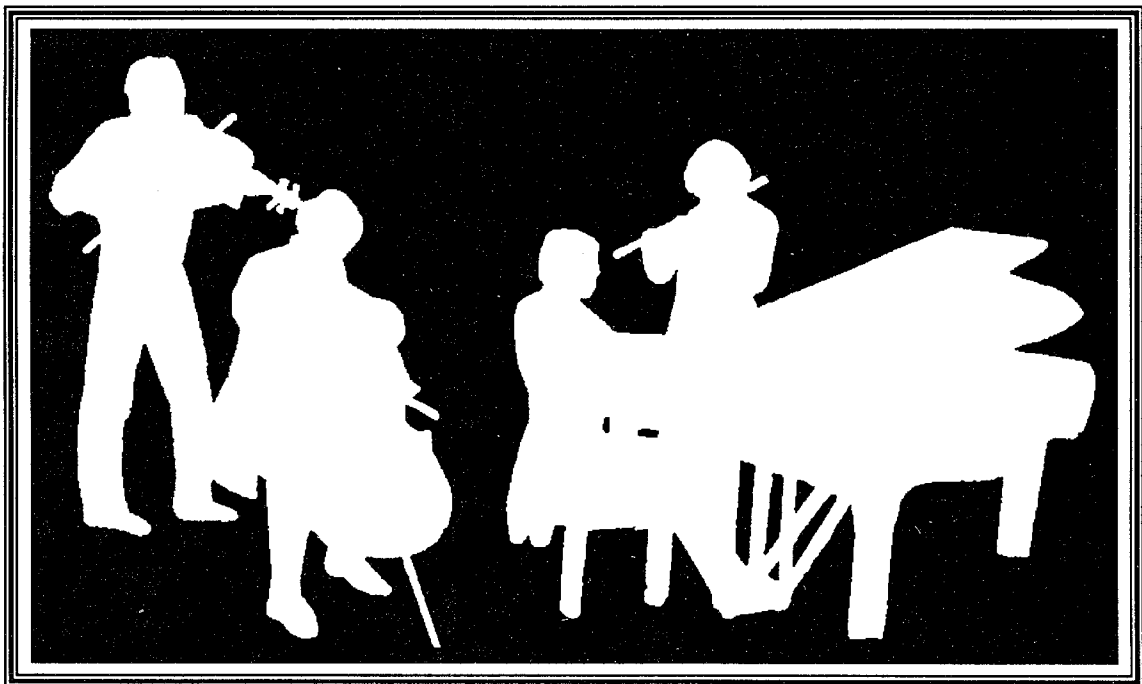


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# AD LIBITUM

A Journal of  
THE AMATEUR CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY INC.



September 1994

Published by the Amateur Chamber Music Society Inc.  
PO Box 156, Woy Woy  
NSW Australia 2256

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# FOREWORD

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The Amateur Chamber Music Society's literary endeavours have not previously been collected and presented in their own right, though scattered manifestations of our members' talents as wordsmiths have appeared in the pages of the Newsletters and Tutti from time to time. Indeed it could be asked whether a Society of Amateurs of the Language of Music needs to bother with a Literary magazine.

This experimental issue - "*Ad Libitum*" - is intended to ferret out the answer. I hope that it will be perceived as showing evidence of a rich fund of stories, reminiscences, and imagination amongst musicians, amateur or professional, which with the encouragement provided by the existence of a Journal such as this can be brought into the light of day.

The members, mentors, tutors and patrons of the Society were invited to contribute. The responses ranged from the anecdotal and poetic to satire, fantasy and cartoon art. As a prelude I have attempted to set down the History of the origins of our Society ( all the History that's fit to print !), particularly as this may be of interest to the increasing number of "new" members who have joined the Society in the last few years. I would like to thank all those who have given of their time and energy to bare their souls. Hopefully their efforts will be widely enjoyed. I am certain that there are many events and adventures in music waiting to be told and if this experiment is a success it may inspire others to send their contributions to a new edition of *Ad Libitum* in the future.

Nils Korner - Editor

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# A SHORT CHRONICLE OF THE BIRTH OF THE AMATEUR CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY (FORMERLY OF N.S.W.)

by Nils Korner

1994 is the 10th anniversary of the Amateur Chamber Music Society's foundation. It is an occasion for rejoicing, for sifting through the archives and remembering how it all began. A jubilee !

It began with Irwin Imhof, Judy Mitchell and Nils Korner but we might as well admit at once that we pinched the idea. It would have been nice to have invented it but credit where credit is due ! The inspiration and role model was our American ancestor - the Amateur Chamber Music Players Inc.. This wonderful organisation, founded in 1946, has for decades published a world-wide directory of players which has brought together many a kindred soul at home and in foreign parts. We knew the Americans, we appreciated them, we had benefited from them, but their directory didn't really work in Sydney and on many a quartet evening we resolved at coffee time that we must do something, that we would do something, about organising a local amateur society. But you know how it is, we procrastinated.

Then came the moment when our Viola player announced that she was moving to Hobart. Did Lenin say that war is the locomotive of history ? Surely progress is Viola driven ! Is it not the dream of all string quartets to be secure in their Viola players ? What better way than to form a Society ? Instead we found another delightful Viola player, procrastinated some more and were content.

But then one memorable starry winter's night Irwin announced out of the blue that he had taken the plunge. We had been playing in Winifred Collins' basement at the Garrison at Spit Junction and when we finished the music he told us that he had rung all the many people he could think of who might be interested in the project and called them together. Irwin had crossed the Rubicon !

The inaugural meeting of the N.S.W. Amateur Chamber Music Society took place at Irwin Imhof's home on 29th June 1984. We sat in Irwin's lounge, our intentions were explained and applauded. We acknowledged the contributions of Aulos and Musica Viva to amateur chamber music but something extra was needed. We would produce a register of players for our members so that they could make contact with fellow musicians and also arrange opportunities for them to meet and get to know each other - playing days. A committee was found; Irwin, Judy and Nils, Michael Goldstein, Michael McGrath, Neville Andersen and Clemens Kelvin (Francine McGovern would help if needed). Irwin had consulted a solicitor friend who drew up our first constitution. We had made a start. And then we got out our instruments and Francine McGovern and Mia Kelvin played a movement or two

of a Mozart piano concerto accompanied by the scratchy sounds of the privileged little band who were there at the beginning. After that we agreed that the world was now a better place and happily went home.

Now we set to work to fulfil our aims. First came the all-important Register for our new members. In July 1984 it featured (instrumentally ) 15 violins, 5 violas, 15 cellos, 1 double bass, 4 pianos, 4 flutes, a recorder, a bassoon, 2 clarinets and a trumpet, a total of 49 instruments (a few talented people played several instruments). We combed the city for a good Playing Day venue and through Judy's work, negotiations and connections with Lane Cove Public School we held our first one there on Sunday, 18 November 1984. We distributed leaflets to music shops, libraries, pet shops and railway stations, we invited our musical friends and publicised the event on the radio and in the press. An article by Ian Cockerill entitled "First-Time Register for Chamber Music" and featuring a fine picture of Irwin and his cello appeared in the "Advocate". Modelling ourselves on the excellent New England University Chamber Music School we somewhat tremulously approached Tony Bonetti (violin) and Gregory Elmaloglou (cello) of the Sydney Orchestra and pianist Raisa Dobrinsky and readily persuaded them to act as our tutors and to give a class on "THE ART OF CHAMBER MUSIC REHEARSAL" which was a delight. The hedonistic bohemians amongst us (Nils and Ann Korner) spent much time and thought agonising about the logistics of striking the right debonair atmosphere with an introductory cafe noir and hot croissant but more prosaic refreshments prevailed and gastronomy was subjugated by art. A good time was had by all, though inevitably there were the very first eructations about group allocations. Altogether things looked good. Over 50 people had attended the Playing Day, including music critic Fred Blanks. Our membership was around 60.

Next we set to work negotiating with the Sydney Conservatorium for our second playing day, held on 10th March, 1985. We again had some 50 people but restricted ourselves to one tutor, the kindly and indefatigable Cedric Ashton. Irwin and Judy worked hard to organise groups for the morning and in the afternoon we tried an impromptu approach - I held a sort of Dutch auction to achieve an acceptable mix of fiddles large and small, pianos and winds. It should have been fun but we soon learned not to do it again and to apply the fallible talents of humans, later aided by computers, to prepare the groups and to match the players so as to try to keep everyone happy. We finished the day with a performance opportunity.

Our committee from the outset developed lively differences on fiscal policy worthy of Mrs. Thatcher's

cabinet. We split into wets and drys, more appropriately sharps and flats. We started harmoniously with a double sharp \$12.50 fee for the first playing day but a flat and soothing membership fee of \$5.00 per annum. By the time of our Conservatorium Day there were gloomy predictions (grave), at the worst of financial disaster (molto agitato), at the best a \$30 profit. The battle raged throughout the early years ( furioso). The flats wanted the society to be readily accessible to everyone. The sharps argued that in order to grow and succeed we had to accumulate adequate funds. Happily the Society has survived and enjoys modest affluence (tranquillo).

