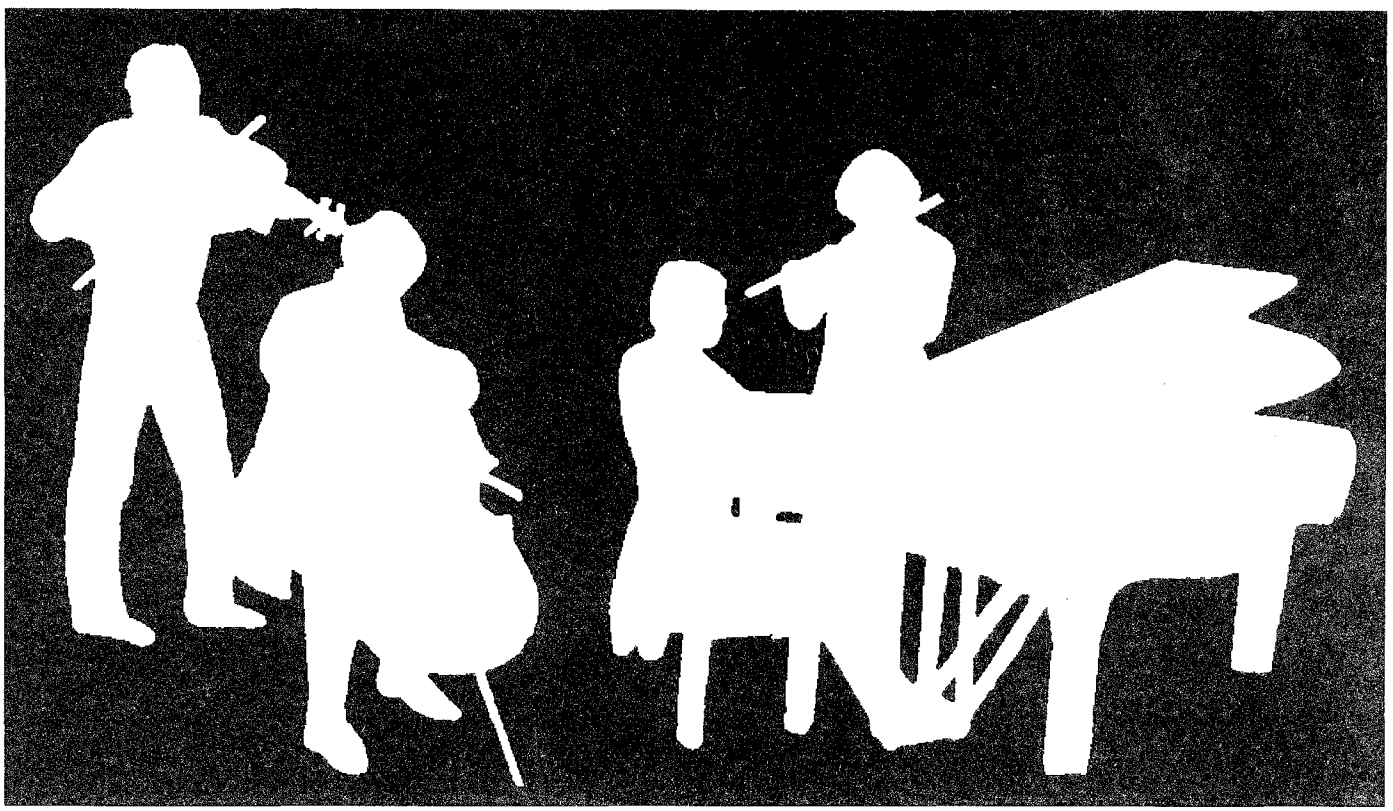
Ad Libitum

A Journal of the

AMATEUR CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY Inc.



August 2000

Number 4

Published by The AMATEUR CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY Inc.

PO Box 584, Balgowlah, NSW 2093

http://www.shoal.net.au/~fbacker/acms.html

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INTRODUCTION

Mike Macey, Editor

In this 4th edition of Ad Libitum I've tried to bring together some aspects of music-making, and especially those of amateur music-making, which are of contemporary relevance. But I first asked a professional violinist, Asmira Woodward-Page, to give us some idea of what it is like to live the life of a professional musician dedicated to reaching for the sky while keeping her feet on the ground, a feat many of us have shunned as too difficult, at least in the musical world. I'd like to thank Asmira for taking the time to do this for us, and for responding so promptly to my request.

Charmian Gadd, who has had a highly successful musical career and now runs a thriving stringed instrument business, "The Violinery", has given us an interesting perspective on the famous Smith violins, and has added some penetrating insight into violins and their owners.

A complementary article comes from Graham Caldersmith, a Physicist turned Luthier, who gave me permission to reprint his article on the relative merits of old violins, and gives a fascinating insight into this subject. Most of us aspire to having the perfect instrument, and most of us don't, but Charmian and Graham together have given us new perspectives.

David Mathers gives us an idea of what it is like to be dedicated to running and playing the clarinet in the same life. The cellist David Oldroyd gives the background experience of one who might have been a professional musician, but became a philosopher instead.

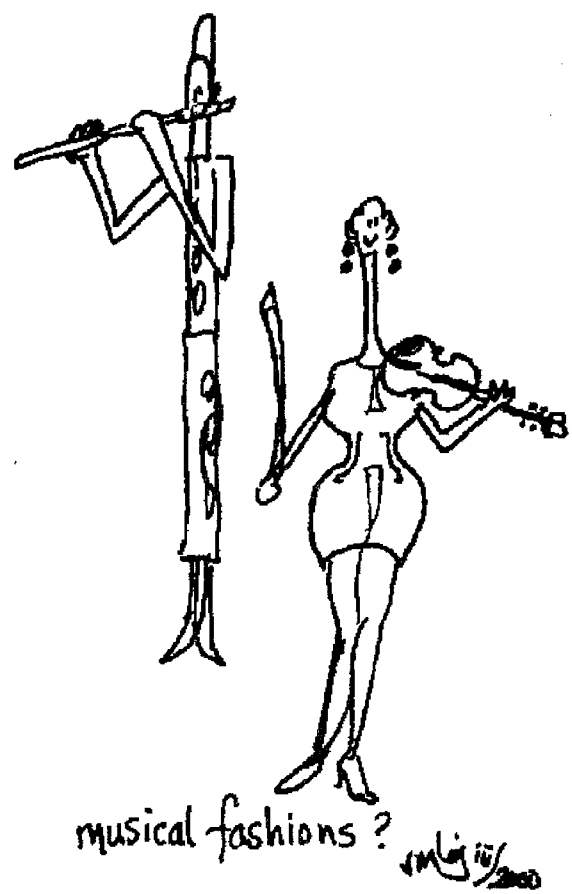
Nils Korner, one of our founding members, has contributed a piece that shows how quartet playing brings out the best and the worst in us. Louis Otonicar has taken a dig at our love affair with Europeans, from the point of view of one brought up in Vienna and who came a long way to escape from it.

I've been very fortunate in persuading Vivienne Jones to use her artistic talent for showing us something of the lighter side of music-making.

I've also tried to outline my response to various aspects of modern music from a caveman's viewpoint, but I've also suggested how we might do something about our ignorance of contemporary music, with the help of Vee Margolis.

There's one book review of interest to musicians, written by Mike and Joanne McGrath; on Vikram Seth's "An Equal Music".

My thanks are due to everyone who helped with contributions to this issue of our magazine, and especially to those non-members who have been so generous.



That this Society exists at all is due to the vision of a few dedicated people; founders Irwin Imhof, Nils Korner, Judy Mitchell. Our present strength is due to all the past Presidents and Committee Members who have given countless hours of their considerable and varied talents to the Society, and to the continuing support of many "unsung heroes" who quietly do so much work to make things happen.

WHY ARE OLD VIOLINS SUPERIOR?

Graham Caldersmith

In the daily routine of dismantling, studying, repairing and reassembling old and new violins of all qualities, while bringing successive batches of new violins through the many painstaking stages to completion, I naturally dwell often on the reason why *old* violins are generally assumed musically superior to *new* ones. Is it just that well made new violins need playing and maturing to reach the quality of the famous old ones, or are there secrets hidden within those old woods and varnishes that set them in a superior musical class?

At the performance of international artists playing their pedigree instruments, I listen for those special qualities supposed to be guaranteed by the fabulous prices fetched by these musical treasures. And after the concert, I tax the tired musicians with requests to examine their rare instruments, seeking to identify some of the characteristics of the ancient magic.

When thrilled by the consummate artistry of a great musician, I attribute much of it to the union of artist and fine instrument, but then wonder how the performance would sound on a good *new* instrument, if the differences would be dramatic or the performance inferior. Knowing that such wonderings expressed to musicians bring benign or embarrassed smiles preceding a change of subject, I am left with the question of *why* old violin superiority has become an article of faith amongst violinists and accepted as fact in the general community.

If one delves into the violin literature for more precise evidence of the supposed old violin superiority, quite a different picture emerges which involves the rise and fall of standards in violin making in different countries and regions after the brilliant original tradition established in Italy and Germany in the seventeenth century. In giving full tribute to the undisputed *Original Masters* whose instruments remain standards of excellence centuries later, it is worth quoting some of the connoisseurs, researchers, and master repairers of these old master violins, to gain a perspective on the relative musical merits of old and new violins.

Charles Read was one of the first to document information on the *Original Master* violins he sought out in the middle of the last century, and he compared them with the violins made by his contemporaries:

The fiddles of Cremona gained their reputation by superior tone, but they hold it now mainly by their beauty. For thirty years past violins have been made equal in model to the "chef-d'ouevres" of Cremona, and stronger in wood than Stradivarius, and more scientific than Guarnerius in the thicknesses.

Edward Herron-Allen in 1882 first published his treatise, *Violin Making - As it Was and Is*, a text that that for all its quaint allegory has become a classic in violin literature. In his rambling introduction, Heron-Allen followed Charles Read's observations with:

No one who has seen the magnificent new instruments of Chanot, of Hill, of Boulanger, of Simoutre, of Gand and Bernadel and of many other living makers can possibly deny that that these instruments will be, when a little matured by age, far sweeter and finer than any of the time-withered, over-repaired and dilapidated instruments which flood the market under the name of Stradivari, of Guarneri, of Amati, of Ruggeri, of Stainer, of Bergonzi, and a hundred lesser names.

Herron-Allen was right in anticipating the subsequent recognition of many of his contemporary makers, but quite mistaken about them superseding the *Original Master* violins.

Early in this century several eminent scientists applied the systematic methods of scientific analysis to the study of violin musical quality, and after half a century of research, F.A. Saunders fairly summarised the outcome:

The net result of this research so far is that we have found no physical quality in the best violins of old makers that cannot be found also in new ones. The "characteristic tone" of old Italian instruments does not depend (a) on the quality of their steady tones, or (b) on the mechanical ease with which steady tones are produced, or (c) on the distribution of strength with frequency, or (d) on the length of the duration of the tone after the excitation is cut off. Whether other trials by

more accurate methods would disclose very small but positive differences between old and new instruments, we cannot say. We hesitate to yield to the temptation to say that there is no real difference between the tones of old and new instruments, for the reason that a very few gifted and experienced listeners can distinguish an old violin of high quality, even over the radio.

