

APL Blossom Time

J. C. L. Guest (Michael S. Montalbano)

Back in the old days, in 1962,
A feller named Ken Iverson decided what to do.
He gathered all the papers he'd been writing fer a spell
And he put them in a little book and called it APL.

Well...

He got him a jot and he got him a ravel
And he revved his compression up as high as she could go
And he did some reduction and he did some expansion
And he sheltered all his numbers with a ceiling and a flo'

Now Sussenguth and Falkoff, they thought it would be fine
To use the new notation to describe the product line.
They got with Dr. Iverson and went behind the scenes
And wrote a clear description of a batch of new machines.

Well...

They wrote down dots and they wrote down squiggles
And they wrote down symbols that they didn't even know
And they wrote down questions when they didn't know the answer
And they made the Systems Journal in nineteen sixty-fo'

Now writing dots and squiggles is a mighty pleasant task
But it doesn't answer questions that a lot of people ask.
Ken needed an interpreter for folks who couldn't read
So he hiked to Californ-i-a to talk to Larry Breed.

Oh, he got Larry Breed and he got Phil Abrams
And they started coding Fortran just as fast as they could go
And they punched up cards and ran them through the reader
In Stanford, Palo Alto, on the seventy ninety oh.

Well a Fortran batch interpreter's a mighty awesome thing
But while it hums a pretty tune it doesn't really sing.
The thing that we all had to have to make our lives sublime
Was an interactive program that would let us share the time.

Oh, they got Roger Moore and they got Dick Lathwell,
And they got Gene McDonnell with his carets and his sticks,
And you should've heard the uproar in the Hudson River valley
When they saved the first CLEANSPACE in 1966.

Well, when Al Rose saw this he took a little ride
In a big station wagon with a type ball by his side.
He did a lot of teaching and he had a lot of fun
With an old, bent, beat-up 2741.

Oh, it typed out stars and it typed out circles
And it twisted and it wiggled just like a living thing.
Al fed it a tape when he couldn't get a phone line
And it purred like a tiger with its trainer in the ring.

Now, there's much more to the story, but I just don't have the time
(And I doubt you have the patience) for an even longer rhyme.
So I'm ending this first chapter of the tale I hope to tell
Of how Iverson's notation blossomed into APL.

So..

Keep writing nands when you're not writing neithers,
And point with an arrow to the place you want to be,
But don't forget to bless those early APL sources
Who preserved the little seedling that became an APL tree.

Dedicated to the pioneers of APL with respect and
affection by J. C. L. Guest