By 30th June 1985 we were one year old and the first Annual General Meeting of the N.S.W. Amateur Chamber Music Society ( the N.S.W. wasn't dropped till a few years later) was held at the Ensemble Theatre, Kirribilli. Present were 24 members and the executive of three as well as various helpers. The minutes record that John Painter, then Director of the Conservatorium, had accepted the position of Patron. Our founding President and Treasurer, Irwin Imhof reported on our condition and the office bearers resigned, only to be re-elected in slightly different form. Irwin, the reluctant President, passed the burden to Nils but retained the Treasury, leaving Judy as the pivotal Secretary. Clemens Kelvin, Len Stewart, Eva Nemeth, John Pinn, Neville Andersen and Dorothy McCormack comprised the newly elected Committee. I had booked the Ensemble restaurant, which had a piano, and after the formalities we had an excellent catered dinner. I had always been eager to include singers in the ranks of chamber musicians and our dinner featured baritone, Dr. Antony Wallington, accompanied by Gerard Carter in a professional rendition of a splendid group of songs. A fine quartet - Michael Goldstein, John Dabron, Rosemary Reynolds and Anna Cernik - entertained us with Haydn Op.20 No.2 for dinner music. We were well behaved - the archives record that the entire membership and guests drank only \$27.75 worth of wine as well as quantities of orange juice.

By August 1985 our members numbered around 109 and played 119 instruments. Our third Playing Day was held at Newington College on 15 September 1985. By this time we had painfully acquired enough experience to improve the organisation of group allocation with the help of Irwin Imhof, Judy Mitchell and John Pinn. We provided four tutors, Cedric Ashton (cello), Max Cooke (viola), Bela Herskovits (violin) and Dorothy McCormack (piano). I attempted to attract singers to join us and our publicity for the day included an advertisement in the Sydney Morning Herald which caused a crescendo in the cost-benefit debate. Becoming known by word of mouth seemed to work best of all. There were 48 instrumentalists but not a

voice was heard. Cedric Ashton, who has put so much time and effort into our Society and has become our well-loved Patron for the first time wielded his kindly baton over the newly generated Chamber Orchestra.

We had good reason to feel pleased with the Society's progress. The Register worked well, the playing days were enjoyable, we had started to establish a basic library at the first A.G.M. and had also discovered the Joy Bower Music Collection located at the Turrumurra Public Library, available directly or through inter-library loans but probably never of much practical help. Later Neville Andersen experimented with a small Chamber Orchestra. We started to think about revising and updating our constitution and continued learning about the need to get publicity. A talented young neighbour of mine, Stephanie Edds, designed our logo, the silhouette of four musicians, which has been our expressive trademark ever since. Now there was another example to follow.

Having experienced the delight of a week at a New England University Chamber Music Summer School I was keen that we should arrange at least a long weekend of Residential Chamber Music. The idea had been welcomed at our first A.G.M.. But where, when and how? The Committee hesitated - after all we were amateur not only as musicians but also as organisers. I started to ring possible venues out of Sydney which had Music Departments and accommodation. Frensham School in Mittagong was too expensive, the Canberra School of Music turned us down and Newcastle didn't offer much prospect. Then a benevolent fate prompted me to ring Professor Edward Cowie, Head of the School of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong. He was at once receptive and enthusiastic about the idea and I decided to go down to discuss the project with him, have a look at the University, the Department of Music and the nearby Wollongong Conservatorium at Gleniffer Brae and get a feel of what was possible. The rest, as the saying goes, is history. Edward Cowie was keen to support us. I took Irwin down to Wollongong to see for himself and he was at once converted. Ann and I surveyed the accommodation and restaurants, including the delightful Horsley Homestead, West Dapto, recommended by our Woolongong friends and we set to work negotiating with the University and the Wollongong Conservatorium etc. about accommodation, costs, programme, dinners, tutors, publicity and so on. Fortunately the excellent living quarters at Koolabong were going to be finished in time for us.

Our first Wollongong Weekend was held on the Australia Day long weekend (25-27 January) in 1986, with some 50 participants, and was immediately seen to be a winner. Edward Cowie set the mood with a witty and delightful account of his adventures in the

musical world, practical and academic, and later brought forth from us an astonishing rendition of Schubert's great C Major symphony - astonishing because, though hardly Chamber music, it filled us all with the delight of participating together in such an adventure, in such splendid sounds. Our chamber groups played in the School of Music and in Gleniffer Brae, the Conservatorium located above the beautiful Wollongong Botanical Gardens and of an evening we had two excellent and convivial dinners, one at the University Union, the second at Horsley Homestead, with music provided by various audacious souls. Our Wollongong tutors Edward Cowie, John Stender and Vanessa Woodhill gave generously of their time and energy. The Committee was rewarded with a warm letter from Carolyn and David La Motte : "The only improvements in arrangements that we could see would be to have provisions for those who wish to play into the night..."

Since then "Wollongong" has been the annual highlight of the Society's activities. At the outset the traditional Australia Day weekend always gave us at least three days of music making; later the NSW Government made the Australia Day holiday coincide with the actual anniversary of Captain Phillip's landing, no doubt good history but chamber music alla breve. Once (in 1990) we had a whole week of music, a challenging task for the committee, not to be undertaken lightly.

During our early years we were no less concerned than at present with trying to make the Society's existence known to amateur musicians, not only in New South Wales and the A.C.T. where there are many members, but elsewhere in Australia. In May 1986 I wrote to Maria Prerauer, Arts Editor of the Australian, describing the Society's activities. "We hope that the Society's example in N.S.W. will be followed by the other states and would welcome inquiries from interested persons." She wrote a short article about us in the "Marietta" column of the Australian and the result was a response from Maxine Komlos and also Barbara Radcliffe of Adelaide seeking information on how a similar group might be formed there. We were only too happy to send our Society Blueprint, and were even more delighted to find that eventually Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia followed suit by forming Amateur Chamber Music Societies.

One other major aspect of the Society's activities must be credited to Seymour Bluhm, the initiator of the monthly Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre (K.N.C.) Concerts. I quote from a letter which Sy Bluhm wrote to the committee in 1986. "During the discussion" at a recent AGM "one of our members commented that in his opinion most of our members do not feel fulfilled in their playing without having a goal, such as an oppor-

tunity to play compositions they have been rehearsing for some sort of audience".

"A very nice opportunity now exists for low key public performance by groups within our Society."

"I am quite active in...the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre .... and it came to me that the time had come for the K.N.C. to resume presenting Chamber music." They had done this previously and Seymour put it to them that our Society would be happy to undertake this task again, giving our members the opportunity to perform and the Kirribilli audience some pleasant diversion for a charge of \$1 or \$2, including nibbles and drinks. The idea found widespread support and there have been virtually continuous monthly concerts at the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre since the first, held under Sy Bluhm's supervision in December 1986. Later the organisation of the performances was undertaken by the Society's third President John Pinn, then Sheila Caldwell and more recently Gary Nash. Our concerts have even attracted reviews by music critics as distinguished as Fred Blanks of the Sydney Morning Herald (who has been a staunch supporter of the Society from its earliest days).

There is a final joyful insight regarding our Society which we also owe to Sy Bluhm. During 1993, whilst visiting his daughter, a semi-professional player of the clarinet, flute (and 4 saxophones) in Malden, Mass. U.S.A., (an outer suburb of Boston) Sy made contact with a Boston cellist whom Rachel Valler, one of our most distinguished and cherished tutors, had met and coached in a European Chamber Music "Camp". They organised a pleasant piano quartet with Sy and when they sat around for coffee afterwards agreed that nothing like our Amateur Chamber Music Society was to be found in Boston, though our American model, the Amateur Chamber Music Players Inc., was well known. Later Sy visited the headquarters of this organisation in New York City and in August 1993 conferred with the administrator for an hour. She was delighted to have a visit from an "Australian" member and was amazed to hear of our Society's activities:- our regular playing days which every member can attend and where we have the opportunity to play with fellow members we have often never met before; our annual Wollongong "camp"; our monthly Sunset Concerts and the top level coaching the Society provides, not only at Wollongong and Playing Days but also for groups getting ready to play at Sunset Concerts." "Next" says Sy "I asked her what was to me the BIG question: -

"Do you know of any place in the world where there is an Amateur Chamber Music Society like ours?"

Her answer : " ...NO ! YOU ARE UNIQUE ! "

# FROM GREAT MOMENTS IN MUSIC A GUIDE FOR AMATEURS

by Theodore Cacophonius

(1152-1168) translated from the original Latin by M.F. Berriman, with additional notes (in the wrong key) by Rod Tuson.

## INTRODUCTION

Probably the most frightening thing for amateur string quartet players in their entire musical experience is playing with others who are better than they are. The fear of being found wanting is a great blow to the ego as well as to the ears of one's fellow musicians. If, however, you are in the happy position of having a good reputation as a quartet player, then you can set forth on the golden road of merry music making leaving others green with envy.

Here are a few tips for amateurs wishing to enhance their reputation as fine chamber players.

## THE GRAND ENTRANCE

Always arrive late to quartet meetings and create a dramatic impression. Enter the room haughtily, open your case brusquely and make as much noise as possible while tuning. This is particularly effective if the others are engaged in one of the many boring string trios brought out at such times. It shows that the person tuning thinks they sound better than the other three put together. When they finally stop, nod perfunctorily and proceed to sit down in the chair provided for you as if nothing has happened.