After nearly half a century of sophisticated research, scientists are still trying to identify those characteristics of superiority in the old violins, but are coming hard up against the inability of even leading musicians and connoisseurs to distinguish old and new violins by structured listening tests. An interesting example is given in the BBC study tapes, *Violins Old and New*, 8160 0101130B, where Isaac Stern, Pinchas Zuckerman, Manoug Parikian and Charles Beare attempt to identify two master violins and two more recent ones.

In fact some of the most experienced violin dealers and connoisseurs have contested the assumption of old violin superiority directly. In his introduction to *the Dictionary of Violin and Bow Makers*, Cyril Woodcock states:

I have often been asked if I thought that the present-day makers are to be compared with the masters of the past - this is a very controversial point which has been debated over the past hundred years or so, and will continue. For my part, after a lifetime of experience examining literally hundreds of instruments old and new, I have come to the conclusion that with the aid of science many of the present day instruments equal in craftsmanship the past great masters' work, and in many cases even surpass them, and with the passage of time this will be acclaimed by musicians of the future...it has been proved many times by testing new against old violins for tone and performance, that many modern instruments are superior as regards carrying power and brilliance.

Similarly, when Hans Weisshaar, described as *the foremost teacher and trainer of violin makers in the world* addressed the Violin Society of America's Tenth Annual Convention, he was asked to comment on the inability of expert panels to identify Old Master violins in listening tests and said:

Usually, when a modern instrument is presented to a violinist and he plays it and finds that it sounds quite well, he is really surprised. He has a very fine old instrument himself and the new one he has just tried compares very favorably with his own. He will then say: "You know, for a new violin, that sounds pretty darn good". Musicians are very prejudiced and this goes even as far as performers are concerned. They refuse to believe that a new violin can be as good as it is. A performer has to believe that a new instrument can sound well, and many do sound well. I'm sure that there are many more good new instruments than good old instruments.

Weisshaar's remark about the necessity of a performer to believe in the musical quality of a new violin sheds light on the explanation given by the musicians' participation in the "*Violins Old and New*" comparison referred to above for why performers most often seek old violins for their concert presentations. Unable to distinguish between fine old and new instruments aurally, they proposed that old instruments provide a feeling of security on the concert platform that new violins lack. If a musician has adopted the doctrine of old violin superiority, the finest instrument (old or new) will fail to supply the vital sense of security if it is not *believed old*. It seems that the assessment of a violin's musical quality depends on the musician's expectations more than the actual qualities of the violin.

This rather depressing conclusion is supported by one of the principal European dealers, Walter Hamma, who, responding to a question on the relative importance of a violin's pedigree and tone at the 1982 Violin Society of America Convention, said:

You are absolutely right in saying that the most important thing for a violinist is the sound, the tone. But in real life this is not the way it works out. A customer comes into my shop and says: "Mr Hamma, I want a violin that will sound very well, and it is not important who made it". Fine. I bring out several violins. He tries them out and finally picks one and says: "Oh, this is wonderful; it sounds beautiful and I am so happy to have such a fine instrument. How much does it cost?" "Ten Thousand" I answer. His very next question is: "Who made it?" and if I tell him I don't know, or that it is made by some relatively unknown Saxon maker, he won't even offer me so much as one dollar for the violin he loved so much a few moments before...All people talk about sound and its importance, but if you equate the beauty of sound with monetary value, I have

never found anyone who is willing to act on this principle; not once in my whole life...People do not and will not pay for sound.

What then are we able to conclude about the question: "Why are old violins superior?" The experience of makers, researchers, connoisseurs, and dealers is that any musical superiority is so subtle and subjective that it cannot be measured or agreed upon, and yet musicians will pay crippling prices for old instruments of even secondary pedigree in which is assumed to reside some ancient musical magic. Perhaps the real answer to our question is to be found in the human psyche's insatiable quest for involvement with great achievements or "golden ages" in human experience offered by fine music, especially if played on fine instruments of a "golden age". Old violins are better *not* because they sound better than good new ones, but because they are symbols of "golden ages" of human achievement in which we find meaning and comfort. Unfortunately, pedigree old instruments are rare, and good ones are rarer, so the popularity of old instruments will continue to increase. But musicians should be aware that they need not pay excessive prices for good new instruments which will last a lifetime without expensive repairs or insurance if they trust their ears (and those of their colleagues) and resist the assumption that modern makers have lost the magic of those "golden ages". Indeed, our present musical culture can only be enriched by an injection of modern magic into the concert platform and at the same time stimulate the pursuit of excellence in violin making by taking the dedication of our present makers seriously enough to allow modern magic a hearing.

OLD AND NEW VIOLINS - MOVING TARGETS

Rod Tuson

There's an anecdote about Yehudi Menuhin that fits somewhat with Graham Caldersmith's article. While it is remembered, alas, the source is not.

A particularly gushing American heiress and Patron of the Arts met Menuhin in the green room after a (customary) stunning performance of two of the Great Concerti, bent over his still open violin case, waxed lyrical over its beauty and said: *What a fabulous sound quality your wonderful instrument has!* Menuhin, tired and impatient with the effusive remarks of his ardent admirer, leaned over, put his ear to the instrument in its case and said, *Funny, I hear nothing!*

It is also recorded that Menuhin was a great admirer of A E Smith violins (and his skills in maintaining the Maestro's ancient pedigree instruments) when Smith violins were contemporary. Indeed, Menuhin quite often played his Smith, and even bravely for that time confessed this to the public.

There is a further factor that skews the OLD versus NEW debate towards the pedigree instruments, and it is unfortunately self-regressive.

It is well known that a good instrument "plays in", that is, its tonal quality improves with playing. This applies not only to a new instrument, but also to a mature one. For example, a Guanerius found after decades in a dusty attic (the stuff dreams are made of), will sound pretty awful at first, even if it is in playable condition. (I played one once, owned by the Italian parents of a very young and singularly untalented Suzuki beginner. Ugh! I could not make it sound like anything but a tea chest in an overcoat!) Now this play-in effect, due to the partly plastic, partly elastic nature of wood and glues, is also noticeable, though more subtle, even on a frequently played instrument.

For example, suppose a certain good modern or old violin is in the possession of a premier performer and is regularly used for great public performances of concerti. If it is lent to a gifted amateur for a month or so (more dreams), the amateur's sound will be remarkably good, of course, but unfortunately the generous mega-star will need to "play it in" again upon its return, in order to restore the tone to its former glory.

Similarly, the lesser fiddle belonging to the amateur, after a month's use by the star will have improved tonally upon its return, possibly quite remarkably, but will lose much of this brilliance after a period of playing by the less talented and less frequent performer.

Usually, top pedigree instruments are in the hands of superstar virtuosi, so they get more expert playing than less expensive instruments. Even good modern violins don't get as much exercise, as it were. Thus intrinsic quality is confounded with the play-in effect. If the latter is significant, as I believe it is, comparisons of intrinsic quality could be made very difficult.

The emphasis on concerti is because it is in these, where the strength of an orchestra is to be balanced in a large hall, that the fiddle must be played at times with every ounce of its sound producing strength. At maximum force, with good tonal quality, the instrument is mechanically stressed favorably and to its fullest, thus setting subtle mechanical nuances into the wood fibre bonds and glues that change the instrument's tonal quality. Some of these favorable changes might be permanent, but most will not, fading over a period of time, from days to months or years, the length of which will depend significantly on environmental factors, but also simply the passage of time, otherwise known as ageing. So ageing in the absence of playing will actually degrade an instrument's sound, sometimes dreadfully.

Suppose a tonal superiority *were* detected between an "old" master and a "new" master fiddle in the hands of the same performer. The detected difference is probably more due to how *well*, how *long* and how *loudly* the instrument has been played in its recent history than the craftsmanship of its manufacture. The tables could well be turned if the performer were prepared to play his new fiddle more often than his old (in public performance as well as in rehearsal).

The foregoing is partly hypothesis based on personal experience and would be an interesting subject for proper research, or even informal research among we amateurs. The chamber music amateur can undertake a simple test of this hypothesis that should show a result after about two to four weeks. At the same time, useful practice will have been done to develop tonal quality and bowing technique. It is practice that should preferably be done with the rest of the family away, or at least undertaken in a reasonably sound proof room. It can best be described as "Pretend to be a soloist." Warning: Forget it when playing chamber music!

Pick a passage from a concerto, (or the Beethoven Romance in G is good) or just pick some harmonious chords on each pair of strings. (Double stopping will do – not triple – and change the chords periodically). Play the chords using long strong bows, concentrating on sound quality and *perfect* intonation. Check intonation by listening to the beat notes (lower pitch, made by the difference in pitch between the two main notes) and to the sympathetic vibration of unplayed open strings. Try playing closer and closer to the bridge and attempting to get the loudest volume while maintaining intonation and tonal quality. A little harshness is tolerable at first, but try to reduce it by adjusting bowing force, speed and distance from the bridge. What you are doing is exercising the fabric of your instrument – teaching its wood how to vibrate in the right way. It will learn, but don't teach it bad intonation or the exercise will be fruitless. (It doesn't mean you will henceforth play out of tune, just that the instrument will not know how to respond warmly to your playing *in* tune.)

If this exercise is done for half hour stints, mixed with very strong playing of something you know very well for another half hour, every day for two or three weeks, the tone of your under-played violin will almost certainly improve noticeably. What will also improve is *your* sound quality, particularly when loud passages are called for in chamber music, though you will not use the force or sound intensity that you have in this exercise. If you are having lessons, ask your teacher to suggest strong bowing exercises and to keep an eye on your bowing technique for problems.

After this "breaking-in" it will be necessary to reinforce the settings periodically, probably for a few days every two to three months, by similar practice with the emphasis unchanged. Naturally, ordinary practice should persist, and the draconian measures outlined above will become less necessary for maintenance if you are playing regularly and well, though some loud well-sounding work will always help maintain the instrument's subsequent tone.

Mike Macey and I have commenced a lively discussion on this fascinating topic by email. I am happy to collect and compile contributions from anyone with views or relevant experiences, for possible later publication.
Email: Admin@statronics.com.au.

THE MYSTIQUE OF SMITH, and other thoughts.

Charmian Gadd

Violins carry a certain mystique. Names such as Antonio Stradivarius and Guarneri del Gesu roll off the tongue impressively, while in the back of one's mind glimmers the realisation that one of their masterpieces is worth a good waterfront property in the Eastern Suburbs. Even the secondary Italian masters with names like Bergonzi, Guadagnini, Ruggieri, and dozens more, are fetching prices that would astound most people and lay claim to a comfortable home on the leafy north shore.

In view of this international reality, the knowledge that instruments by Australian maker A. E. Smith are nudging $50,000 hardly seems newsworthy. But in our terms this is a major milestone, and represents a coming of age, perhaps or a significant step in the arduous ongoing battle of the cringe.

Smith was a serious man, an artisan of talent and training, a stern taskmaster in the workshop of his famous store in Hunter Street, where a generation of Australian luthiers received their training. His success during his lifetime was considerable, with his son-in-law, Ernest Llewellyn, concertmaster of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, serving as a flagbearer for the master by playing one of his finest violins. At one stage the entire viola section of the orchestra played on Smith instruments.

The shop itself was an entity far beyond a mere commercial establishment and is recalled with nostalgia whenever musicians of a certain age run into each other. You never know who you would meet there - Yehudi Menuhin, perhaps collecting one of the copies he commissioned of his Strad, or Isacc Stern or Ruggiero Ricci. Smith had signed, framed photographs of all the great artists who visited Australia. He would prominently display the photograph of whoever was visiting at any time, and would observe the niceties, like hiding the photo of Heifetz when Mischa Elman visited.

