

S7 E22 - The Africa Ship Canal

Transcription by Kurt Adkins. Final corrections by Helen.

GREENSLADE:

This is the BBC. We commence with a flourishing chorus of 'The Gallant Hussar' by Fotheringay's Singing Midgets.

GRAMS:

SPEEDED UP BANJO AND VOCAL FOLLOWED BY AN EXPLOSION.

GREENSLADE:

And here is the midget composer, Harry 'Nuts' Secombe.

SECOMBE:

Hallo, folks! Hallo, folks. Now let me inform you, Wallace, that no midget composer am I. Haaallo, folks! My vocation is engineering. I graduated in tunnel building.

GREENSLADE:

How terribly, terribly.

SECOMBE:

Yes, yes, yes. Yous. Yes. Yus. My first big tunnel I built in 1931.

GREENSLADE:

Oh, yes, I remember now. Six other convicts escaped with you.

SECOMBE:

What? What? What? What? What? What? What? What? What? What? What? All lies, I tell you. We were just *dressed* as convicts. It was carnival night. That's how we slipped away unnoticed. All lies, I tell you, all lies! (MUTTERS OFF INTO THE DISTANCE..)

SELLERS:

Yes. This is a story of how an escaped convict became a great engineer and vice-a-versa.

SECOMBE:

What, it's true

SELLERS:

I will. If you just stand naked on the piano with your back to the audience, you will hear the story of The Great Trans-Africa Canal!

ORCHESTRA:

FANFARE TYPE LINK.

GREENSLADE:

Scene one, that well-known variety theatre, the House of Commons.

MILLIGAN:

(UNINTELLIGIBLE ECHOY HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT TYPE BACKGROUND SPEECHMAKING).

SECOMBE:

Hallo, folks. On that feetful day in Parliament, two sinister figures were present.

GRYTPYPE:

Hello, folks! It was us. We were camping in the lobby, an al fresco mode forced on us by the dreaded Rent Act. I refer of course to the Rent Act of 1831 which introduced rent.

MORIARTY:

Hallo, folks!

GRYTPYPE:

Shut up, you la grip ridden steaming French nit.

MORIARTY:

I... I only wanted to go 'Owww'!

GRYTPYPE:

You fool! Anyone found going 'Owww' in the lobby can be charged with 'felo de se'.

GRAMS:

DONKEY BRAYING

GRYTPYPE:

Don't forget, when the Honourable Minister's finished this speech, we put forward our plan.

MORIARTY:

The plan, ohhh, what a plan that will be, I tell you!

HENRY CRUN:

Yes, Mister Minister

MINNIE:

Speak up.

HENRY CRUN:

What? What?

MINNIE:

Speak up! What about the suffragette...?

HENRY CRUN:

With the closing of the canal our ships have been forced to travel around the Cape

SPRIGGS:

Ahhhhh! Just a minute, couldn't they travel overland?

HENRY CRUN:

Yes, well, we've tried that but it ruins the bottoms of the ships. Has the Hon. Min. any suggestions?

ECCLES:

Me? Oh, no, you just carry on! You just forget I'm here. I got other things... I got things...

ORDERLY:

[SELLERS]

'Scuse me, Mr. Minister. There's a...

ECCLES:

Yes, my good man?

ORDERLY:

....blonde suffragette chained to the railings outside No. 10, Sir.

ECCLES:

I know, I chained her there. Ha, ha, ha, ha! Oh, dear. I'm no fool. What?

SEAGOON:

Haallo, folks. Haallo, folks!

ECCLES:

What's this? What? What?

SEAGOON:

Hallo, folks.

ECCLES:

What's this about? What's that? What? What? What? What?

SELLERS:

The voice came from a man in the distinguished visitors gallery, who lowered himself into the chamber on a rope attached to a distinguished visitor.

SEAGOON:

Haaaaallo, folks. I've just come from France.

CHURCHILL:

Down the rope?

SEAGOON:

I always travel by rope, it's cheaper! Haallo, folks.

SPRIGGS:

Wait a minute. Will the 'Hallo Folks' intruder kindly explain why he's disguised as Frodman De Lesseps?

SEAGOON:

Yes!

SPRIGGS:

(SINGS) Frodman De Lesseeeeeeps. (NORMAL) I thought I'd get that in.

SEAGOON:

Yeeeeees. My other suit's at the cleaners. Hallo, folks! Gentlemen, you realise of course...

SPRIGGS:

Yes?