Never apologise! If they think that you are deliberately late they will believe that you are a better player than they are and will be consequently very grateful for your turning up at all. This will guarantee your being invited (sorry, asked) to play again.

## TUNING

Once you have sat down, persuade the others to take your "A" as standard (even if they have already tuned up). This will put you in the superior position of being the only one in the entire quartet who will be in tune. If someone reaches for a tuning-fork or piano, discourage them, saying that you tuned your instrument to the standard A while the others were playing. If a perfectionist (a logical absurdity in amateur music) insists on adopting an A from a tuning-fork, point out to him/her that by adopting your A there will only be three instruments out of tune and not four.

## HOW TO HANDLE GETTING LOST

If you lose your place during a passage NEVER apologise or admit that it is your fault. This will immediately shatter the air of credibility which you have so painstakingly established thus far. Simply stop playing, adopt a very frustrated appearance, and say

loudly and forcefully, "We're not together. Let's go from the top." (It is unlikely that anyone will suspect that you are at fault). If the problem persists (and it will) simply continue playing as if everyone is together. No one else will notice.

Alternatively, when lost you can move your bow up and down or play one or two notes in the tonic chord of the key signature and pray that you strike no modulations. **IMPORTANT** - As in politics, the time when you least know what you are doing is the time when you must seem to be in greatest control. Therefore, it is no use pretending to be playing if you are going to be faint-hearted about it (leave that to the others).

Move your bow vigorously even aggressively, and frown as deeply as possible, snorting at the first note in each bar. If the quartet reaches a sudden pianissimo and you are caught out playing a fortissimo nonsense note, turn it into a sforzando by reducing to a pianissimo as quickly as possible. If someone challenges you about your dynamic contrast simply accept the challenge and point to a sforzando or fortissimo somewhere near the point you think the rest of the quartet has reached. It is unlikely that they will verify it by a bar count (people being invariably lazy).

Of course, all that begins badly will end badly, and it is vital to convey the impression that you have ended at the right note in the right bar (usually the last). As long as you have even a rough idea of what the ending of a string quartet movement sounds like you should have no difficulty in fooling others into thinking that you all ended together. Try these few tips - When the music starts to sound loud and vaguely cohesive, look at the faces of the people playing next to you. Do they look intense and serious? Unlike during the rest of the quartet, do they look like they mean business? Like they are actually involved in something purposeful? If so, it is very likely that you are nearing the end of the movement. Quartet players approaching the end of a movement are like horses bolting for home. They seem to be on automatic pilot, and will kill anything that gets in the way of them and the glorious sensation of playing the last few bars. **BE WARNED** - If you stop the quartet at this stage you will be in serious trouble. It is like taking a bone away from a hungry dog. Even if you were Jascha Heifetz they would show you the door without a moment's hesitation.

Most quartets end with loud, pretentious chords (particularly Beethoven) so be wary of the last bar.

When you are reasonably sure that you have reached it, strike the tonic note of the chord with an aggressive down bow. If there is yet another chord, repeat but more aggressively. If another, repeat even more aggressively while simultaneously jumping up from your seat a few inches. If you get anxious and strike a note when everyone else has finished you have three options - A. you can try to convince them that they were wrong and you were right (only recommended for very persuasive people with a sales background in insurance, real estate or used cars), B. play a short scale (in key) downwards ending on the tonic, remove your handkerchief and wipe your brow while sighing as loudly as possible. C. Look bewildered and ask, "Was I the only one to observe the ritardando?"

If you are one of the rare breed who practice beforehand, the first and last few bars of each movement is the absolute maximum that can be justified. The closing phrase of the last movement is the most useful, since you can add a dramatic accelerando with great panache, and finish a few beats before the rest, thus simultaneously giving the impression you played the whole work perfectly, and had held back your tempo through the allegro just in deference to their mediocrity.

### THE PRINTED NOTE

Never carry a music stand. This is the hallmark of an amateur player. No professional who values his ability would be seen dead carrying a music stand as they are invariably either supplied for him/her or the people with whom he/she plays always have a complete set for quartets, etc. REMEMBER - Even if requested to bring a stand, DON'T! If you turn up to a house where there is no extra music stand it is the duty of the host to forego his/her stand and use a chair instead.

Your colleagues' respect for you can be further enhanced by giving the impression that you have a vast music library, ALL of which you have played at least several times. To start your collection, visit a secondhand bookshop, and look for old sets of hard bound music with parts missing, or very worn out. The price will be right, of course. Make sure there are pencil marks right through any edition, add them if necessary.

If you really want to buy new music, your acquisition must be pretreated. If it's part of the well-known repertoire, then it must be put through the washing machine and marked on each page with numerous pencil marks so as to simulate the patina of age. If it's a rather obscure work which you actually want to play, the parts should be kept in mint condition - photocopy your own part to practice (Don't be silly enough to try to learn the whole work. Just copy the first page of the third or fourth movement and learn that).

Upon arriving (late, remember) to play Haydn quartets your lines are: "I've just bought the Sibelius Voces Intimae and thought it would be fun if we read it" This will strike fear into your friends, but they won't want to admit that they haven't the faintest chance of stringing more than two bars together. Your next line is "Let's start at the third movement" (The one you've been practising a page of for the last six months) "it looks quite easy". Now you must launch into it at full speed - the wrong notes won't matter a bit. Now you realise the importance of keeping the music clean. Your reputation as a most formidable sight-reader is now established!

There is a risk that the players you are with might actually make some headway, so just "read" to where you've practised and announce in an irritated manner that "perhaps we had better stick to Haydn".

When you take music to playing days or other gatherings, just take the most obscure and worn-out of your collection. It's also handy, if you're a violinist, to have a fully pencil-marked copy of the 24 Caprices and a few of the most unplayable concerti lingering in the box. Leave it there so the organising committee can be in awe at the virtuoso works you have played, as they try to find out who owns the music.

### THE STRADIVARIUS

People ALWAYS expect good players to play good instruments so it is no use trying to convince others of your musical proficiency if you persist in playing on a Shanghai Special. Studies have consistently shown that not even world class virtuosos can tell the difference between a Strad and a Suzuki (unless the latter has handle-bars) when someone else is doing the playing. GOLDEN RULE - In amateur music appearance is everything. DO NOT BUY OR PLAY AN INSTRUMENT FOR ITS QUALITY OF SOUND. When buying an instrument look for signs of age like worn varnish, nicks and gashes, worm holes and fancy pegs or scroll. This will automatically create a talking point when you meet other musicians and produce a good impression. If the instrument has a Strad or Guarneri label inside, insist that it is genuine. If it has "copy of" written before a famous maker's name, this can be inked out by careful application of a fine brush between the f- holes.

You should develop the history of your instrument long before you start playing it in front of others. Practise recounting its pedigree until you can do so without faltering or blushing. A good line is how you inherited the instrument from your grandfather who played in the Berlin Philharmonic, or how it once belonged to Paganini or Sarasate.



# KIRIBILLI

by Paolo Totaro

Suddenly a man breaks out of the lunchtime stream  
and runs  
as if chased, fending the human bow-wave;  
a lady falls - can't he stop? - as he crosses  
cars come to a swear and a screeching halt is bound  
for the Town Hall steps, red granite under a laurel wreath  
and dried flowers for the Fallen Soldier.

There you know he will turn, random music sheets  
falling from a case whose latch is torn.  
You see his face, mirroring a life under neon lights,  
the greyness of a suit and a fading tie,  
no attributes of a person standing out.  
Yet he is out, staring down wide-eyed.  
Slowly opens his mouth, and screams.

Screams as if newborn to the noonlit steps,  
sounding high and then low as a record  
made to slow by the weight of a hand.  
His cry crawls up flagpoles, enters locked  
windows. All crowd stares, all motion slows  
even breeze and the flight of a sparrow.

All stops. And he speaks "*Signore e signori*  
I perform miracles: all was go and now is still;  
I stop tide and sun, I can turn into lion,  
into *refola'e viento* puff of wind.  
I can be father to one, ten or none; I can be servant  
to a boss or boss to a tribe of women.  
*Morto*, I will suck my coffin's nails to the inside  
lift lid and, *comm'a Dracula*, will stare bleary eyed.

I belong to no nation or three or ten - I salute all flags -  
I can voice aliens' chagrin or quietly suffer pain.  
Like Soldier in *nonna's tale*, who traded all he had  
- a violin - for the Devil's gift to be king,  
I traded language love and soul to be same  
to each of you with a job and a house *con giardino*.

But I split like a sapless tree, each splinter an ache  
I can't stand, and want him back that I was, *che ero io*.  
Tell me please have you seen the child who was me ?  
*E voi signora*, do you remember *com'ero io* ?  
His anger soars like photoflash smoke and is quickly gone.  
All is quiet, till a frozen leaf slowly glides again  
and a sparrow steals a crumb, indifferent to the scene  
A shiver creeps as a child's hand - Devil ? -  
offers the fallen paper leaves  
back to the man who now bends in defeat.

Cars resume. From sealed office windows faces  
disappear.  
A voice in the crowd " Go bellyache back home !"  
and you walk on, fellow prisoner *in rassegnazione*.

The man collects his music and is back in the crowd,  
alone.