Out of his workshop came some of our foremost makers (Cedric Clarke, Phillip Burgess, Harry Vatiliotis) Though their instruments may well be said to rival those of Smith - affectionately known as the "old man" - their battle for recognition is a difficult process. Even Smith's success has not rubbed off on them to the extent that they can charge international prices for their instruments. Short of Italianising their names and putting Cremonese labels in their violins, there is little they can do to overcome the crushing snobbery of the cringe. Nevertheless, milestones are milestones, and Smith's continued success several decades after his death must inspire them. At least, for the cost of a Smith these days, we can put a deposit on an apartment in Woy Woy.

Further thoughts from the Violinery.

Australia's history in terms of Western Culture is a brief one. We have come a long way in a short time. Reminds you rather of George Bernard Shaw's scathing comment on America, to the effect that it is *the only country that has gone from barbarism to decadence without a period of civilisation in-between.* I would like to think we in Australia are enjoying a rosy era of culture and civilisation at present, but the spectre of decadence is tantalisingly visible, dancing on the graves of our hard-slogging grandfathers.

That the hard slog is not far behind us is brought home sometimes in strange ways. A home-made violin is brought into the Violinery. An old man tells us his father made it. It is pretty crude and of no commercial value, but as the man begins to tell us of its history, we are transported back to the shearing sheds, where

they simply had to have an instrument, but there were none to buy. So his father set to with whatever bits of wood he could find, and fashioned, with shearer's tools, a working fiddle that enlivened many a country dance. What a delightful picture of our past.

Most of the instruments that are brought into us do not bring such smiles to our faces. Australia seems to have been a dumping ground for England's convicts and Germany's factory made violins. One problem is that all these instruments carry starred labels, and once they have been in the family for a few generations they acquire a sort of family fable and are believed to be the real thing. To make it worse, there is a whole underworld of people who know the tiniest bit about violins, who pronounce on instruments and encourage people to believe that what they have is a treasure. I cannot imagine that in any other field of endeavour, comparable amounts of nonsense and disinformation could be in circulation.

Mostly this is not harmful, but it is frequently painful to have to inform the owners that their dreams are not reality. But occasionally, someone will die, and leave the house to one child and the violin to the other. Then it is truly distressing to inform the owners, whose emotions are in turmoil, that their inheritance is worthless. No wonder that wills sometimes split families asunder.

To the player, the bond formed with an instrument is a sacred and tangible thing. We spend our lives in a quest for the perfect mate, the perfect voice for our expressive needs. Often we have to compromise and settle for less power, in favour of a complex and compelling sound. Then we secretly seek something more powerful, and the search goes on. Fortunately, no marriage certificate needs to be signed, so one is free to indulge in ongoing flirtations.

Hoping not to sound like a music-moralist, I have to say, though, that there is no greater satisfaction than in committing oneself to an instrument one can love, and in finding a bow that is right for it. Then a plateau of trust and confidence is established from which one can blossom. It is possible to be quite neurotic about one's instrument. I know players who are constantly adjusting their sound posts, getting new bass bars, or chasing the new repairman who comes to town. There is a lot of commonsense in knuckling down and spending the time to get the most you can from the instrument you have, and giving it your loyalty has to be part of that. Violins are like living things. They respond to the vibrations we create within them, and sing with the voice we instinctively seek. They respond equally to neglect and joyless sound production.

How lucky we are to share our lives with them.

POSTCARD FROM NEW YORK - (no, we're not famous yet...)

Asmira Woodward-Page

Being a young violinist living in the Big Apple, I often find myself missing Martha Argerich in Carnegie Hall, or the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra in the Lincoln Centre, because I'm fiddling around the corner with some group or other that is trying to break into that vast Music Mecca we call New York City. And it's not like my bulimic wallet benefits much from doing that underpaid-but-promising new-group-gig. It's the career investment which counts, I tell myself as I shuffle through piles of bills. But the reality means that missing gigs means no yummy food, or more seriously, an unpaid rent cheque. It also means that somebody else took your place in the spotlight. As diva-ish as that may sound, that spotlight won't be there if you don't pay the light bill. But so far my TV still works, and I can catch Seinfeld at half past seven if I'm not already out playing somewhere.

While not recommended for the faint-hearted, breaking into that kind of scene can be quite thrilling. Like a few other musicians in that city of about ten million, my violin playing involves solo, chamber, and orchestral aspects. It's an exciting, busy life, and over the past two years, I've been a founding member of several new groups, including a conductorless 22-piece string ensemble called SONYC (String Orchestra of New York City). Through inevitable trials and tribulations, we have been together for a satisfying year and a half. Here is our story.

In April 1998, after auditioning for a conductor from the National Orchestral Association, a group of string players (including yours truly) found themselves touring Utah performing String Serenades. Halfway into the tour, and many rehearsals later, it happened in Park City. While we continued as the conductor checked the sound balance from the back of the hall, it suddenly dawned on us how fantastic we sounded without him! Not an insult to any of our baton-wielding friends reading this, but let's say that this particular conductor didn't come very high on the scorebooks. For starters, it was an exceptional group of players, with careers straddling the solo, chamber and orchestral spheres. So over several beers that night it was decided that we must stay together "without that guy". Soon we were giving our first fund-raising concerts, and receiving donations from generous supporters. After pooling our resources (a lot of time and effort) a few grants began to trickle in from the various organisations we had applied to.

Alas - the dilemma of finding a name! It took months. Everything we came up with seemed to be either taken, not cool enough, too spunky, too Italian, not musical enough, or too long. It had to be just right. "SONYC" settled it. During this whole ordeal it occurred to me what a colourful collection of personalities we had on board, and during our short time together this has proved to be an invaluable asset (and occasionally a curse) to the group in every way, most importantly in the process of music-making itself. Sometimes the best playing can result from those joking or passionate debates over interpretation. Other times it can just get irritating, when, all of a sudden, everyone wants to share their deep and meaningful insight. That's when the concertmaster reminds us that "we've got ten minutes to get through five more pieces. And the show's tonight!"

Standing, not sitting, should be our other name - we play much more energetically that way. The feeling of apathy which can sometimes creep into seated orchestral sessions seems to vanish when the whole body is involved with performance as with solo playing. This habit certainly simplifies the setting-up/packing away schlep of a new and under-funded ensemble.

Uniquely juxtaposed between the chamber and orchestral facets of orchestral playing, we found ourselves drawing on all our experience to pull it off. On one hand it was an extended string quintet, and on the other, a whole orchestral string section. With twelve violins, four violas, four celli and two basses, each player can be individually heard - no faking with that kind of exposure. With such an in-between size, however, arises the difficulty of gaining the right cohesion of sound. At times it is quite a necessary challenge for those wonderful sounds to blend.

We're the perfect size for musical blitzkrieg educational events. We have done it many times; break up into smaller chamber groups for the classroom, and reunite for assemblies, thus opening up a plethora of young ears to the possibilities of collective music-making. After playing a quintet or quartet medley of anything from Schubert to George Crumb for a class of 30 five-year olds, it's fun to watch their faces when we break out with a bass/violin blues duo! I discovered something very interesting during those educational outreach visits to the West; while many of the "developed world's"

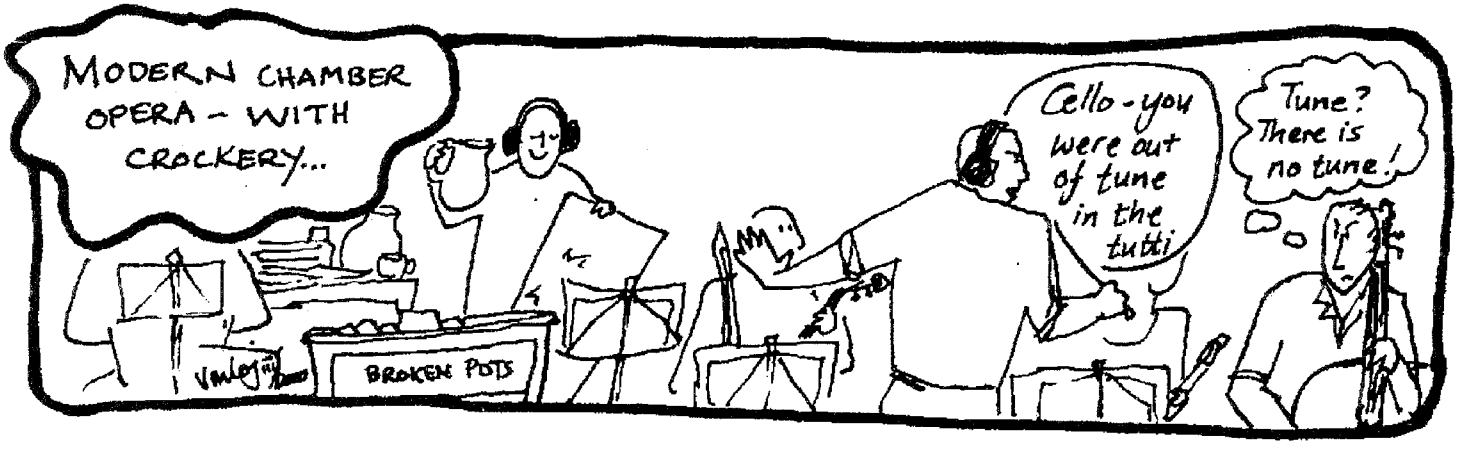
governments continue to obliterate art and music from the schools - despite all the scientific evidence showing that to do so seriously stunts a child's development, Utah's State Law requires them to be taught. The Mormons are onto something.

Being the first person or group to play a work fresh from the composer's hands is a unique experience. My most recent opportunity to do this came towards the end of 1999 with SONYC's official New York debut in the Merkin Concert Hall when we performed Chris Theophanidis's beautiful work: Visions and Miracles. The fact that Chris was a close friend of a SONYC member meant that he was doubly delighted to help us in any way he could, not to mention the added exposure for him and for us. Re-arranging his first and only (so far) string quartet for our larger ensemble, Chris attended nearly all of our rehearsals, hearing his piece evolve from something like a train with squeaky brakes to the lushly-textured Greek-influenced, vibrantly rhythmic piece of music seemingly transcending the dots on the page. Besides that, we played Musica Celestis by an older already famous New York composer, Aaron J Kernis. While Chris's piece presented some difficulties with rhythm, Aaron's work required many sometimes painful rehearsals involving intonation and sound colour. He attended our concert and was apparently pleased with our efforts.

Studded with the works of two New York composers, one famous and the other unknown, the rest of out debut concert was comprised of Vivaldi's Concerto for Four Violins and Elgar's Introduction and Allegro for String Quartet and String Orchestra, which show-cases the inner string quartet in a more modern take of the concertino style. A juggling act between four soloists, the rest of the group and tutti sections, both works draw upon the group-within-a group idea. Hardly foreign to us, this concept was made a lot easier as we drew upon our extensive experience playing together in smaller chamber music settings. One enjoyable moment in our Vivaldi preparations was the drawing of soloists' names from a hat (actually a rather unattractive plastic bag). Since any of the SONYC violinists are quite capable in soloist mode, we thought it to be the most diplomatic method of decision.