SEAGOON:

...that due to the canal closing British aeroplanes are forced to fly around the Cape. (PAUSE FOR LAUGHS) It is my intention to cut a canal across Africa so that they can fly over that.

HENRY CRUN:

Fly over a canal? What if they crash? They'll all drown!

MINNIE:

Yes.

SEAGOON:

Don't worry, folks.

HENRY CRUN:

What...?

SEAGOON:

Hallo, folks! All aeroplanes will be fitted with a new wooden lifeboat.

ATTLEE:

Yes, but even lifeboats can sink!

SEAGOON:

They can't in this canal - there's not going to be any water in it!

ATTLEE:

Oooooooooerrrr, you're cleverer than I am, you know. Come to think of it, anybody's cleverer than I am!

SEAGOON:

Thank you. Hon. Membs. You would have guessed of course from my ragged clothes that this canal is going to cost you a lot of money.

ECCLES:

Ooooh!

BEVAN:

[SELLERS]

(WELSH ACCENTED) But you'll have to see the Chancellor of the Exchequer about that, won't you?

SEAGOON:

But *you're* the Chancellor of the Exchequer!

BEVAN:

(WELSH ACCENTED) Ooh, am I? Lend us a couple o' quid, will you, boy?

SPRIGGS:

Gentlemen. Gentlemeeeeeeen. No, please, quiet, please. Gentlemen, this idea of a dry canal for aeroplanes is brilliant. Brilliant, I saaaaaaaay! I think Mr. Seagoon's Frodman De Lesseps Mk.2 should receive some kind of support... and wear it at all times!

SEAGOON:

What? What? What? What? What? What? What? What? What? What? What? What? What? What? What? What?

CHURCHILL:

Silence in the gallery. What would be the cost of this scrins and scrans?

SEAGOON:

I.... wouldn't like to say.

SPRIGGS:

Hoorah!

GRYTPYPE:

Gentlemen, why spend all this money when for 14 shillings the Moriarty horse drawn zeppelin service will fly you round the Cape in 80 days.

MORIARTY:

Owwwww!

GRYTPYPE:

Thereby avoiding the traffic at Oxford Circus! And anyway, this idiot knows nothing about canals!

MORIARTY:

Nothing!

SPRIGGS:

Honourable members! I move that... I moooooooooove. I move that as it is customary in our beloved country England a man so totally unsuitable for the job should be given the contract. (AUDIENCE APPLAUSE) Thank you, Thank you.

SEAGOON:

Thank you, folks, thank you. I'll start work right away, hold my coat.

GRAMS:

PNEUMATIC DRILLS.

MORIARTY:

Curse, Grytpype, he's got the contract.

GRYTPYPE:

But not for long. Get my lawyer, Max Geldray, on the blower.

MORIARTY:

Right!

ORCHESTRA:

MUSIC STARTS...

GRYTPYPE:

Shall we dance, Moriarty?

MORIARTY:

Ahhhh, the leaping divine of a modern melody...

MAX GELDRAI:

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

GREENSLADE:

The well-known Trans-Africa Aeroplane Canal, part derx.

BLOODNOK:

We move now to Congo jungle and district Commissionaire.

ORCHESTRA:

JUNGLE DRUMS.

BLOODNOK:

(SINGS ALONG WITH THE DRUMMING) La da da de dum... Ooohhhhoohh! Well, that saved paying for an orchestration, anyway! Ooohhhhoohh, I've had a hard day. I thought she'd never go! Ohhh! Ohhhh! Ellington, take my boots off, will you? And don't you let me catch you wearing them again! Oh!Oooooohhhhh, goooo, ging, gong, gueeeh!

FX:

RAPID KNOCKING ON DOOR.

BLOODNOK:

Ethel, bring that door in here for me to open will you?

FX:

DOOR RATTLES AND OPENS.

SEAGOON:

Oh, thank you! Hallo, folks!

MILLIGAN:

(OFF) Helloooo!

SEAGOON:

Haaaallo, folks.

BLOODNOK:

Hello, folks.

SEAGOON:

I'm Neddie Seagoon, you've heard of me, Neddie Seagoon? (SINGS OPERATICALLY)

Be my loooove.

Falling in love with [UNCLEAR].

When you come home again to Waaaaaaaales.

BLOODNOK:

You'll get a punch up the duster, you will. Oh!

SEAGOON:

Major! I've come to inform you that we're building a canal and... I'm afraid it's going to cut right through your house.

BLOODNOK:

What! Well, if you think I'm going to run downstairs and open the door every time a ship wants to come through, you're barmy.