*Signore e signori*: Ladies and gentlemen  
*Refola'e viento*: Puff of wind, Neapolitan dialect  
*Morto*: Dead  
*Comm'a Dracula*: Like Dracula, Neapolitan dialect  
*Nonna*: grandmother  
*Con giardino*: With a garden  
*Che ero io*: Who I was  
*E voi signora*: And you, lady  
*Com'ero io*: As I was  
*In rassegnazione*: Resigned

# MUSICAL REMINISCENCES

by Cedric Ashton

## MALCOLM SARGENT

In the 1950s, the ABC was promoting the SSO in various ways:

1. Country tours
2. Sunday afternoon concerts
3. Suburban concerts.

Visiting conductors, in addition to the celebrity concert in the Town Hall, were invited to conduct the orchestra on these various excursions.

Malcolm Sargent was invited to conduct a concert at the Marrickville Town Hall. Sargent was nicknamed "Flash Harry" by the London Symphony Orchestra because of his impeccable, tailored appearance. From head to toe he was immaculate. Sharp-featured, dark-eyed, alert, his dark hair was brilliantined and glossy. He wore morning dress with pin-striped trousers and spats, and always a white carnation in his lapel.

He must have read Sir Henry Wood's recipe for a conductor. On the podium he used his baton like a rapier, alternately stabbing and thrusting the air or describing eloquent, sensuous curves, all the time swaying, dancing or marching with the changing mood of the music.

The architects of the various suburban town halls of Sydney never foresaw that they would have to accommodate a 70-80 piece symphony orchestra. The stages were grossly inadequate both in size and lack of risers, that is, steps, so that visually the orchestra is well presented. Marrickville Town Hall was such a one, so carpenters were called in to construct the necessary risers. On one side of Marrickville Town Hall was an entrance for council trucks and lorries.

On the night of the concert, the orchestra assembled on the stage and commenced tuning and warming up on fragments of music. The hall was packed and buzzing with conversation. There was a lively feeling of anticipation. And so there should be. This was the first time ever that Marrickville had been treated to a full symphony orchestra with a celebrity conductor.

Precisely at 8pm Sargent emerged from the wings of the stage in full evening dress with white carnation in lapel, hair smooth and black and glossy. The audience burst into applause. Baton in hand, he bowed three times; to the centre, to the left and to the right of the audience. Turning to the orchestra, he signalled

them to rise.

The concert commenced with "God Save the Queen".

For the first item, Sargent had chosen Weber's Oberon Overture. Muted horns whisper over muted strings. We are magically transported to a mysterious forest. Sargent waited for absolute silence in the auditorium, then with a precise small beat, indicated the horns to whisper their forest call.

At that very moment a council truck turned into the passage alongside the town hall. I would guess that it must have had at least half a dozen sheets of galvanized iron which, when it bumped over the kerb, were lifted two or three feet into the air and descended with a series of mighty crashes that completely obliterated the forest whisperings of the orchestra.

Sargent's face was white. Whether with anger or shock, I'll never know. He kept the orchestra moving in its forest murmur, no doubt praying that it was not subject to more blitzkriegs. His trial was not yet over.

The carpenters called in to make the risers and cover them had skimmed on the flooring and had left a 3/4inch gap between each plank. As a consequence, timpani, xylophone and other instruments with legs or wheels, had to be carefully manoeuvred to miss the gaps.

Sargent's next piece was "On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring" by Delius.

He set the orchestra moving, with strings playing a gentle, lilting music and with woodwind colours brushed in delicately like water colours. Truly spring time in the English countryside.

He signalled the clarinet to usher in the first cuckoo call. Instead, a ghastly series of clinkety clank skeletal sounds rang out from the xylophone. One of the wheels had slipped down the gap in the flooring. Sargent closed his eyes and took a deep breath. His cuckoo was kaput.

During the interval, I passed Sargent's room and the door was ajar. A quick glance showed several ABC officials, Mr. James among them being subject to a torrent of anger from Sargent.

I heard, "Intolerable! ...ghastly ... ignorant barbarians - a cultural desert! I refuse to finish the concert."

However, he was prevailed upon and reluctantly

agreed to conduct the second half. Unfortunately his gods had still deserted him.

Suburban audiences in Australia of that era were by and large unsophisticated. Listening to a symphony concert was akin to going to the pictures. At the interval, they trooped out and came back with their ice creams, chocolates, peanuts, etc.

Sargent, his wounds not yet healed from the first half of the concert, lifted his baton and waited until quietness reigned behind him. With the audience still, one irritating sound persisted. Sargent looked around.

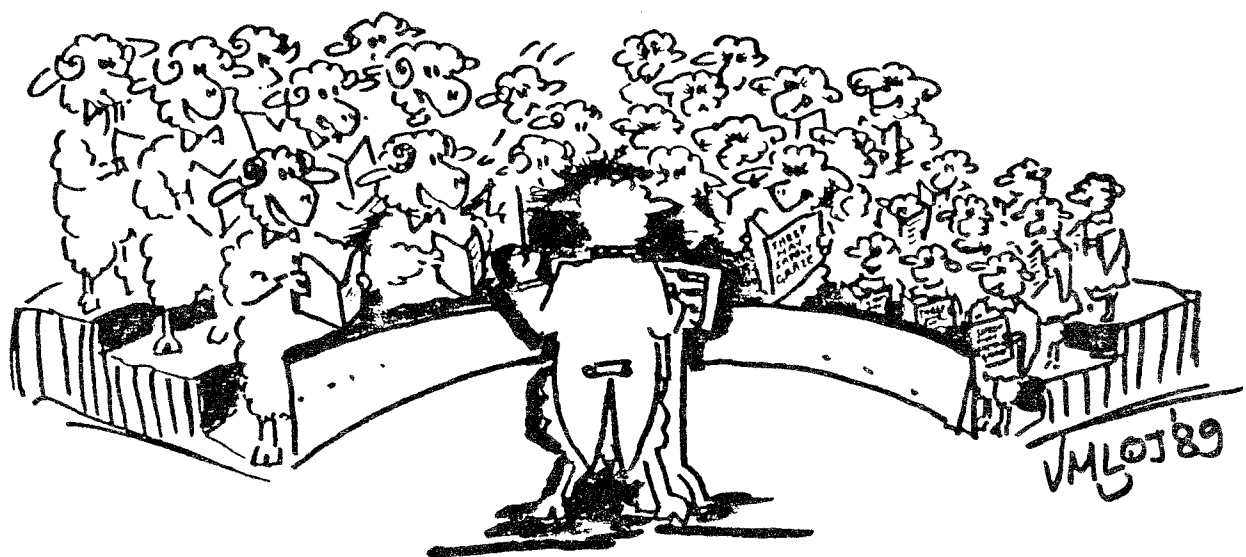
A small boy in the front row had bought a bag of peanuts and was diving his hand noisily back and forth into the cellophane packet. The boy stared at

Sargent and continued his cellophane symphony. Sargent made a "stop" gesture to him, but the boy kept on eating his peanuts.

Elizabeth Vidler, the harpist, was the only member of the orchestra who could not fit on the stage and was therefore at floor level. Sargent signalled to her with mime and gesture to seize the boy's bag of peanuts.

The boy was still unapprehendingly staring at Sargent when suddenly his peanuts were whisked away. He stared open-mouthed at Elizabeth, then at Sargent and yelled, "Mum they've pinched me peanuts!!"

Sargent vowed he would never again return to Australia. He did, but he kept away from the suburbs.



WE'LL TRY THAT AGAIN FROM BAAA 36...

# THE LIFE OF A GROUPIE

by Irwin Imhof

I am not that sort of a groupie - I do not follow the Brodsky or Guarneri quartet around the world. It simply means, as one of the founders of the Society, I was entrusted with the unenviable task of organising the groups for our first Playing Day.