Tried and tested, it is a well-known fact that well known composers attract more bottoms to seats, especially Vivaldi. So while we still had a strong commitment to perform the works of New York composers, we also felt the need to reach beyond the inevitable friends/pets/relatives/colleagues audience. Since Aaron Kernis has quite a following in New York City, we felt his piece - apart from its inherent merits, was a good draw card. As was Chris's; his fans grow by the minute. If some audience members couldn't give a hoot about new music, I'm sure these works changed their minds, and further rewarded them with Vivaldi and Elgar. After the sweat and toil, we managed to almost fill the hall, which is pretty good for an unknown group. But these days it is near impossible to be blessed by the presence of a CRITIC - they're too busy ooohing and aaahing at some Carnegie Hall celebrity. So we still lack a New York Times critique, which should explain the title.

During my past two years in New York, I've had the privilege to work with some truly great artists and groups, ranging from Herbie Hancock to the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, but of them all, I have enjoyed working most with my colleagues from SONYC. If we are lucky, some entrepreneur will see the necessity for a more enriched musical life in the Land Down Under, and sponsor a SONYC tour in the near future. Meantime, we continue our fundraising, hours of rehearsals, endless e-mails, concertising, and teaching. So it may be a while before I get to hear Martha Argerich.



TUNING WOODWINDS

Joe Wolfe

Introduction

How is it that several good woodwind players can sit down together and play out of tune? Sometimes it is because the players don't listen carefully enough. Provided that they are already close to being in tune, then each player can listen and adjust. Other times it's because they haven't tuned up carefully enough. If the tuning is generally bad, then there is not much that you can do yourself by listening and adjusting, because you can't simultaneously lip up to match the bassoon and down to match the clarinet. Unless the tuning is reasonably close to start with, it will just be uncomfortable to play no matter what you do.

Some of the advice given here is common sense, some is musical tradition and a tiny part of it has the authority of my professional expertise in musical acoustics. I don't claim to have a great ear, nor to play always in tune, but I have thought about it and tried to improve the tuning of groups in which I've played.

Rehearsals

* Arrive early so that you can warm up before you go on stage (particularly oboe players). Bring a pencil so that you can put up and down arrows above notes (along with other markings) on your part.
* Double reed players can put some reeds in water as early as possible (for instance on the way to the gig) so that the reed is well soaked when you start to play.
* Get some warm, wet air into the instrument early - as soon as you have it assembled.
* Warm up with playing. Oboes obviously should not play sustained As while warming up, especially if strings are present. (The tuner will work on any note if you want to check your own tuning. Eb major is a good key for oboes to warm up with!)
* It may be worth playing through a movement or a substantial fraction of one before your tune, just for warming up.
* When it comes time to tune, decide to whom you will tune. An oboe is an obvious candidate, if she/he has a tuner. Otherwise, someone with absolute pitch will want to give an A. The A string on a cello is usually pretty reliable. Once the tuning instrument starts playing an A that lasts more than a few seconds, listen to it carefully for a few seconds, then play a note yourself. (It is annoying and boring for an oboist to play As for a long time while nobody does anything.) So be ready and start tuning quickly. Nevertheless, take the time to tune very carefully. Even if it takes a few minutes, no-one will begrudge it if the result is a group that plays in tune!
* First get one of your As in tune, carefully. Then tune several notes, especially A, D and F. The D minor tuning is partly tradition, but it has some good features. It allows you to check your tuning and to make a compromise tuning using different lengths of pipe for all of the instruments. D minor is good because D-A gives a nice fifth to tune, and F-A a major third. At some stage in the tuning one of the bassoons can tune a low D carefully and then hold it so that the section can tune both to that and the oboe A. (Listen down when tuning chords.) 1st and 2nd of each instrument should check octaves because they often play in octaves.

How to tune

Listen carefully to the oboe note, play yours and see whether it's high or low. If you cannot tell, lip it up and down and note which way you had to lip it to get it in tune. Then adjust your slide and do it again. When you think it is correct, try the Dm chord notes as described above. You will usually have to compromise on the tuning.

Flute: it is most important to get the top octave in tune. (The others are easier to lip up or down, and they are also easier to hide!) So tune your high and middle As, Fs and Ds, rather than the low ones. In fact the only reason to play the second space A is to make a mental note of how much you will be lipping it, along with the rest of your bottom octave notes.

Piccolo: what's the point in tuning the low A? How often is it written in your part? Tune the high ones - they're the ones that will be heard. Better play a loud (but short) high D and A now and get them in tune. They'll be loud and people

will hear you, but better than playing them in the concert out of tune.

Oboe: Second oboe should not play very long low As so that other players don't get confused over which A to tune to. Listen, play a short one, lip it up or down and adjust. Oboe 2 especially can make use of the other notes (the higher As, Ds and Fs). When the D minor chord is going and reasonably well in tune, Oboe 1 should check the middle A and the Ds and Fs as well, especially the high D and F - on my oboe the high F is sensitive to which reed I use.

Cor anglais: the tuning A (written E) is one of the worst notes on most Cors. If I play this note and it sounds in tune, then my instrument is badly flat. Tune the low (written) E instead, and the As and Cs. In fact the only reason for playing the tuning note during tuning is to remind yourself how far you have to lip that note down.

Clarinet: getting the long B in tune doesn't give you an idea of whether your throat notes are in tune. So check the throat G, and also check the low B and G. Especially check the high notes in the E minor chord.

Bassoon: the main thing is to have the right crook in: moving the crook within the range of the whisper key is for fine adjustment. You always end up doing most of the tuning with the chops anyway. Some bassoonists say that the only reason they play notes during tuning is because conductors would get worried if they found out that the bassoon can't adjust the tuning on the instrument. But there is a reason: you need to remind yourself how much you have to lip the different registers for the particular reed and crook you're playing. Which note you "tune" depends a lot on your bassoon. On mine, the standard fingerings for both A4 and A3 are both flat. So I mainly tune the low A and the Ds and Fs.

Section: If a bassoon plays a low or middle D and can get it nicely in tune with the oboe, then the rest of the winds can tune D minor chords, as discussed above.

Doubling: if you don't get a chance to tune your doubling instrument during the wind tuning in an orchestra, tune it during the brass tuning. Remember to breathe into it whenever you get a chance in the several minutes before you use it.

Playing in tune

Nothing beats listening! Conductors often say "listen down" so winds should listen especially to the bassoons. Bassoons are not always the most reliable of references, so this advice should be taken *cum grano salis*. But listen to your chords and, when in doubt, move about. If the chord doesn't sound right, lip up or down until it does. A chord whose mistuning varies with time is more interesting than one that remains permanently discordant. Once you have worked out which way you needed to lip a note in a particular chord, put an arrow (up or down) in pencil on your part, to remind you which way you had to lip to get that note in tune. Due to different combinations of instruments playing, and different contexts and keys, it could be that sometimes you have to lip a particular note up, and then elsewhere lip it down.

Remember that you are in a team and, if the chord sounds wrong, the whole group sounds lousy. The moral satisfaction that you were "right" (whatever that may mean) doesn't count.

Concerts

Everything from rehearsal tuning applies. It shouldn't have to be a longer or more careful tuning than rehearsal, if anything it can be shorter if you have rehearsed well how to tune

quickly and efficiently. But if it takes a while, this is better than playing out of tune. Flutes and piccolo should not be afraid to tune up their high notes: these are much more important than the low ones.

In concerts, warm up backstage, but continue to warm up on stage. Not only does it keep the instrument warm and wet, but it's better than sitting quietly, getting nervous and wondering whether your reed is still working. It's also a good ambience for the audience: that busy broad band sound of lots of instruments playing in different keys. It's part of the anticipatory excitement of a concert. When warming up, however, don't play your big solo that the audience will hear later - or at least don't play it so that it can be heard.

Oboes should not play A's while warming up, no matter how many enquiring A's and looks they get from strings and brass. There will be only one official tuning, just before the conductor comes on. Ideally, the leader will allow warming up till then so that the orchestra can tune and then have the minimum time of sitting quietly.

Homework

You probably know the answers to these questions. You certainly need to know them, so it is worthwhile just checking again to see if the answers have changed since last time you thought about them.

* What notes on your instruments are most out of tune, and which way? Make a list of the worst half dozen or more.
* What alternative fingerings can you use on the bad ones? Remember that some fingerings are better at PP and others better at FF.
* Are your octaves narrow or wide? How are they affected by the reed? Do they get narrower with a soft reed, or as the reed gets wetter?

You can find out the answers by playing octaves and scales slowly and listening. You can also check with a tuning meter, or by comparing with a (well-tuned) keyboard. Playing octaves with your section partner(s) is a good exercise. Tune together on one note, then one player goes up the octave, or what should be an octave.

Work out with another player (especially your session partner in an orchestra) what his/her problematic notes are. When you have an interval to play together, you can compromise. If you know she/he has trouble getting a particular note low enough, you can lower yours a little.

Flutes: check your cork. The flute has an enormous advantage here over other winds. You probably have a centre marker on your cleaning rod, but you can experiment with this position. Pushing the cork in raises the pitch of all notes, but it raises the pitch of high notes more than that of low notes. Pulling it out (just screw the crown clockwise) lowers the high notes more than the low. So if your octaves are wide, you can pull the cork out. If narrow, push it in. If you move the cork to get your octaves sounding like octaves, you then have to change your normal tuning slide position.

This article is available on the Musical Acoustics site at:

www.phys.unsw.edu.au/~jw/music

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BOOK REVIEW - An Equal Music, by Vikram Seth

Joanne and Michael McGrath

"An Equal Music" is a beautifully composed book. In this novel Seth immerses the reader in the world of the string quartet, classical music, Tonini violins and Scordatura violas.

Vikram Seth's love of music goes back to his earlier training in Indian classical music. However, when writing his first novel "A Suitable Boy", he found himself becoming ever more interested in western classical music, and especially the songs of Schubert, which he enjoys singing.

Because of this love of music, Seth was initially hesitant to use it for the theme of a novel, and said "I can't write about music, it's my refuge". This hesitation was overcome when he realised the intriguing structure, complexities, and unique interactions possible in a string quartet.

The story is narrated by Michael Holme, the protagonist and second violin of the Maggiore Quartet. Michael is an intense, complex, and neurotic character who is passionately obsessed with Julia, a pianist, who he met while they were both students in Vienna. At the opening of the novel, ten years have passed and they have lost touch. For Michael it is a bitter separation. When the relationship is rekindled, they travel together, with the quartet, to Vienna and Venice. She is torn between her old love and the love she now has for her husband and child. Moreover, they both have to confront their own crises as musicians; Michael's emotional breakdown and Julia's ensuing deafness.

Michael rediscovers a lost Beethoven string quintet and his lost lover at about the same time; a parallel which might prove too much for some readers. The Maggiore Quartet also decide to play Bach's "Art of Fugue" in a version in which it is necessary to tune down the middle strings, the second violin playing the viola part in some sections, and a viola has to be specially constructed that can be tuned down a fourth. The reasons for this were not made very clear. (This work has been arranged for string quartet by Klemm and Weymer)

Another hard part to reconcile musically is the performance of the Trout Quintet including a hearing impaired pianist who leads the Quintet, but relies on cues from the double bass.

This is not a book for the reader seeking tidy resolutions. There is much that is frustrating in the claustrophobic world of the novel. Much of Seth's best writing describes interacting tensions, personal and technical, between the four brilliantly-drawn members of the quartet. Their darting, seemingly aimless dialogues are shot through with flashes of spite, humour, generosity, and understanding, in the way of small, close-knit groups.