SEAGOON:

You don't have to open the door, you can leave the key under the mat!

BLOODNOK:

Over my dead body.

SEAGOON:

No, under the mat. A-Ha, ha, ha, ha. A-ha, ha, ha... Under the mat! Ha, ha, ha, ha, hu-hum!

BLOODNOK:

Are you sure it was a prison you escaped from?

SEAGOON:

Lies, lies, all lies, I'm perfectly sane, I tell you! It's a lie! Never! All lies, lies, I tell you!

BLOODNOK:

Look here, I... I tell you, I won't have aeroplanes flying through my house. Now get out!

FX:

DOOR SLAMS SHUT.

SEAGOON:

Very well. If that's the way you feel about it, goodbye.

FX:

DOOR SLAMS SHUT.

BLOODNOK:

Never darken my door again.

FX:

DOOR SLAMS SHUT.

SEAGOON:

Since you insult me, I shall leave, goodbye.

FX:

DOOR SLAMS SHUT.

GREENSLADE:

Listeners with a degree in higher mathematics will have counted 4 doors slamming. This was in fact an aural illusion. What you did hear was not four doors being slammed, but one door being slammed four times. Or, in your parlance, one to the power of four. You see, it is these little snippets of information that makes me feel that my job is worthwhile, thank you.

SEAGOON:

'Ave you done?

GREENSLADE:

Yes.

SEAGOON:

Thank you. So work began on the Great Trans-Africa Aeroplane Canal, folks. But meanwhile, on the top of a number 11A3, two sinister figures sit steaming in a brown airing cupboard.

MORIARTY:

Ahhh, I tell you, Grytpype, we got to sabotage the canal with sabotage-type sabotage.

GRYTPYPE:

Don't worry, Count Jim.

MORIARTY:

Owww!

GRYTPYPE:

The best laid plans of mice and men gang aft a-gley.

MORIARTY:

Aye, man, aye. Ah, wee towering timorous beastie aft gang a-gley.

GRYTPYPE:

Do you like Burns?

MORIARTY:

Yes.

GRYTPYPE:

Well, hold this white hot poker!

MORIARTY:

Aargggghhhhh! Aargggghhhhh! Aargggghhhhh! You fool!

GRYTPYPE:

This is no time for beauty, mark ye. Hold this leather piano in the key of C.

MORIARTY:

Yeargghh! Owff! What's the plan?

GRYTPYPE:

We are going to steal the Trans-Africa Aeroplane Canal!

MORIARTY:

Where are we going to hide it?

GRYTPYPE:

We are going to bury it.

MORIARTY:

It's dead?

GRYTPYPE:

As good as, Moriarty!

GRYTPYPE AND MORIARTY:

Becaaaaaaause! (SINGS TOGETHER)

We're riding along on the crest of a wave,

(SPEEDS UP) And the sun is in the sky.

GRYTPYPE:

(SPEEDS UP) In the sky, Moriarty.

GRYTPYPE AND MORIARTY:

(SPEEDS UP) All our eyes...

SELLERS:

And so they headed for Seagoon who was watching the canal being dug by 40,000 British labourers.

FX:

ONE HAMMER BLOW ON BRICK.

OMNES:

WHISTLING

SEAGOON:

I say there, foreman!

WILLIUM:

'Allo, mate.

SEAGOON:

Why are you the only one working?

WILLIUM:

Well... all the men are on strike, mate!

SEAGOON:

What for?

WILLIUM:

We can't think of anything, yet. But, er... we will, we'll... we'll think of something.

SEAGOON:

What are they doing here this morning?

WILLIUM:

Errrr, they come along for the tea-break.

UNION REP:

[MILLIGAN]

Yesss, you want a... (INCOHERENT TRADE UNION/OFFICIOUS TYPE MUMBLING)

WILLIUM:

That... that was the 'ead striker, that was. 'E says what they stricked for is £15 a week.

SEAGOON:

Alright. I'll pay them £15 a week.

OMNES:

HOORAY! (SINGS) 'LAND OF HOPE AND GLORY'.

SEAGOON:

What's up?

WILLIUM:

They gone on strike again.

SEAGOON:

Why?

WILLIUM:

They want more money, Mate! And 'ere's their spokesman, Rage Nurglegoos to give the message on the old bonjoes. Now let's get right back round the old brandy, there.

SEAGOON:

Right-oh, there.

FX:

MASSED BOOTS RUNNING

RAY ELLINGTON QUARTET:

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

GREENSLADE:

Now, the Trans-Africa Aeroplane Canal, part the derx.

