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That dude was laying it down in the middle of the Two-Zero century, in an accent as real as a three-pound note and a vocabulary he'd borrowed somewhere in Harlem and never got around to taking back. And he was the hippest, swingiest, funniest cat you could hope to hear in a lifetime. You don't know what I'm talking about, you just put this editorial down and go off and straighten yourself on the Internet. I got time.

Back when Joan Baez was just a young chick, she wrote about him on an album cover; and, cats and kitties, let me tell you, there ain't much higher honour than a shout-out on a Baez album cover. And the Spiderman, that would be Canada's own Spider Robinson, he's been saying the same to anybody ready to listen since the Nazz was a carpenter.

So you're probably asking, have we flipped our editorial wig? Why (apart from pure green envy of the cat who could *really* pull the act off) pastiche the late Lord Buckley here? Because it's the beginning of a new term, and I'm lecturing to a new class, and I'm finding out all over again the joy — and the power — of standing up there at the front of the room and hamming it up. Not because the material (abstract algebra) is boring: nothing could be further from the truth. But I deeply believe that a lecture delivered with a little seasoning — and your recipe will differ from mine — will be remembered better than

“the facts, ma'am. Just the facts.”

You don't have to juggle the whiteboard markers or make up limericks about the folks who proved the theorems in your lecture. But think about the last conference you were at. Which talks do you remember? Maybe one of them was a dry-as-dust presentation, delivered nervously by a young colleague who's going to win a Fields Medal for that work in two years' time. But the chances are that many of the memorable talks combined interesting material with a little entertainment.

It's not just what you say. It's how you say it. So...my lords and ladies... go out there and knock their socks off.