Besides Michael, there is the homosexual first violinist with his caustic wit, Helen, his new-age sister is the violist, and Billy is the plump cellist with a taste for chocolate biscuits. Billy arrives late for rehearsal.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'll never be late again. Never ever."

"Have a chocolate biscuit, Billy," says Helen, affectionately.

"Get a mobile phone, says Piers, in a lazy-peremptory prefect-like tone.

"Why?" asks Billy, "I'm not a pimp or a prostitute."

The parts of the novel about making music are also quite interesting. Some rehearsal techniques are described. For example, each rehearsal begins with a slow three octave scale with the instruments in unison, without vibrato, in a key depending on what they are about to play. They make a point of not looking at each other as they play so that no-one appears to lead. Of the process, Michael says:

"No matter how fraught our lives have been over the last couple of days, no matter how abrasive our disputes about people or politics, or visceral our differences about what we are to play, and how to play, we are reminded that we are, when it comes to it, one."

"An Equal Music" is not a flawless novel, but is a fascinating read for the chamber musician.

MY OTHER OBSESSION...

David Mathers

...is... road running. What's that got to do with music? The less the better, in the cause of a balanced life. On the other hand. . .

Running the City to Surf or performing at Kirribilli - it seems like a good idea at the time, there's a lot of hard work in the middle, and you feel good about yourself when you've achieved something.

As a wind player, I can only benefit from big demands on my lungs. Ros (my music teacher, Roslyn Dunlop) says, "You've got to be fit to play the clarinet." Ros says, "Support from here..." the abdominal region... "not here" ...halfway up the chest. Next Sunday I'm in a fun run - eight kilometres out and coming up a steep path through a reserve (Pidding Park, Ryde). I feel my lungs going from lock to lock, like hitting something solid with each gulp. It's a bit scary. Hey Ros, I think, now I'm getting down to the gut. Then I think, will I be a better runner when Ros has finished with me? And will I be a better clarinettist when I can crack the sixty-minute City to Surf?

I'm out in front of the concert room at Kirribilli. I've said my well chosen words of amateur musicology. I make eye contact with the crew - Haydn seated, fingers on the fingerboard; Rohini in the corner, pensive, bow raised; Gail poised over the keys. They're all looking at me. The audience is looking too. I try not to think about it. There's only one thing for it. Eyeball the opening notes. . . big breath. . . up comes the bell of the clarinet. . . and . . .hit it!

A crisp morning in (normally) August. Park Street packed with people in shorts and singlets. The crowd hushes, human energy about to surge forth in a mighty celebration of simply being alive, fourteen exhilarating kilometres of pounding feet and pumping hearts to the timing gates at Bondi. It all starts at ten o'clock. Forget it. At ten o'clock it's all over bar the fine tuning. At ten you've put in the kilometres or you haven't - the laps, the long slow distance, the hillwork. So when did the real starter's gun go? The Old Man fired the gun the night he and Mum got together and drew up the genetic blueprint that set the limits into which I could expand. Everything I've done since has either helped me realise that potential or compromised it. The result I get at Bondi depends on the blueprint they gave me and the work I've done on it. No surprises.

When breath meets reed in the concert room my fate is sealed. The next few minutes reap the reward of those Saturday trips to Kellyville (Gail's place, where we put it together), late nights behind closed shutters practising my own part - repetitions, working up the florid bits from a pace I can handle to one that might excite an audience. Every note I've ever played goes into those few minutes, every attention I've given to tone, tonguing, pitch, phrasing, and managed to internalise from conscious monitoring to something more automatic. Or not. I reap the reward and suffer the punishment. I think of those sheets of exercises Ros gave me which are so good for me and so easy to push aside on the way to more interesting fare. I think of the work I should have done with the pitch gadget to get my top notes in tune. I think of.... hell - it just goes on.

Once you stand in front of an audience it all goes. Nev Thomas (Clarinet Society) says, "Everything goes but your preparation." I've got news for you Nev - I can go blank on things I've practiced to saturation. Another Nev concept is more useful - practice at being nervous. I want to run the Gold Coast Marathon. I'll never know if I can go the distance till I finally stumble across the line. (Actually I ran it in 1993 and 1997, but I was younger then.) Meantime I turn out for every half-marathon and longer so when I face up to 42.195k I've broken the back of it. Some musical performances are less threatening. If I work my way up the hierarchy of fear, I can reach the big one with a handle on my nerves. That's performance sophistication. That's the theory anyway.

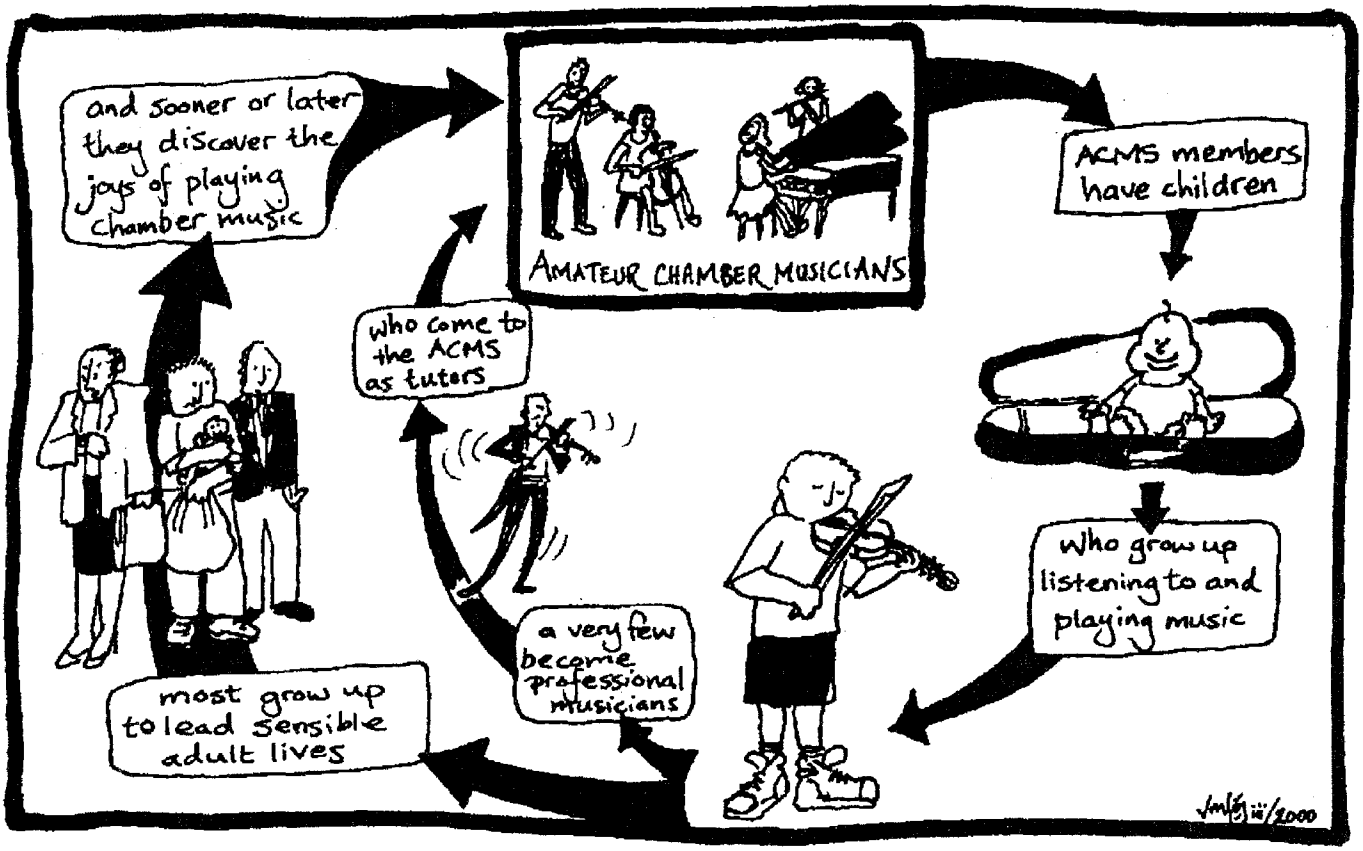
One year I was lapped in the *Herald* Half Marathon. I was huffing and puffing along Kent St for the first time, gasping for every atom of oxygen I could lay my lungs to, forcing my legs to keep up cadence and stride length, concentrating on the best looking bottom I could see bobbing along in front of me. (Honestly - with no other intent than passing it. If you're going to focus on a short term goal, you might as well find one you can enjoy). I was doing it hard. Then two Kenyan boys came striding past. . . flowing, really. It looked so effortless. And they had to be going at least twice as fast as me.

When I wrote this I was working on the slow movement of Brahms' Quintet - a beautiful relaxed thing. In the midst of all this tranquillity you're doing eleven or twelve notes to a quaver beat. I do it over and over to etch the motor program into my brain. I take it down to demisemiquavers to get it even. I slowly ease it up on the metronome. I do everything I can think of to get it right. Then I see the black bit coming up and panic. Once in a while I put on the CD to hear what it really sounds like. And there it is - ten-plets, eleven-plets. . . the lot, all the right notes in the right place, and sweet and effortless as the song of a bird.

Before we leave the *Herald* Half let's move along a bit. Coming down to Mrs Macquarie's Chair for the second time. I lift my mind above my feet and take in green parkland, sparkling blue water, bridge beyond. . . I say to the person beside me, "If you take your mind off the hard work for a bit, that's pretty nice." And maybe there's a parallel for musicians in that too.

At the Wollongong dinner one year I shared a table with another runner and someone who wasn't. "What's the City to Surf got to do with anything?" he said. It was funny coming from an amateur practitioner of the most abstract of art forms. What, I sometimes wonder, has anything got to do with anything. I think my last words are going to be, 'What was that all about?' Until then I make sense of life in terms of whatever more or less artificial constructs appeal to me. The things one runs with (plays along with?) will be those one can do in a supportive social context. I find the running scene congenial. In music I've found enough people I can relate to among the sometimes difficult personalities. In both music and running you get nothing for nothing. Those who need instant gratification will dismiss as boring the things we do in hope of making some incremental impression on a long-term goal, be that practice or training.

Notes mean more than mere sounds. Collectively they can express the gamut of human emotions. In some subliminal way everything I am and everything I've ever done inform the way I interpret the dots. You too. One small part of that is the camaraderie of the road, the exhilaration of being physically extended in beautiful surroundings like Lake Gillawarna or the harbourside at Pyrmont, the agony of forcing myself home totally spent in the Gold Coast Marathon. . . a million memories from fifteen years of road running lurking in the back of my brain, to come blowing out the end of my clarinet every time I play.



AMATEURISH REMINISCENCES

David Oldroyd

There's a lovely book, written by two amateur Germans from the 1920s, called *The Well-Tempered String Quartet*. I don't now have a copy, but I recall a memorable passage in it that went something like this (it was in the days, it seems, when cellists were in short supply): *Let your children learn the cello. Nothing but the cello. Every evening of their lives they will be provided with tea and cakes. And they will marry early.* I have always taken this profound dictum as my guide to the good life. And to an extent it proved successful. At least, I married early. (But my two sons were unenthusiastic about learning any instrument, be it piccolo or double bass. Perhaps my grandson?)