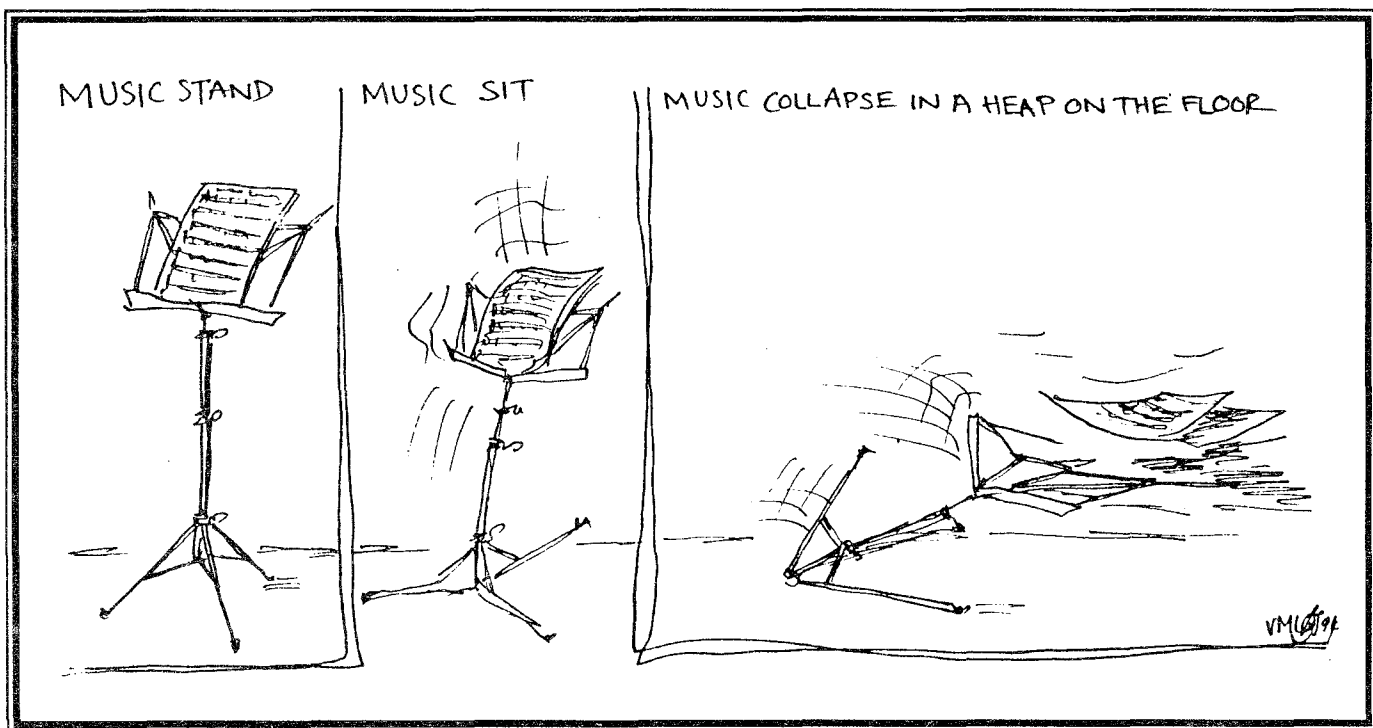
I managed to make such a mess of it that I was immediately put in charge of future groupings. Grouping in the early days was more a hit and miss affair. No computer program to help you, you had to rely on intuition and luck to create the right groups. Often you were left with, let's say, two flutes, three violins and a pianist. Why on earth did Mozart or Beethoven not write for such a combination? Obviously they did not anticipate the formation of our Society. Although I must say Wolfgang Amadeus did his best and he often does help us out!! With the advent of the computer, life became a bit easier. Thanks to, first Graham Cormack and then Wolfgang Kloger, it provided us with a program which places the players into various groups for each session.

Unfortunately the computer cannot think, so it is unable to tell us how to create a homogenous group guaranteed not to scratch each others eyes out. Finally all the groups are in place and we can admire the masterful arrangements with great satisfaction. Of course this state of well-being only lasts till the Playing Day. Just to mark you, invariably two or three people,

without prior notice, will fail to turn up and all the carefully arranged groups will be thrown out of kilter. What do you do with a string quartet without a cello or a piano trio without the pianist? After tearing out the few remaining hairs, you pinch a player from here, shove a player there and you have, instead of three reasonably satisfied groups, at least two disgruntled ones.

Of course in time one develops an instinct for divining who does not want to play with whom. After all, it is hard enough to group people according to their abilities without having to worry about their incompatibilities. Over the years I have had many members sidle up to me and whisper into my ear, "please do not put me with X - he is hopeless" or "why did you put me in with Y, you know I cannot stand him". And if that is not enough, one also has to contend with people who do not like baroque or modern music, who do not want to play in small or large groups and those who do not want to play at all because they are too frightened. Yes, we have had those too.

Alright, I know I made it sound worse than it is, I had a lot of fun grouping people and lots of satisfaction seeing them enjoy themselves on Playing Days. Also the majority of members are helpful and understanding and they make up for the few difficult ones. So anybody for grouping?



# MUSING ABOUT MUSOS - '63 - '73 - '83 - '93

by Edward Cowie

It's just thirty years since I heard my first great live chamber music. In 1963, I attended the first Wardour Castle Summer School of Music at Cranbourne Chase Public School in Dorset. This 'middle of the road' girls' college nestled in the gold-splashed wheat fields, hemmed in by rampart hedges of blackthorn. The school had been organised by the composers, Goehr, Birtwistle, Maxwell Davies and Tippett. They gathered a hoard of musicians together who even then made up some ten pages of the best Who's Who imaginable.

The John Aldiss Choir was there, together with the fabulous Melos Ensemble, and many other great solo musicians such as Alan Hacker and Garry Howarth. On one of those halcyon August evenings, when bats flickered along the sun-warmed ramparts of the great hall, and tawny owls screeched plainchant in the velvet darkness, the Melos Ensemble performed Messiaen's Quartet for the End of Time. Not only did the experience shatter every sense I had, but it remains one of the greatest performances of music I have ever heard. There is one particular movement, which features the cello and piano alone. The melody is played in a gently unfolding ascension by the cello, finally lifting up to the maximum stretch of the left hand, which hovers on the edge of the fingerboard like a hang-glider about to take off. The piano breathes gentle chords, startlingly consonant to an ear which had almost become attuned to the acid harmony of Schoenberg and Webern.

By the time this performance happened, we all knew that the players and participants hit the bar pretty hard before the evening concerts. Terrence Weill, the cellist, had had a skin-full. There was something about the angle at which he ambulated to his seat that gave the clearest indication of a vertiginous tendency towards unsteadiness. It didn't look good for Messiaen! However, if Bacchus had 'taken a swing' (or a swig or six) with the cellist, there was no sign of trouble with bow, fingers and mind. Tears flowed down Weill's cheeks, down onto his heaving breast, and threaded through the music in iridescent cascades of passion and thoughtfulness. Half of the young audience were in tears as well. Afterwards, I sought out the cellist, and found him propping up the bar nearby. I had just passed my twentieth birthday, and even at that tender age, I realised that adults could function through clouds and shrouds of unhappiness. Just what Terrence Weill's misery was about, I will never know, but I pressed him to talk about the

Messiaen with all the ardour typical of the earnest pest of post-adolescent adoration of the mighty. "What do you think about when you play music like that?" I asked.

A noisy swallow of a single malt whiskey and "My boy, when you have played as much music as I have, you don't think at all. You've heard of letting your balls rule your head haven't you?... Well, this music was made by the soul, and that's the bit of me that got going tonight. It's not technique ... it's not cleverness ... it's just that music like that grabs your cynical brain and gives you a faith and a belief that comes straight from the unknown and unknowable." How could I ever forget a statement like that??

In 1973, I sat in the clarinet player Alan Hacker's Peugeot station-wagon in the middle of a traffic jam just outside Kings Cross Station in London. Hacker had endured a fateful stroke and was paralysed from the waist down, and yet had become the greatest exponent of contemporary clarinet music in that time. He had invited me to write a clarinet concerto for him, and I had shown him some sketches at his home before he drove me back to the station to go back to my home in Lancashire. Typically, Alan enthused about the clarinet in a way that I still find amazing. Once, he had rung me up at 12 at night, and played me the sound evinced from a glass mouthpiece he had picked up on a tour in Turkey. Its baleful wail piped through the telephone ear-piece, and Alan's chuckle of satisfaction gave cadence to the message.

In his car, with traffic blasting hooters, and throngs cascading all about us, Hacker got out his instrument, and played a series of chords on his instrument. "Ed, you remember you asked me if I could play the chords of I-IV-V—! in A minor on the clarinet? Well, I've been having a mess about with this ... and I can do it!! I slip fingers and lip the sounds, and though it doesn't sound great, I can produce the effects you want. Give me time, and I'll make it sound better". Meanwhile a London Bobby was leering through the window. The traffic jam had dispersed, and we were holding up streams of traffic.

"Sir", he oozed, "the bloody Albert Hall's just around the corner...maybe you'd care to drive to a place where you can busk without holding up the entire flow of London traffic?"

Hacker winced, "Officer, we're making bloody musical history in here", rapidly putting his clarinet in its case

whilst easing forward away from the dazzled Bobby at the same time! How could I forget that either?

1983. I had moved to live in Australia. I visited the composer John Antil in his flat in Cronulla, NSW. I had persuaded Wollongong University to award him an honorary doctorate, (amazing his first), and wanted to get to know him better. Antil was old and frail, but with startling and starting blue eyes which blitzed the unwary mind if you let them. He didn't like being questioned, and only after I had shown him some of my paintings and talked about my love of nature did he unbend and relax. I saw his exquisite score and drawings for his Corroboree Music. I asked him if it was possible for an Australian composer to really write music which could express the nature of Australia's landscape.

"Edward... it's like this. You can try to represent anything you like, but you'd better watch out if you do it second-hand. The only way you can make music about the land is to take your shoes and socks off, and dip your toes into the hot soil. After that...it's easy!"

Who could forget moments like that?

In September of 1993 I had just passed my fiftieth birthday, and found myself at the ABC studios in Brisbane to make a recording of my '48<sup>1</sup>. What a bloody trauma it was to get players from the QSO, QPO and distinguished freelance players together on

the same two days!! There were 10 of us altogether, all bound to record one hour and forty minutes of music in four sessions; a tall order by any standards. The ABC grand piano was out of tune in 40 minutes, they had forgotten to have the thing tuned, and two players had to do a school symphony concert early on the same morning that we started.