ORCHESTRA:

DESCENDING FANFARE MUSICAL LINK.

SEAGOON:

To break the strike, I had sent for two professional strike breakers, who even now were on their way from England by electric rowing boat.

GRAMS:

WAVES BREAKING ON THE SHORE AND SEAGULL CRIES. OARS IN THE ROWLOCKS.

BLUEBOTTLE:

Eccles? Why...? (AUDIENCE APPLAUSE) Thank you! Why did they throw you out of being Prime Minister?

ECCLES:

Well... um... Anybody listening?

BLUEBOTTLE:

Yes.

ECCLES:

Who?

BLUEBOTTLE:

Me.

ECCLES:

Oh, ho, ho! Well, then. Well, then, um, Bottle, you remember that blonde suffragette chained to the railings outside No. 10?

BLUEBOTTLE:

Yes! Yeah!

ECCLES:

Weeell....

BLUEBOTTLE:

Yes?

ECCLES:

Well, I chained myself to her! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ho! Ohhhh!

BLUEBOTTLE:

Good, that was naughty, that was, Eccles.

ECCLES:

Oh, yeah? Was that naughty?

BLUEBOTTLE:

Yes, it was.

ECCLES:

Welllll, owwowwwwoowww.

BLUEBOTTLE:

I never did that when I was Prime Minister, you know. Do you know what hurted, my good man?

ECCLES:

What did, my fellow?

BLUEBOTTLE:

Well, then, when I found the lady what was chained to the railings.

ECCLES:

Yup? Yup? Yup? Yup?

BLUEBOTTLE:

In a flash, I whipped out my boy scout knife.

ECCLES:

Ohhhh.

BLUEBOTTLE:

And in a flash I removed a stone from her hoof.

ORCHESTRA:

PUNCHLINE TYPE FANFARE.

ECCLES:

Oy!

SEAGOON:

Alright you two, that's your bit done, that's all! Now, welcome to Africa!

BLUEBOTTLE:

Hello, Captain.

ECCLES:

'Ello.

BLUEBOTTLE:

We have brought from England this modern Kelsop super canal digging machine.

ECCLES:

Machine!

BLUEBOTTLE:

Yes. It's inside this parcel.

SEAGOON:

Inside the parcel? What a neat idea.

BLUEBOTTLE:

Yes, it is a neat idea, yes.

FX:

RUSTLING PAPER

BLUEBOTTLE:

Oh, save the brown paper Eccles, I need a new suit.

ECCLES:

Ooh.

BLUEBOTTLE:

Now, Captain? Let us demonstrate this machine. Do you know that that it can dig up four tons of earth in three seconds?

ECCLES:

Hallo, folks.

BLUEBOTTLE:

I will time it with my watch.

GRAMS:

COMICAL SOUNDING MACHINERY OPERATING. (BLEEPS, BURBLES ETC).

SEAGOON:

That was a noisy machine.

BLUEBOTTLE:

Machine? That was my watch! Captain, this machine can do the work of two men.

SEAGOON:

Well let's see it.

BLUEBOTTLE:

Alright, but you'll have to help us 'cos it takes three men to work it.

SEAGOON:

Right! Eccles and Bluebottle, you three get it going.

BLUEBOTTLE:

'Ere. Wait a minute, Captain. Eccles and me only make two.

SEAGOON:

Nonsense. (SARN'T MAJOR TYPE SHOUTING) Fall in! From the left, number!

ECCLES:

One.

BLUEBOTTLE:

Two.

SEAGOON:

Two and One equals...?

ECCLES:

Three.

SEAGOON:

Right, off you go!

BLUEBOTTLE:

(MUMBLING) No, no, [UNCLEAR].

ECCLES:

(MUMBLING) I don't believe that!

SEAGOON:

Right, get cracking! Now, the next problem is this fellow Bloodnok.

FX:

BANG...WHOOSH!

GRYTPYPE:

Neddie...

SEAGOON:

Grytpype! You!

FX:

RUNNING FOOTSTEPS, GETTING CLOSER.

SEAGOON:

What's this?

GRYTPYPE:

My legs, I thought they'd never get here!

MORIARTY:

I'm sorry, Grytpype, it was my fault, I... I let them out for a run in the park.

GRYTPYPE:

You sentimental steaming Latin, you. Never let my legs out unchaperoned again, do you hear? The world must never know those Thynne measurements

SEAGOON:

Gentlemen, I see from the next line that you can help me with this Bloodnok problem.