Anyway, I started chamber music early. My mother was a piano teacher and my father (an industrial chemist by trade) was a good amateur violinist and violist. They put me to the cello when I was about ten. So I played piano trios at home from an early age, becoming enthusiastic from the start when we tried Haydn's *Gipsy Rondo*, in which there were two lines that I could play perfectly and my notes made the harmony fit nicely: GGGG, GGGG, GGGG, etc.! From there we moved to harder things, so that I knew most of the standard chamber music repertoire by the end of my teens, especially trios. I had a good quartet at school and we gave respectable concerts. But I never had any idea of becoming a professional. A much too risky and tea-and-cakeless profession, thought I!

We lived in England, by the way, and there was a splendid music camp for teenagers down in Dorset every year. It was our custom - not frowned on by that amiable organisation, British Railways - to commandeer the guard's van of the train down from Waterloo and play the Schubert octet therein. At the camp there was much fun, like: how many people could play a single instrument simultaneously? The answer was four. The cellist again had the advantage. I could clasp both an instrument and a girl on my knees. We shared the fingerwork, and two assistants wielded the bow like a two-handled saw. The results with the big tune of *Marche Slav* were outstandingly good and we won a prize for our efforts.

But there were serious things too. We learnt quite a number of important orchestral pieces; and once, as a marvellous act of charity, the violin tutor, David Martin, grabbed three of us to make up a quartet, saying he had to perform it on the radio the following week and wanted to try it through. *That* was an experience and a half: Haydn travelling faster than the speed of light!

Later I graduated to the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain—a truly extraordinary institution. It was founded entirely at the initiative of a remarkable woman, Ruth (later Dame) Railton. She did all the auditioning and organisation and got distinguished musicians to tutor us and conduct. But she was a tyrant (albeit good-looking)! If you dropped a rubber (or eraser, as our American friends would say) in rehearsal you got put back a desk. A dropped pencil would see you on the back desk, and a messed-up passage would mean you would not be invited back. The whole orchestra was re-auditioned every year. It was funded by the *Daily Mirror* and Ruth so dearly loved her creation that she took the precaution of marrying the proprietor, Cecil Harmsworth King, to ensure continuation of funding from an unlikely source (the gutter press). Anyway, the organisation thrived.

We had a wonderful time as teenagers. It was a splendid marriage market, through which I met my wife Jane (who then played the oboe but now prefers tennis). At the first rehearsal, the orchestra just sat down and read through Berlioz's *Benvenuto Cellini* - to perfection as it seemed to me. Everyone was playing their parts properly, all in tune and time. And it just got better and better therefrom. Everyone wanted to be in the orchestra, so the standard was terrific; even though we all hated that tyrant, Ruth(less). Every evening in the dormitory there was a ritual chanting: "We hate her. We hate her". Even the conductors hated her a bit. I recall a row at Birmingham Town Hall when all the basses couldn't fit on the stage, and Ruth(less) wanted to turf two of them off for the concert. But the conductor, Walter Susskind, thought he could see a way of arranging them so that they could all play. Ruth(less), who always expected to have her own way, challenged him. It was an invincible force meeting an immovable object. *"Who's conducting zis b----y orchestra, you or me?"* asked the invincible force, with its pronounced Central European accent! The immovable object proved abject and mobile and retreated to the back of the hall to weep on the shoulder of William Pleeth, the cello tutor. The orchestra chortled. Strictly we should all have gone to the back desks, but that was logically impossible. There was much rejoicing in the dormitories that night. And maybe Susskind wasn't asked to conduct again?

So on the face of it, there was strict discipline. But you can't keep kids down. I remember one of the horn players playing a concerto using a fire hose in the hostel in Bradford; and some of us from the cello section played the Schubert two-cello quintet on five cellos in Brussels. Riotous days (and nights)!

So I leaned something about chamber and orchestral music from an early age, and the value of discipline and concentration in both. Later, I did a lot of playing in Cambridge, and subsequently in London with the Chelsea Opera Group. Colin Davis, who was still conductor when I joined around 1960, founded the Chelsea Opera Group in 1950. At that time Carl Pini was leader. The group is still going strong, and continues to give concert performances of rarely performed operas. Carl is still prominent in the Sydney musical scene, and Sir Colin has of course gone from strength to strength in a brilliant career. He still has a love of Berlioz, and I remember doing *Romeo and Juliet* with him all those years ago. It's a pleasure to remember being associated with such brilliant musicians. Sir Colin has always had a broad repertoire, and I gained much from the COG experience.

So we sailed to New Zealand in 1962, and then moved to Sydney in 1969. In NZ, I got to know more repertoire, my wife and I playing in the Christchurch Civic Orchestra. It was sometimes a bit zany there too, as when we did a pop concert on a Sunday afternoon with Dobbs Franks conducting. We "did" the *1812 Overture* with soldiers from the local barracks firing blanks into large oil drums to simulate cannons. They synchronised well, and the roof nearly lifted. But in New Zealand - as in Sydney, but unlike Europe - there were few amateur quartets that played together week after week for many years. This was one of the great disappointments of moving to the southern hemisphere.

There are, however, many long-lived amateur orchestras in Sydney. My wife and I worked for maybe fifteen years helping to make the Kuringai Philharmonic Orchestra a goer, and subsequently I've played in the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra for several years. Indeed, I've played in many groups in the city, and with many conductors. Let me tell you a few anecdotes from the KPO. We had highs and lows. At our zenith we once even played the *Rite of Spring* in the Opera House. But then there was the terrible occasion when we did a Sunday afternoon concert

in the City, when, as ever, we were short of first violins. The concert was supposed to start at 2.00 p.m. But where was our leader? Well, she was still at home, getting ready in her accustomed well-organised manner. She duly arrived at 2.45 p.m. *Where have you been? We had to start without you!* Indeed, where was she? Sad to tell, she had forgotten that she had to change her watch for summer time! It was not a good concert. The strangest concert we ever gave, but also one of the best, was with a guest conductor from Japan, with "Zen tendencies". We played Tschaikowsky No. 6, which, as you will recall, begins in melancholy fashion with divisi double basses. At the first rehearsal, the conductor turned to the basses until (unaccustomed) they had stopped talking, tuning, putting on rosin, and eyeing the first flute. He said not a word, until: "Why haven't you started?" "You didn't give us a beat", said those base basses. "That's quite irrelevant" answered the conductor (though with less polished diction, which I cannot now remember). "I have started; so you should have too". The base basses were flabbergasted. They had never been spoken to thus. Being a rare species, they expected to be treated with respect, regardless of their lack of punctuality, indifferent intonation, and incurable loquacity.

But now the conductor had their attention and the high moral ground. He got them all breathing in unison (the Zen part). And somehow they did all begin together, though no one knew how it was done. They were, of course, actually concentrating - something to which they were wholly unaccustomed. There was much excitement on the day of the concert. Would the conductor give an indication? Would it all be done by smoke and mirrors? Or by co-ordination of diaphragms? In the event, there was a barely discernible rising of half a hair of one of the conductor's eyebrows. The basses were ready. They played together. The composer's ideas magically emerged.

Then, when we got to the loud bits, the conductor (I do wish I could remember his name!) transformed into a tiger escaped from a cage. He cut the air with his baton as with a Samurai sword. Given our amateur capabilities (or lack thereof), it was a tremendous performance and a great evening. And the following week our regular conductor, Chris Nicolls (who could have been a great conductor too, but always managed to slip and cut himself just when things were going well) did perhaps an even better performance. I don't know whether it was the breathing exercises, or what, but something got into Chris that night. I guess he wanted to show that he could do just as well as the Zen tiger, if not better!

Reminiscing again, quite the worst performance that I ever had a bow in (and for the disaster in which I was chiefly responsible) was during my first year in Sydney. The conductor Roger Covell asked me whether I would help out in a performance of *Dido and Aeneus* at a little festival at Orange. A group of players and singers was to meet one Friday lunchtime in Sydney, take a bus to Orange, get there about 4 p.m., have a single rehearsal, starting at about 7 p.m., going on till about 10.30 p.m., a good night's sleep, a lazy day in Orange, and then the performance would be in the evening of the Saturday; home again on Sunday. It was mostly a group of professiionals. It should have been all right. 'Dido' is not all that difficult.

Well, I couldn't catch the bus, as I was giving a lecture that Friday at noon. I was bought an air ticket and was in Orange about 3.30 p.m. I went to the hall and waited for the musicians to arrive; and waited; and waited . . . Eventually they arrived about 11 p.m. Some people had not arrived on time (almost certainly the bass player, but I can't be sure now), and the bus had got tangled in the weekend traffic on that b----y Parramatta Road. The obvious thing to do was to go to bed and have the rehearsal at about half past nine the next morning. But unions ruled in those days; and their rules ruled over all common sense. The soloists insisted that they could not have a rehearsal on the same day as the performance. So we started rehearsing at about 11.30 p.m., and finished at about 4 a.m. the next morning. It was a ghastly night, and no one was fit to do anything the next day.

So came the performance. You will recall that, near the end, the cello continuo plays a repeated sequence of mournful notes (about 30 times) as Dido is carried by six men, hands above their heads, and placed on the funeral pyre. Well I don't know whether I played those bars 29 or 31 times, but I do know I was too tired to count to 30 correctly, and our conductor was seemingly unaware of the problem. So the whole thing fell to pieces. The orchestra totally collapsed and poor heavy Dido was truly up in the air, trying to falsify Newton's law of gravity. The bearers struggled to keep her there while the conductor and the continuo player (yours truly) struggled to find their bearings. We eventually lost the struggle completely, Newton won, and Dido was dropped onto the stage. Probably this was much more entertaining to the good citizens of Orange than anything that Purcell could have conceived,

but they must have formed a low opinion of the competence and/or sanity of Sydney musicians. I forget what happened after that. It was all a sleep-deprived blur. Anyway, that was the worst moment in my musical career. Fortunately, the conductor and I are still good friends, many years later.

The best amateur violinist I knew in Sydney was Morice Shaw, who taught architecture at Sydney University. As I understand, he'd been a violin prodigy in Melbourne, but he took up architecture. (In fact, he had a considerable reputation as an architect, early on winning a prize for a house made of beer bottles and old bricks!)

Morice bought a cottage in Glebe, knocked down walls, leaving jagged brick edges, on which candles were placed and the wax dripped down in interesting shapes. He cut off the plaster in great sweeps as if he were Henri Matisse; created a rain forest in the living room (with a waterfall from a pipe in the ceiling); and climbed a ladder to his nest under the rafters, where he bedded himself (and possibly others for all I know) on cushions. He had his architecture students practicing dance so that they could get an idea of space. (Whether that helped I know not.) I tell you, Morice was an eccentric, but he was a tremendous violinist when he was in the right mood.

Morice was one of the most eccentric and lovable, and original, but exasperating, people I ever knew. I had many good evenings with him and we did a memorable performance of *The Archduke* in the Great Hall at Sydney University; also a splendid rendition of *Brahms' 1st piano quartet* at the Armidale music school, with Alice Carrard (a pupil of Bartok, and still alive and well I believe at over 100), and Barbara Robinson. All that was many years ago now.