Bit by bit we got through the movements. The whole thing was done like a religious ritual. At no time did any frustration or angst surface. It was an experience of Australian music-making I had come to expect, having worked with Orchestras and ensembles in this country for ten years. There's something special about the commitment of Australian musicians to new music. They urge their way through the complexities with such an ease and with such a laid-back splendour that an ex-Pom like myself cannot easily understand. I still go with a metaphorical suit of armour to avoid the grenades and histrionics. It's all a question of feeling right. Oz musos feel good about music, and they are not infected by the pressure of history. At the end of the final session, the horn player, Peter Luff, called up to the recording booth, with head lifted, and spittle dripping from the horn, "Cop that lot then!!" Who could ask for anything more? I don't!!

<sup>1</sup> A set of two books of 24 pieces in the major and minor key regions, devoted to Australian Landscapes, and worked in collaboration with the painter John Coburn, whose 48 paintings were exhibited in the Queensland Art Gallery, at the same time as the music was premiered.



# UNRELIABLE MEMORIES OF AN AMATEUR CHAMBER MUSIC PLAYER

by Louis Otonicar

The clarinet player called the number under the heading of Chamber Music Society of NSW. Softly spoken and encouraging, the man suggested participating at the forthcoming playing day. The player, with a repertoire of zero, thought this not to be a good idea and set forth to expand his musical knowledge.

The title page said: "Mozart Trio", the Koechel number close to the requiem.

The player ascertained the absence of allegro, presto or vivo.

The player practised diligently and nominated the aforesaid trio for the following playing day. Certain of his exclusivity, the player arrived at the venue with illusions of grandeur.

The player noticed the man in the bespoke tweed homespun, suitably encumbered with suitable handluggage in conversation with a lady in Azzedin Alaia, perfumed by Patou.

Suddenly the player became conscious of his St. Vincent de Paul apparel and his motor vehicle of circa 1969 next to the Merc.

Registered and tagged, the player's sense of uniqueness was somewhat diluted by the man, who, catching a glimpse of the instrument, exclaimed, "Not another clarinetist!!!".

Now totally disoriented, the player failed to notice the decreasing numbers and the purposeful movement into various directions.

The player wondered whether he was Robinson Crusoe, or lost in the catacombs of St. Joseph.

A noticeboard, now unobstructed, caught the player's attention.

In disbelief he noted his name against Room 38. The player, late, but confident, entered the room.

"Have you got the music" the person at the piano demanded, cutting short the feeble attempt of an introduction.

The player extracted the unblemished edition from his folder and proceeded to assemble his instrument whilst sucking vigorously on his reed.

A single note was struck on the keyboard.

The string player performed what string players normally perform in similar circumstances.

"Concert A?" the pianist enquired.

The player, totally assured, pressed the appropriate single key. The resulting tonal mismatch was deafening.

"What sort of clarinet is this?" The two other players demanded, looking suspiciously at the hollow tube. How many sorts could there be, the player wondered and replied "French and made of wood".

The truth of this statement was lost on the two players, who explained that for a B flat instrument "You play "B" to sound "A", because if you play "A" it sounds "G". The player, now in a catatonic state, contemplated if there was life after death, remembered Franz Kafka, and considered abseiling as a less hazardous activity.

"Two to the bar" the pianist announced, at a tap, a nod, and *vesti la giubba*.

The clarinet player, in an attempt to see the logic of counting two in a 6/8 measure missed his *gruppetto*. Four bespectacled eyes fixed on the player in an enquiring mode.

"We try again". The announcement for the benefit of the clarinetist only.

The player, instructed and bewildered, remained impotent during the foreplay, made the correct entry and joined the other players to end the movement in simultaneous climax.

The post climactic somnolence was disturbed by "one beat to the bar" coming from the direction of the piano.

The player overlooked the repeat sign and proceeded into the trio.

Although titled trio, this movement is actually a dialogue between piano and string to show the clarinetist how it is done.

The player drank some tea from his thermos. His absence was not missed.

During the last movement, the player became aware of a certain urgency in the tempo. Was there another climax?

The player had practised that part at a speed now almost "grave" compared with the prevailing rush.

He glanced at the semiquavers further down the page with foreboding and began to pray for a miracle. The miracle was denied, but the end came after some improvisation and uncontrollable squeaks.

As pianist and string player repaired to the tea room, the player, now near cardiac arrest, searched for a window through which to escape unobserved. Alas there was none.

P.S. The player, now heavily disguised and sporting an ethnic accent, has since made many friends and spends many happy times with fellow Chamber Music players.

# THE UGLY DUCKLING (OR DISCOVERING ONE'S TRUE INSTRUMENT)

by Fred Heifetz (alias Mark Berriman)

Everyone seems to know a story about someone who has plodded on all their life trying to fit into a mould that was set by someone else only to wake up one fine day and realise that their real talent lay elsewhere. It's the classic story of the ugly duckling. Well, I was one of those.

What made me see the light? For Newton it was the apple which landed on his head. For me it was a much more drawn out affair, fraught with pain and anxiety. In retrospect I suppose it was the result of biting off more than I could chew, and then discovering it was stale.

It all started when I wanted to take up the violin. No-one in his/her right mind takes up the violin, especially when they are 40 years old. Your fingers are like lumps of timber and you are half deaf. You scratch your way through scales for hours on end while your nearest and dearest pray for the day you will take up hang-gliding or hot-air ballooning.

Of course I should have realised all along. I had listened to too many records of virtuosi playing unaccompanied Bach sonatas or the Brahms concerto. It sounded marvellous and I wanted to do the same. I could see myself performing on stage, the orchestra swirling behind me, the conductor going green with envy while I rode the delicious harmonies like a surfer riding a wave ... Anyway, you've got the picture. I was totally carried away.

I hadn't really taken full stock of the fact that at 40 I was a little old to be pursuing a concert career and that it would take years of training even to play "*Baa Baa Black Sheep*" in tune.

"The older you get, the harder it is to play", said the man at the music shop. He clinched a deal on a Suzuki that afternoon, minus the case. I wondered if Paganini began his career in the same way.

I used to carry my new prize to and from music lessons in an old sail bag. I couldn't afford a case.

"What you got in there? A snake?" People were fascinated by the peculiar shape the bag used to make when recumbent on my protective knees. I suppose it was better than being asked if I was carrying the usual machine gun that the hard cases had to put up with *ad infinitum*.

"My uncle's got a genuine Strad. Fair Dinkum. It's

written inside it".

You just had to nod in polite agreement. People have their fantasies, and I was no exception.

I played (scratched) an hour a day for three years before the tunes began to be recognisable. I remember the glorious sensation of harmony when my teacher played a duet with me for the first time. I was no nearer the concert hall, but it no longer seemed to matter quite as much.

Then there were the real rites of passage .... Admission into an orchestra.

The city where I lived at the time had a music club and the music club had an orchestra for beginners which was called the "L-plate Orchestra". It was with trepidation that I joined. My heart was beating rapidly as I waited for the conductor's baton sweep down and for the music to begin... The baton descended and the cacophony began. Wow ! What an experience! It was a privilege to be taking part in this racket (thank heavens it was held during lunch-time!) but to me it was music.

I remember it was a piece by Haydn. Probably some obscure symphony that had been dragged out of the archives. It opened with two crotchets and then changed pace with a group of four semiquavers. This irritated me no end. Just as I had successfully completed a down bow and then an up bow my right arm had to do some ridiculous acrobatic feat to dispense with the last beat and be ready for the down beat of the next bar. Curses ! Couldn't the orchestra slow down a bit ? Only the fiddles seemed to have such difficult notes. The other strings just played on like elephants on safari, and the conductor wasn't even looking at my distress!

The first concert was a nightmare. If the first movement was bad then the slow movement was out of the frying-pan and into the fire.

I propped my instrument under my chin, sat quietly, raised my bow into the right position only to find that I had suddenly developed a magnificent right-hand vibrato. Nerves ! What a curse. I could get away with anything during the fast movements because I was usually hidden by the winds and brass. Besides, there was so much happening that the audience couldn't tell who was playing out of tune. As long as they could recognise the tune they were usually



happy. But a slow movement was like a drawn-out torture. I not only had to actually play the same note as the other violins, I often had whole passages with nothing to hide behind, and everything happened so slowly it was easy to get lost.... Was that the second rest or the third? I looked at the conductor for guidance but realised with a cold flush that he had given up the race long ago. He couldn't tell whether to follow the wind or the strings, or neither, his baton waving like a dog's tail. It would have been all right if he didn't wear that stupid expression on his face and the designer forelock which bounced up and down over his eyes like an English sheep-dog. I could feel the resentment building up in me ... If only he had spent a little less time grooming and more on conducting we could have brought it off.

By this time I was totally lost. I felt like putting down my instrument and escaping. Either that or seizing the conductor's baton and breaking it over his head. I could tell just by looking at him that he was a wind-player. All wind-players are the same.. hot air! Hiss ! I looked at the huge puddle beneath the French horn and felt disgust. To make matters worse he hadn't even brought a mop to clean up. Not one of the brass players had bothered to clean his instrument; they were all tarnished and developing a green tinge between the keys. I bet they were all unwashed as well. I could smell body odour. Someone's deodorant had let them down.

I looked at the conductor. He was swimming in his own perspiration. His tails were saturated and liquid was pouring down his legs, onto the podium and then onto the stage. He had gone into a trance, his eyes closed and his baton lunging forward and back, forward and back. The lead cello had to prop him up with her bow otherwise he would have fallen head first into the music. He hadn't even turned a page in the last three minutes, a look of sublime stupidity wrapped over his facial features as he abandoned himself to the throes of his own private ecstasy. What about us ? We were the ones making the music ! This bloke was a wand-waver from way-back. I knew he was a wind-player. He even looked like an oboe.