GRYTPYPE:

Neddie? You see this piece of knotted string leading from Moriarty's wrist up into that cloud?

SEAGOON:

Do you mean... you mean, there's... there's something on the other end of it?

GRYTPYPE:

Yes, Neddie! It's the perfect device for removing Bloodnok's house. Id est, Count Moriarty's hand-sewn blue-serge zeppelin.

MORIARTY:

Yes, Neddie, we can lower our sky hooks and lift Bloodnok's house out of the way in a second.

GRYTPYPE:

Now, Neddie. Go in and tell Bloodnok that in 15 minutes his house becomes skyborne.

SEAGOON:

Right!

FX:

DOOR OPENS

GRYTPYPE:

(STRAINING) Right, up there?

MORIARTY:

(VERY FAINTLY) Jawohl.

GRYTPYPE:

He's in!

MORIARTY:

(VERY FAINTLY) OK.

GRYTPYPE:

Attach skyhooks and haul away.

GRAMS:

COLLAPSING BUILDING TYPE SOUNDS.

MORIARTY:

(VERY FAINTLY) Ha, ha, Grytpype. Up he goooes, we've got him! We've got [UNCLEAR]!

BLOODNOK:

Whooooaarggghhh! Call a doctor!

MORIARTY:

Major Bloodnok! Kee-es-ker-ce-ces-say-sain!

BLOODNOK:

Oh! Cest-in-french. I... I stepped out of the back of my house.

MORIARTY:

What?

BLOODNOK:

Walked down to the bottom of the garden.

MORIARTY:

Ah!

BLOODNOK:

Pleasure bent. Finally... I... I turned around, and to my building society's horror, my house had vanished. There was nothing there!

MORIARTY:

Nothing there! You must have been seeing things.

GRYTPYPE:

Moriarty!

MORIARTY:

Owww!

GRYTPYPE:

Never mind that man of no fixed abode. I've got great news.

MORIARTY:

News!

GRYTPYPE:

I've bribed the workmen to fill in the canal.

FX:

TELEPHONE BELL RINGS.

MORIARTY:

Splendid! Answer that door.

GRYTPYPE:

Hello? Yes?

SEAGOON:

Hello, Grytpype? I'm speaking from Bloodnok's house and he's not here.

GRYTPYPE:

Oh, Neddie. Don't wait any longer, you come out, lad.

SEAGOON:

Right.

FX:

TELEPHONE HUNG UP.

GRYTPYPE:

Moriarty, quick, put that fire bucket over there.

MORIARTY:

Right! How's that?

GRYTPYPE:

A little bit more to the right. That's it.

MORIARTY:

Right.

SEAGOON:

Yaaaaaaarrrrrrrrrrrrgggggggggggggggghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

FX:

WATER SPLASH.

LITTLE JIM:

He's fallen in the wa-tah.

GRYTPYPE:

Thank you, Little Jim, for telling us where he is.

LITTLE JIM:

Der.

SEAGOON:

Thank heaven for that water. It broke my fall and my neck. But wait! The canal! Where is it?

GRYTPYPE:

It's gone, Neddie. And the Moriarty Zeppelin Service is back in operation.

SEAGOON:

You devils of green.

GRYTPYPE:

Now, Neddie, we're still good friends, aren't we?

SEAGOON:

Why?

ALL:

Because... (SINGS WITH SAXOPHONE AND ORCHESTRA)

Arm in arm together,
just like we used to be.

Arm in arm together,
[UNCLEAR].

(CONTINUES UNDER...)

GREENSLADE:

The cast, having no strong finish to the show, now go into a cowardly song and dance routine.

HERN:

And so, as the Goon Show sinks slowly in the popularity polls and the audience move menacingly towards the stage, we say goodnight from happy...

FX:

ARROW FIRES, WHOOSH!

HERN:

Ye-ipp

ALL:

(CRIES OF DISTRESS)

ORCHESTRA:

END THEME.

MILLIGAN:

There he goes. He's always there.

GREENSLADE:

That was the Goon Show, a BBC recorded programme featuring Peter Sellers, Harry Secombe and Spike Milligan. With the Ray Ellington Quartet, Max Geldray and the orchestra conducted by Wally Stott. Script by Spike Milligan and Larry Stephens. Announcer, Wallace Greenslade, the programme produced by Pat Dixon.

ORCHESTRA:

END THEME CONTINUES...

Notes:

'felo de se' is a legal term in Latin that means suicide (literally a felon against oneself).

One to the power of four still equals one. ($1^4 = 1$)