But suddenly Morice gave up his life in Sydney to grow vegies in Queensland (which he may still do to this day?). So he had to sell his house. He got it advertised as the 'house of the week' in some newspaper and prospective purchasers were to ring and call one Saturday afternoon. To give the right atmosphere, Morice thought chamber music in the background would help sales. So he asked Molly Rodgers, Barbara Robinson and me to come and play something conducive to vending. We were to be colour co-

ordinated; so I was directed to purchase a sort of purplish shirt for the occasion, which I did. (I quite liked it and wore it again thereafter more than once.) We settled down to play, looking as well as sounding good. But the phone never rang and poor Morice got more and more agitated. Eventually the three of us had a cup of tea, commiserated, and went home. It was a minor Shakespearian tragedy! Morice's phone was later discovered to be out of order. So not a soul came. It took him quite a while to sell the house after that, the demand for soggy floorboards in a living-room rain forest being a bit limited, even in Glebe. Perhaps such details would have passed unnoticed if the colour co-ordination and a bit of Mozart had been available? — Well, I hope we'll meet again one day, Morice. You were a great loss to Sydney!

So what is amateur chamber music all about? Those who are perfectionists - like Morice - may give it all away. For myself, I like the friendships it brings (along with the early marriage, tea and cakes, etc.). I want to create as well as listen; and I'm not a perfectionist. But sometimes the Platonic form of the ideal group, to which I have long aspired, seems a very distant entity. Indeed, sad to say, it seems further away now than when I was but a lad.

ANAEMIA

Nils Korner

Have you ever wished that you could look straight into people's minds - work out what's going on behind that smiling face? You know, make a really cool appraisal of your new acquaintance's personality, just like the tests those clever psychologists use to decide whether you are right for the job. I suppose *"please fill out this questionnaire"* wouldn't go down too well, but what about subtly steering the conversation towards a few incredibly well chosen questions so that the specimen under scrutiny doesn't even notice that he or she is being analysed. The score sheet is ready for an infallible assessment - the introversion index, the passive/aggressive aggregate, bleating sheep or fearless leader, loyal team player or conceited grandstander, all are weighed in the balance of science. Those psychologists have got it worked out to a T.

The trouble is that it never works - for me anyway. Did I tell you about the special meeting our Managing Director called to introduce us to the Visiting Overseas Executive of the "X "Cruise Line, who was offering our Company a chance to take part in a brilliant new venture. He had smooth silvery hair and a Swedish accent and all 23 of us watched with a dreamy look as he showed the slides of the newly refurbished Luxury Ocean Liner, which our Company could buy for a very reasonable price. The slides were fantastic - the staterooms, the promenade deck, the dining room, the swimming pool! We would cruise the Mediterranean on what was going to be our very own ship for free. If the members of the Company had no use for it from time to time there was a fortune to be made by letting it out to the tourists on charter. The ship was being fitted out in Rotterdam or Kiel and would be ready for the summer.

We met again the next day to decide on the offer. Sure, you needed the guts to take a little risk, but imagine dropping in on one of those marvelous Greek Islands on a warm summer's night! The Overseas Executive welcomed our questions about the finance, the ship, the crew, and the ports of call; he understood that we needed to know all those details. We fired away and the answers rolled off his tongue. If we accepted he could have the documents on our Managing Director's desk the next morning at 9AM and clinch the deal. But we would have to be quick, he said, or we would miss our chance. The tickets and hotel reservations for the first Cruise were not a problem. Nothing was a problem!

The next day there was also nothing on our MD's desk at 9AM - or at 10 and 11! He rang the Visiting Overseas Executive's Hotel. The VOE had checked out that morning. Later on we heard that he had got word that Interpol had tracked him down!

It was not the high point of our Managing Director's career. I don't know if he contemplated resignation, but he wrote us all a letter of abject apology. We were so pleased to have got out of it unscathed that we let him stay on. Soon afterwards the MD started driving around in a Rolls Royce, but he assured us that it was second hand, so we didn't give it too much thought.

Well that's the trouble with all that psychological scoring. Take the Confidence Index - it might work for some, but in my case the only people who *really* inspire me with confidence usually turn out to be confidence men.

Don't despair though! Fortunately there is one personality test that has almost miraculous powers - Chamber Music! Have you noticed that? Let me tell you how I discovered it - perhaps it will get us a Research and Development Grant!

I suppose almost all of you have at some stage or another played quartets with Daniel - it's a part of music education in this town. If somebody in his group moves to the country or gets sick or worse - heaven forbid! - and you are next in line. Daniel will give you a call and you are on. A certain minimal skill is required or you don't last beyond one evening, but just as important you have to know your place. Daniel makes the decisions - what to play, how fast or slow, how loud or soft, do we repeat. He is a fine player and an excellent musician, music is his life, so there is no problem. When my turn came I was new to the game and was honoured to play second fiddle to Daniel's first and to be asked back after the first evening. Our viola player was a charming, unpretentious but experienced Hungarian, Charles was our determined cellist. We had a lot of fun and I learned a great deal.

One evening we arrived at Daniel's house to find that we were in for a special treat - a visitor from the USA, and what was more a violist. Violists are rare and much sought after and perhaps this makes it a bit harder for them than for most people to stay modest. Our visitor was a big man who had found Daniel on these distant shores through the Amateur Chamber Music Players Inc. Directory. We gave him the full reverential treatment and were delighted at the opportunity to play those marvelous works with two violas, the Mozart string quintets, particularly the G minor and C major. We unpacked our instruments, and whilst we tuned he regaled us with the story of his travels. He liked to talk, had been everywhere. An affable man.

Then we started the G minor quintet. There seemed to be a very loud viola sound from the first bar. It was loud in the *forte* passages, it was loud in the *piano*. It drowned the first violin and all the rest of us together. It was loud in the *allegro* and in the *andante*. Our visitor was determined to be heard.

Finally Daniel could not contain himself any longer. *Do you think we should try to observe the dynamics a bit more?* he asked cautiously. *Especially in the piano passages - we seem to be a little bit unbalanced .*

Unbalanced ? said the visitor. *I think we should all be heard.*

Yes but especially in Mozart, when it says piano we should hear the melodic line above the accompaniment.

That sounds pretty anaemic he said. *I don't play Mozart anaemic!!*

We looked at the floor, at the ceiling. We didn't dare look at each other. We started again from where we had stopped. There was a loud viola sound.

No danger of anaemia, though our musical souls bled! But we had our visitor worked out to a T.

All characters in this story are fictitious. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

CLASSICAL OR MODERN - A MISSIONARY POSITION

Louis Otonicar

The scenario - a typical playing day. A group member suggests a contemporary piece of music. Worse than that, an Australian composition. It is a worrying thought. The maker of this outrageous suggestion may well have a death wish.

All eyes are on that misguided individual. Someone registers a protest (probably the first violin) Some agree reluctantly, but the violist is still contemplating the unneeded expanse of at least three of his instrument's strings. The cellist is *stumm,* not due to a moment's indecision, but to sleep apnoea. Inevitably, the group continues with an Austro-German classic.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with playing "legitimised" music! Some is really quite nice in a soothing sort of way. So is a lukewarm enema, but you don't have to share it. Probably nowhere in the world is a people more neglectful of their own music than in Australia. The absence of Australian compositions from performance programmes during the early days of the conservatorium, and even for the opening of the Opera House, attest to this. Things may be changing now, but only slowly.

So how did European music, and specifically Austro-German music infiltrate into the Australian landscape? First one needed a method of efficient distribution. This was provided by Mr Gutenberg. A resident of Germany, he was not a musician, but a mechanic, the inventor and builder of the first practical printing device. Originally intended to duplicate biblical text, the principles were later adapted to print music. Thus it was possible to effect easy distribution. All that was necessary was to instill into the population a burning desire to purchase printed music, whether they played instruments or not.

Publishers with vision saw to that. They sought the endorsement of bishops and popes. If it was good for the clergy, it was good for the country. Printing was the new El Dorado, and you didn't have to go to South America to look for it. At one stage it was more popular than *Weisswurst and Semmel.* Supply preceded demand, as it has in the recent information age.

Suddenly there were more composers of music than veterinarians. A fairly large proportion hung out in German-speaking Europe and protected themselves from hostile take-overs by establishing strict rules. Encouraged by their publishers, they used a multitude of dynamic and phrase markings to ensure that their music sounded exactly the same regardless of by whom or where it was played. Nearly all composers used the *da capo al fine* facility. this allowed composers to extend their output even when stumped for inspiration. If all failed, there was the *al segno al coda* - the ultimate safety net. So copious was their output that a serial number system was devised to place a composer's work into chronological order. Although some suspected that a given work was assigned several serial numbers, it would have been socially incorrect to bring this to the attention of the authorities.

There were rules for virtually everything at that time. Even sexual activity had to adhere to convention. All lights had to be off at night, with no noise, lest a neighbour should call the ambulance, fearing someone was hurt.

During this time the world experienced the establishment of personality cults. Thus when Bach flicked his quill of excess ink, some fan catalogued it into the *Bachwerkeverzeichnis.* On a good day, Bach wrote interesting stuff. On a bad day, he wrote suites for unaccompanied cello. One could suffer a hernia just listening to it - let alone playing it. It is reported that Casals played them daily - he also died celibate. Even Mozart could not get a handle on it sometimes. Try listening to his *Gran Partita* for thirteen winds. Sit through that one without a nosebleed!

Let's be frank. Two hundred years of composing produced what is really only intimate drawing-room music. Often tedious, irritatingly repetitive, and often just plain boring. The inevitable result of eating *Kartoffelknodel* and wearing tight trousers. Both are constrictive, and in their defence it has to be said that, as composers of integrity, they had little to be inspired by if folk music was a source of inspiration. The folk music drawn on was *Schuplattler*, this being a type of tribal dance where the prime object is to slap as many cheeks as possible (and not only on the face) whilst emitting a spine-chilling howl in falsetto voice resembling the anguished call of a constipated hyena, or something like that. Composers with a pronounced degree of nostalgia included it frequently, renamed as *Ländler*.

If distance is a consideration, Australia is a most unlikely destination for this music. During the early years of the 20th century Australia probably had a vibrant, if perhaps raucous, folk music. Like all good folk music it could be danced to, marched to, and raised pints to. Simultaneously, European music underwent a metamorphosis. Two segments of European society faced serious downsizing; musicians who practised diatonic scales, and who were unsure and/or afraid of electricity, and stockists of Haydn string quartets. The answer was to move both to distant shores. South America was considered, Carlos Gardel was already well established there. Asia was understandably suspicious of Austrians bearing gifts. Africa was unsafe, but Australia was not. Masquerading as engineers and geologists, people came with their violins and chamber music scores. Within a few years, we had a musical tradition, and a hundred years worth of printed music, of which a portion has found its way into the ACMS library.

So where does Australian music come into all this? It doesn't. The writer was recently involved with songs by Miram Hyde, turning the pages for the pianist. Although they were written in the 1930's they are as yet unpublished, but after hearing these one would not want to go back to *Frauenliebe und Leben.*

So what about contemporary music in general. Why play it? For one, it's generally of short duration. If you don't like it, you don't have to suffer it for long. It's not going to put you on a cosmic train to eternity, rather it may evoke some strange responses. A rush of excitement, a burst of adrenaline, maybe a headache, how do you get into the groove and the feel of it? Perhaps one of the best ways is to play with a clarinettist. In the right hands, a clarinet can make *Shepherd on the Rock* sound like *Der kleine Harlequin.*

Listening to contemporary music is not recommended. Mostly it is players' music. Perhaps not unlike jumping out of aeroplanes. Unbearably exciting, but not much to watch. Jumping out of aeroplanes may result in a broom and shovel job. It's like changing from rolled oats to polenta. It's the same, but different. Just do it!