As if that wasn't enough he started to hum along to the main theme, as flat as a tack. It was infectious. Like a bunch of lemmings walking over a cliff the audience joined in to completely ruin my attempts at achieving the ultimate harmonic experience. To add insult to injury some unscrupulous listeners started to clap along as well. I could have screamed but it would not have been heard amid the din. Papa Haydn would have turned in his grave.

The last movement started well. Typically the audience applauded at the end of the slow movement, which gave the conductor the opportunity to start without them. They had to shut up so they could catch on to the tune, but old Papa Haydn had them fooled .... how could they whistle along to a fugue ? They were all over the place ! The orchestra soared on, faster and faster. Too fast! Many of us could not catch up. What was this idiot doing now? I could not believe my eyes ... the conductor had seized the lead cello by the bow and pulled her towards him. She resisted seizing back the bow in a heavy *martele* down beat which caused her instrument to growl like a tiger. He pulled up. She pulled down. The tug-of-war gained momentum until it was a frenzy of motion, a steam train running out of control. His baton, attached to his left hand, acted as a counterweight to his right, and we had no choice but to follow it. Inevitably the winds started to get nervous. This meant only one thing ... they played too loudly. It was deafening! I could not hear what I was playing. I began to curse my fate. There were twenty strings and a full complement of winds ... four horns, two trombones, two trumpets, an English horn (in a Haydn symphony? Who had re-scored this work?), two flutes, two oboes, two bassoons and five clarinets (so the conductor was a clarinetist !). I could see that the violin second desk had started to panic. They were a bar and a half behind and running the risk of joining the cellos in their fugal subject entry.

I looked back at the conductor. He was now pinned to the floor by the cellist, using her spike to immobilise him. She was a disciplined player and had not yet missed a beat. Her spare foot held his neck to the floor while he foamed at the mouth, his baton now jabbing at his captor in 6/8 time. By raising her bow high during the up beats she was able to relay the beat to the rest of the orchestra in a steady 2/4. Her cool, calm and collected attitude brought the orchestra to its senses. The wind players relaxed and dropped down a dynamic range and the strings began to hear themselves again. The piece closed adeptly. It was like the perfect emergency landing.

Two double-bass players carried the conductor off stage. He had not stopped conducting and had to be forcefully restrained. It was then that I gained a deep respect for the nether basses. They could always be relied upon to do any unpleasant work. Perhaps it was because they were strong, having to lift their huge instruments everywhere. Perhaps it was their attitude to life. They could never be *prima donnas* so they had to make a virtue of solidity. In many ways they were the opposite of the conductor, in their own way more

deserving of respect and a more exalted position in the orchestra.

After that embarrassing event I moved down in the string world and took up the viola. A middle fiddle ... a rare entity. This instrument was an adulteration, often omitted in orchestration because of its unlikely tonal textures. As a string it is the odd one out, its size not reflecting its Pythagorean exigencies. No standard size exists for the viola. It can vary from 15 inches to 17 (plus) inches. To truly express its tone it would be the size of a small cello. It represents the point where tonal necessity is sacrificed to the limits of human capability. It is sandwiched between treble and bass where it is more often seen than heard. It is well known that violas are failed violinists. It is a way of being a big fish in a little pond. If an orchestra rejects you as a violinist you can always enter the back door as a viola player. In an orchestra there is first and second fiddle; the viola is the third. You can retire from the world of the violin by becoming a viola player. There is hardly anything written for the viola, at least as a solo instrument, and you have to make do with transcriptions to supplement your repertoire, inevitably incurring the derision of both violinists and cellists alike.

There are even jokes about the viola ... How many viola players does it take to change a light bulb? How many strings on an Italian viola? What do you call a group of viola players? Did you hear about the Irish viola? .... I won't tell you the answers. They're too painful.

Who invented the viola? No-one. It hasn't been invented yet..... You see? Viola players have a poor self-image. They usually come from divorced families where there has been an alcohol problem. All viola players, without exception, have an attitude problem. In a music shop they have masses of violin music, all beautifully arranged on the top shelf. On the bottom, gathering cobwebs, you will find about two or three viola pieces (usually with the piano part missing). You ask for viola strings and the salesperson offers you violin strings. People will stop you in the street and say "I love the violin. Play something for me". You feel like walking in the opposite direction. No pianist will accompany a viola player, at least not for very long. After playing the Telemann concerto for the tenth time they will smile tightly and ask in a steely voice "I don't suppose you brought your violin with you, did you?" They never ring you to make rehearsal arrangements. Between the paradise of the treble clef and the hell of the bass, the alto is a form of purgatory. It is like being without a sex, neither here nor there,

lost in no-man's land.

There are more suicides among viola players than any other stringed instrument. It's tone induces an unbearable melancholy. Ironically, the better the instrument is played, the deeper the sense of melancholy induced. It is hypnotic in its sadness. There are many cases where neighbours have murdered neighbours because they have played the piano or violin to excess. It induces a frenzy. When the neighbour is a viola player you will find suicide or manic depression is the only outlet. The attraction is hypnotic. One case of a viola-induced suicide was treated as manslaughter by a British court after the judge suffered a heart attack on hearing the offending instrument played.

In string quartets the turnover amongst viola players is second only to abattoir workers. To be covered in blood and gore and indifferent to the cries of the doomed animals is a picnic compared to a life sentence as viola player in a professional quartet. Some psychologists maintain that it is the nondescript nature of inner harmonies played in a nondescript clef which deeply affects the cerebral cortex, causing the pituitary gland to release hormones in an irregular pattern. The dark apparition which appeared before Mozart in his final days is now often thought to be the result of his playing the viola in his youth. Worse still, his father, Leopold, played the instrument to the infant Wolfgang to induce sleep. It may well have induced an irreparable melancholia which led the young prodigy to avoid minor keys at all costs. The vast majority of Mozart's music is composed in the major, with the occasional descent into the minor producing work of extreme poignance such as the G minor string quintet, the G minor piano quartet, the D minor string quartet (K421) and, of course, the 40th symphony. Addicted as ever to his melancholy the young genius dashed off major key commissions to support himself, while secretly persisting in his minor key obsession. The shadow would alas always be with him. His first masterwork, the *Sinfonia Concertante*, represents the battle that raged within him: it was the battle between joy (the violin) and sorrow (the viola), linked together from first movement to last. The violin was life, the viola death. The alto doppelganger dogs the violin through comic somersaults and one feels that Mozart has resolved the duality in the simple frolic of the last movement. Even the orchestral violas are divided into two sections as if to mock the imagined freedom of the concert violin.

The singular melancholy of the viola did not go unnoticed by German military strategists. During the

first world war small orchestras of violas gathered in the trenches to play when the wind drifted over enemy lines. British morale dropped rapidly and insidiously as the sonorous noise swept over the troops. Indeed many cases of viola melancholia have been wrongly diagnosed as shell-shock. During the "concerts of death" (as they were known to the British troops) the rate of desertion soared. Defeat would have been imminent were it not for the fact that the viola sound attracted rats, making conditions in the trenches unbearable to the German troops. Mustard gas was a relief by comparison.

The concert shattered my illusions about the joy of music. I immediately resigned from the orchestra and sought refuge in drink. In bars I would sit hunched over the counter, feeling sorry for myself and my lost joy. I tried to drown my feelings for music by playing the juke box incessantly. I deliberately chose works far removed from the classics ... the Sex Pistols, Black Sabbath, Guns and Roses, the Smiths, Frank Sinatra and Perry Como. As a smoker chain-smokes cigarettes I chose disc after disc to try to wipe my feeling for music from my shattered soul. Even the punks winced as I played "*Manic Depression*" for the tenth time in a row. The publican banned me from his hotel and word got about that I was a dangerous personality. Soon CLOSED signs would appear out of nowhere as I was about to enter pub doors the city over.

I stayed in my bedsit and played acid rock for hours on end. My hair began to turn grey while crows feet and dark rings formed under my eyes. I could no longer sleep. After seven days of sleeplessness I seized my viola in a rage and set it alight on the floor. I laughed for the first time in three years as the stringed demon came alive with tongues of flame. I gathered its ashes in a jar and threw them into the harbour. The next day the police dragged up a body from the same place I had dropped the jar. They say it was an illegal immigrant, but I knew it was Beelzebub himself.

I visited a psychiatrist who told me that I was highly strung. The cost was \$200 per hourly session, ten times more than my music lessons. It seemed a lot, but I was determined to throw off the melancholy. No price was too high.

All was going well. Dr. Schmerzenlieber took me back to my childhood. I recalled quite clearly an incident in which my father caught me blowing his pipe like a trumpet. He seized me by the ear and threw me downstairs where I fell unconscious. When I regained

consciousness I realised that I was surrounded by angels with harps. The gentle sound appealed to my senses. I soon became obsessed with the sound of vibrating strings and would stop in subways to listen to guitarists while others walked by, their noses in the air.

I wanted a guitar and asked my father to give me one. He refused saying that only hippies played guitar and that he hated hippies. If I wanted to play an instrument why didn't I learn a real instrument like the tuba. I did not know what a tuba was and asked my mother who said it was some sort of plant. I dared not ask my father and none of my friends knew or were even interested in knowing.

