giant explosion, crowd screams]

Ginstone:

Oh dear, I don't quite know what happened!

Fx:

[Fire engine bell ringing, screams continue, fade out]

Omnes:

[Fade in: Shouts and boos in House of Commons]

Fairfax:

Lads, lads, lads. Please, lads. Quiet now. Let us have a fair hearing. And now, Mr. Bladok.

Seagoon:

Mr. Prime Minister, Honourable Members. I fear that the explodable bird-lime was a mite too powerful, but fear not, St. Martin's will be rebuilt!

Timothy:

But the starlings will only roost in it again.

Seagoon:

If they do, well, we'll blow it up again! Naturally we would rebuild again, but if the starlings still persist in roosting there, we'll have no compulsion but to blow it up yet again! We'll see who gets tired first!

Minnie Bannister:

But think of the expense!

Seagoon:

No fears there! I have it on good authority that our financial position is far in excess of the starlings!

Minnie Bannister:

Huzzah!

Seagoon:

Yes, in any case, I have a new invention to deal with the pests.

Sellers:

What?

Seagoon:

Rice puddings fired from catapults!

Fx:

[Catapult rubber released]

Seagoon:

Oooh!

Timothy:

Good shot!

Sellers:

Right, lads, how about a nice cup of tea?

Omnes:

Here here, plus cheers and applause *[fades out]*

Grams:

[Starling twitter during announcements]

Timothy:

That was "The Starlings", that was, by Spike Milligan. All parts were played by Peter Sellers, Harry Secombe and Spike Milligan. Other pests were played by the starlings themselves. Technical production by Harry Green and Barry Wilson. I am the announcer, Andrew Timothy is the name, and I am asked to say that any resemblance to a Goon Show is due to the laxity of the producer Peter Eton. *[Starlings fade out]*