"Ven did you discover vot is a tuba?" asked Dr. Schmerszenlieber, with uncharacteristic interest. Personally, I could not see the relevance of this question. I told him that it happened during a walk in the park. There was a brass band playing and brass instruments I had never laid eyes on. It was fat and ungainly (as was the man playing it) and it wrapped around itself like a fat snake, seeming to suffocate its player. The noise it made suggested a relationship of symbiotic misery. The red-faced player puffed mightily, his cheeks contracting and expanding like bellows, as he tried to elicit some semblance of harmony out of the dread device.

"Vich year wast dis?" asked Dr. Schmerszenlieber, even more irrelevantly. I told him that it was in 1963 when I was 13 years old.

"Vich band was?" he continued. I objected to his question, seeing it far from the mark but reckoned that, if the ways of God are strange, those of psychiatrists were stranger still, and answered it to the best of my ability. I have always been gifted with a good memory and find that minutiae will etch themselves indelibly onto my memory bank. It just so happened that I was fascinated by the badge worn on the hat of the tuba player which disported a unicorn uttering a series of notes (quavers, I believe, because of their tails) from its solitary horn. I admit to having a secret fascination for unicorns and hold them among the most fascinating of mythical creatures (second only to griffins) and was intrigued by the association between the biological and musical horn as depicted on the badge which adorned the tuba player's hat.

I reluctantly told Dr. Schmerzenlieber about the unicorn when he suddenly changed colour (from red to white). At first I thought I had embarrassed him, but realised that, if this had been the case, his chromatic transition would have occurred in the opposite direction. I feared that I had in some way induced anger or

severe resentment in the good doctor, noting the modulation in his behaviour. There was an uncomfortable pause during which he looked out the window, withdrew a pipe, and set it alight. I was shocked. I had not expected him to indulge such a habit. I had always held a private disdain for those who made use of tobacco for any reason, be it personal enjoyment or emotional foil. Then again, I realised that a good portion of my shock was the association with my father and that my immediate reaction was a simple transference brought on by the symbol of the pipe and the rather personal implications this held for me. I was being unfair and, in spite of the revulsion I felt, decided then and there that I would not allow personal feelings to cloud my judgment. Little did I realise the irrelevance of my conclusions, for this had been made in spite of me.

Dr. Schmerzenlieber suddenly stood and moved towards the window. He stared fixedly through its mullioned translucence for some time. It seemed an eternity before he spoke and when he did so it was with a voice I barely recognised as his.

"I am afraid dat I can no longer help you". My heart went cold. I wanted to ask him why but my mouth refused to open.

He took the pipe to his lips, drew on it and expelled a jet of smoke into the air.

"You see", he said coldly "I was dat tuba player." I felt faint. The doctor swung around and pointed his pipe at me accusingly.

"Und for der record I vood like you to tell der rest of der story. For reasons unknown to me you are repressing certain details of vat happened to der tuba player after he made your acquaintance. For instance, did you or did you not put a potato down der instrument vile I vas playing it in der park?"

My God ! It was not possible! It was him ! Dr. Schmerzenlieber went to a cupboard, pulled out a hat and tossed it into my lap. I jumped up, shrieking, as if it were a snake. It was the hat with the musical unicorn! It lay on the floor accusingly, staring at me like an angel of vengeance. I ran to the door to escape but it was locked. I pulled at the handle until the skin chafed from my fingers. I ran to the window but it was too high to jump.

Calmly and methodically Dr. Schmerzenlieber placed his pipe on the mantelpiece and unlocked another cupboard. I watched in horror as he produced a tarnished and battered brass monster from its depths.

He laughed demonically.

"Und now I will wreak my vengeance for der kareer you haf ruined for me. I vas professor of tuba at der Berlin Konservatorium. I vas tutor to Doktor Goebbels himzelf and taught him der importance of der brass band in raising patriotic feelink in der German people. After der var I escaped to your country to teach tuba in der konservatorium until a certain street urchin placed a potato in my tuba inducing asphyxiation durink a particularly difficult piece (der *Radetsky March*, to be precise). My lungs vere irreparably damaged und I was forced to retire and take up psychiatry".

His eyes glowed red. My heart beat like a military drumroll. He laughed again as he blew into the infernal machine playing, over and over again, the bass line of the *Radetsky March*. I thought I would go mad. I blocked my ears and cried for mercy but I could not block out the hated sound. I screamed. All went black.

I woke to the sound of a flute. It was a gentle, soft sound that did not adversely affect my aching head which felt like it had been trampled upon by a herd of elephants. I opened one eye and saw before me a person (female) with wings and a glorious golden halo. On seeing my open eye she stopped playing and smiled.

"Am I in heaven?" I asked hopefully.

The angel laughed and told me that I was in the dressing-room of a concert hall during a rehearsal of *The Magic Flute*, the Mozart opera. She had found me lying in the street and had persuaded a couple of stage-hands to carry me inside so that she could keep an eye on me. I was pleased. I liked the opera and, in spite of its title, found the use of the flute (wind instrument though it be) eminently suitable. I did not know, however, that the opera called for a flute-playing angel with halo and questioned the woman on this unexpected addition.

"This version is different", she said.

"Oh", I replied. "I see".

There was no use arguing. I had seen modern dress versions of *Julius Caesar*, *Salome* and *Tristan and Isolde*, not to mention an underwater version of *The Pearl Fishers* and *Othello* on ice, so I was not picky when it came to producers stretching one's credulity threshold beyond recognised boundaries, so long as the intention fell short of gimmickry.

"Are there more where you come from?" I asked.

The angel shook her head.

"There is only one magic flute."

With this she started to play. Before long I felt that I was being carried over lush rainforests full of birds and unusual winds and swirling rivers with gushing torrents and endless waterfalls. I saw someone waving at me from a cloud-topped mountain. I flew down to see who it was and realised that it was my father. He was smiling at me. As I descended to join him he puffed at his pipe and clouds of mist issued from his mouth. It was not the acrid smoke that I remembered, but a gentle vapour which smelt like a fresh bouquet of flowers. It wrapped me as I fell into his arms. He placed me gently onto the precipitous summit and led me down the mountainside into the verdant valley below.

"Son", he said resonantly, "I have found you a real instrument at last. I think you will like it."

As we descended further I could feel his touch becoming lighter. I could not see him in the mist but, oddly, felt no fear. When the mist parted I saw that he had disappeared and knew then that he had become part of it. My father was the cloud.

I descended the mountain and came into a forest. It was full of beautiful sounds like an orchestra of nature. One of these sounds was singularly attractive and I saw, glowing golden before me, a long stick. I picked it up and saw that it was a flute. I had never played a flute before but felt no anxiety in attempting to play this one. As I clasped it to my mouth I felt an enormous power surge through me. I blew into the mouth-piece and was transfixed by the experience. Tactile harmonies flowed from the flute like a torrent of water. It was bliss.

The music stopped. I came out of my reverie and saw the angel standing over me. She looked at me with large blue eyes.

"Do you want to play it?" she asked, tendering me the golden flute.

She smiled.

"Just think of a tune. The flute will play it for you."

Conservative as I am I opted for "*Baa Baa Black Sheep*". The sound that came out, however, was no mere nursery melody. It was a glorious concoction of tones and variations on a theme that only a genius could have composed. I was astounded.

"Fantastic, isn't it?" asked the angel.

I nodded in stunned agreement.

"Would you like it?"

I was dumbfounded. I nodded again.

"It's yours", said the angel, "but first you have to go through a little trial of courage."

I knew there was a catch. Strings attached, even to a wind instrument! But I felt in control. I knew I could do anything with this incredible device. It was my Excalibur and all I had to do was to pull it out of the musical stone.

"Don't worry", said the angel "It's not hard,... even I've done it".

I looked at her blankly.

"If you've passed the test then the flute must belong to you".

She laughed.

"No", she said, "I sat the test for the magic viola. The flute is really my second instrument."

I smiled. Life is full of ironies.

"What's the test?" I asked in trepidation.

The test was to listen to every conceivable wind instrument play the *Radetzky March* for a total of 14 hours continuously. I did it. I can't believe it, but I did it. The first ten minutes were agony, that incessant theme playing over and over again made me want to scream. Then, suddenly, as if by magic I started to hear all sorts of hidden harmonies and overtones, counterpoint and syncopation. By the end of the experience I was wrapped in it. It's not such a bad tune, after all. In fact it now appears on my top ten desert island disc collection along with the Haydn *Trumpet Concerto* and Roy Orbison's *Pretty Woman*.

And then it struck me. I had turned into a wind player! I sat for an audition as principal flute with the Berlin Philharmonic and won the position hands down. I leave tomorrow on a jet plane travelling first class. I have even booked a separate seat for my flute, just to put the wind up those pretentious cello players who are too snooty to put their noise boxes into the hold like the rest of the hoi polloi. String players! What pretenders! Three quarters of them can't play their chosen instrument, nine tenths can't play in tune and the whole jolly lot of them resent the fact that they can't be heard in an orchestra when the mighty winds let loose with their full-throated cry of joy. Orchestral impotents!

*Listen!*

Dum-der-dum, dum-de-dum, Dum, dum, dum ...

*The Radetzky March!*

Play it again, Sam...