MUSIC - A VIEW FROM THE CAVES

Mike Macey

In the last issue of this magazine (Ad Libitum No.3 1998) David Mathers rightly attempted to persuade us to pay more attention to modern music. I remember Kathy Selby, the pianist with the Macquarie Trio, being asked why her group did not perform more modern music. Her reply raised the problem of selling enough of it. David's article was a reminder of the gap between the public and contemporary art music. It was ever thus, I suppose, but more so as the pace of change increases. David used the term *Troglodytes* as a terse description. What do we play on playing days and at the Wollongong music camp? Most of it wasn't written in this century. Say, 100%? Well, 99.9%.

The cave dweller in David's audience asked the wrong question. *What does this music mean?* is inappropriate; it's how it makes you feel that counts. Stent ((1978) comments *the content of music is necessarily more purely affective than that of any other art form; its statements pertain almost exclusively to inner events...music can reveal the nature of feelings with a detail and truth that language cannot approach.*

There are other problems, as well as those arising from prejudice, whatever one's sympathy with lack of support for modern or contemporary music. It is true that some *rhythms, chords, cadence* do *sit easily on the human brain*, as David pointed out - what has been termed *The Grand Chord of Nature* (see, for example, Machlis (1980) Other musical cultures, Siamese, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and Persian, include extremely complex scale systems, but with no concept of harmony, keys, and modulation (Parry 1909). It certainly needed a bit of a tweak, leading eventually to Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier, to adapt our scale precisely to the human ear, but after that it was all go. But even this tempered scale is not an artificial construct, since the mathematical basis for it is well known, and it works perfectly as long as it's assumed that all octaves have to be perfect, which seems fair enough (see Cree Fisher 1975). The system has spread everywhere. It maintains relative consonance for fourths, fifths, thirds and sixths of the scale, and renders modulation from one key to another possible. In music that is systematically atonal, consonant intervals are mostly avoided, and modulation is not an option. So exclusive atonalists use the tempered scale for a purpose different from that for which it was designed.

It is not necessarily an invalid art form to take an ancient modal tune, like Messaien does, and then throw notes at it until there is an effect one happens to like. After all, Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles* is worth a lot of money, and he used to swing leaky buckets of paint over the canvas. With this sort of music, when you see the score, you can't predict what it would sound like, but trial and error can nevertheless achieve a right-feeling sound. Schönberg tried to get some order into atonal music using the concept of the tone row, which was a sequence of twelve notes taken from the tempered scale more or less at random, and then used in various combinations throughout the composition, the so-called *Serial Method*. Much has been made of the distinction between atonal *Expressionist* and *Serial Method* music, but the impact of both is much the same. The tone row (which Schönberg said emphatically, was not a tune) in its various forms does not make much difference to atonal music, because it is very difficult to recognise it, or feel it being played backwards, inverted, or played backwards and inverted at the same time. Schönberg himself believed that the tone-row structure of so-called Serial Music appealed to our innate sense of order. On the whole, this hasn't worked. The system, in a modified form, still has its adherents, like Pierre Boulez, whose music is rigidly atonal and can accompany poems like this one, from Le Marteau sans Maitre (Literally the Hammer Without a Master or more freely, perhaps, A Hammer on the Rampage)

The red caravan at the edge of a prison
And a corpse in a basket
And work horses in the horseshoe,
I dream the head on the point of my Peruvian knife.
(quoted by Machlis, 1980)

This music by Boulez is no doubt beset with respectable intellectual foundations (strangely at odds with the poetry it illustrates) but these are difficult to spot, so you don't follow or feel it. Some, on the other hand, prefer noise, which has no such pretensions. John Cage (a student of Schönberg) liked random sounds so much that he,

for example, savaged the Grand Piano, and made it sound like something entirely different. The *Prepared Piano*, he called it, but the process of preparation is not popular with the Piano Tuners' Union. Cage said he preferred music that wasn't going anywhere, which was *content to stay where it was*, that he was not interested in structure, and wished to *bring about a structureless world* (quoted by Ford 1993); *Social anarchism?* Ford suggested. *Exactly*, said JC. Boulez and Cage had a big fight about who invented music that was based purely on chance happenings, like the throw of a dice. (*The Man Who Would be King - an interview with Pierre Boulez* by Andy Carvin, 2000) John Cage really "invented" it, but Boulez took it up and called it *Aleatory Music*. Cage was annoyed because Boulez gave his invention a name, thus subsuming randomness for himself, even though the general idea of randomness was hardly new. The idea is, apparently, that it is too restrictive to leave random noise out of your definition of music, even if such exclusion governed its prior evolution. Modernism (or Postmodernism? who can define the difference?) is of course partly about challenging existing definitions. Audiences who do not come from the caves often cheer wildly following the performance of atonal music by Boulez and Ligeti. That's why Troglodytes are so useful. They have time to reflect. One must admit that composers like Boulez and Ligeti are tremendous fighters in their own cause, and have Nietsche's so-called *Will to Power* well developed. Stent (1978) has discussed the whole problem in a chapter called *the End of The Arts and Sciences.*

On a more primitive level, I remember the grinding feeling of absolute and utter boredom I feel listening to a work such as Schönberg's *Five Pieces for Orchestra* or Boulez's *Hammer on the rampage*, the final effect of which is only matched, in my experience, by the sound of my Irish botany teacher in high school dictating to us the life-cycle of a fern. She had the magic to make three minutes seem like infinity, changing the apparent relationship of consciousness to time by several orders of magnitude, being maximally predictable, especially as we had the book and could see what she was reading. I can tell you I don't remember a lot of my school days but that one is indelible. It's the opposite pole of unpredictability with much atonal music, and with noise. Both fail to give me any pleasure at all.

I don't want to give the impression that I am a totally prejudiced cave dweller. There are many contemporary composers worth looking at. (For example, the website of Glen C. Ford at http://www.io.com/glenford/Genres.html). They are by no means all atonalists or noise specialists.

Perhaps the most popular style of contemporary music is the so-called minimalist school represented by John Adams and Philip Glass. It takes a radically different approach from the atonalists, and is not unlike that of Rock Music. In this, you could say, the Common Chord is a harmonic combination of real importance, with an occasional added sixth or seventh. Sometimes, but slowly, the music changes key as well. All this is bolstered by the sophistication of modern instruments and technology, and the use of complex rhythm, an element often lacking in much 19th century Western music. Minimalism could be a reaction against the arid sound of exclusively atonal music, and you have to have some sympathy with this motivation. But it is of course only one of many bizarre solutions to the problem of how to be different.

Far from modern music being released from the *bondage of song and dance* (David Mathers, Ad Libitum No 3), at least some of it is best digested along with them, in a manner similar to Chinese Opera or Japanese Ballet. Remember all those aurally assaulting wooden drum sounds with mime sequences? How could you listen to all that and risk eardrum rupture if you couldn't see what was going on? What distinguishes the Western Classical and Romantic periods is music that stands on its own. Shostakovitch, Stravinsky, Prokoviev and Bartok still fit, mainly because their atonalism was imaginative and selective. But imagine trying to listen to, say, Britten's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, with suffering soloists suspended in sound space without audible means of support. Such music is meaningless without visual props.

Stent (1978) has made an impressive attempt to analyse the progress of music, in terms of probabilistic expectations of the listener, but you don't need to be a philosopher or a neurophysiologist to realise that as music has become more and more complex, its intellectual appeal increases up to the point that the brain network can't keep up with what's going on, and then starts to drop off as it becomes too complex to follow. Cage's answer, of course, was to abandon any pretence of perceivable structure, and use sound as a mental trigger, in the manner of the Rorschach Ink Blot Test, to induce a sort of mental state in the listener. So what you are aware of is not what you hear, but some visceral response to it. Get it? By-pass the cerebral cortex altogether, in fact. It's what politicians would like you to do in other contexts.

As amateur musicians, spare a thought for the professionals who have to cope with all this. Many of you will have watched the recent programme on the ABC describing the lives of musicians belonging to the London Philharmonic Orchestra. One sequence described the rehearsals of a Ligeti Opera. At one point this involved the suspension of an enormous horse above the stage. It looked about thirty feet high, no ordinary horse, but an overblown travesty, with staring eyes and, in contrast to known horses, binocular vision. The musicians wanted to know if they were properly insured against the collapse of the horse, which could make a real mess of the orchestra pit and the musicians occupying it. *But there are ten people holding the horse with ropes* said the harassed manager. *But what if one of them has a heart attack?* said a cellist. *Ten people* repeated the manager, *Ten people!* You could hear the borderline Cockney of the stalwart Essex man, coping with the crisis. Herr Ligeti, I remember, cleverly detected grievous errors (by the cellos) against a background of discord and disintegrating chinaware, which at the end of the session were being swept up into a *broken teacups* bin.

Connor (1997) has attempted to summarise Post-Modern Cultural Theory, and there you can read how contemporary composers have tried to avoid what Connor calls the *Pythagorean Symmetries of Western Harmonics* involving overemphasis on the more energetic members of the Grand Chord of Nature. On the other hand, the contemporary minimalism of Philip Glass, of John Adams and of Rock Music is based mainly on the common chord, departing from it sometimes with prolonged slides of subtlety changing tonality. So who has it right? Nobody, of course. It's how you feel that counts. Connor tells an interesting but confusing story, amongst which you can find ideas like that expressed by Thomas Doherty (1988), taking just one sentence, thus: *aurality is also marked by a tendency to heterogeneity or alterity, for its major transgression is to hear what is not there, to make the work which is the object of its perception different from itself.* *This, of course, disappears up itself. Connor's book is an interesting attempt to summarise an impossibly difficult area, but unfortunately there is no clear concept of what the term *Postmodernism* actually means or how it can be distinguished from *Modernism*. Lyotard argues, as a postmodernist, in favour of music as *Soundart* (Tonkunst) which rids itself of music altogether; more or less what Cage tried to do. In searching for some concept of the difference between modernism and postmodernism, the contrast of approach between Arnold Schönberg and his pupil John Cage is as useful a starting point as any, but the whole picture is impossibly complex, because you have to include the minimalists as well as the purveyors of chaos and the recorders of traffic and waste-pipe noises.

Just to cheer you up a bit, there's an article in the New Scientist called *The Mozart Effect* by Gary Kilewer. Brain functioning involving spatial concepts was improved in experiments on human subjects by prior attention to Mozart, but not to Philip Glass or Rock music. My Troglodyte tendencies were reinforced by these results. I was, however, devastated by the disclosure that

the maze performance of rats was also improved by Mozart's music.

It's just a pity they didn't pick something more welcome in the Caves, like pussy cats or poodles. Well, there you go. Prejudice again.

* Like the World War II myth of the bumble-toot bird, an apparition said to be suffered by RAF fighter pilots in non-pressurised aircraft who were suffering from oxygen deprivation. It was a bird that flew round in ever decreasing circles prior to its inevitable disappearance up itself with an irritating "toot" sound. But at least it followed its own impeccable logic, and mercifully, vanished.

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GOLDEN RULES FOR ENSEMBLE PLAYING

Anonymous

1. Everyone should play the same piece.
2. Stop at every repeat sign and discuss in detail whether to play the repeat or not. The audience loves this, too.
3. If you play a wrong note, give one of your partners a nasty look.
4. Carefully tune your instrument before playing. That way you can play out of tune with a clear conscience.
5. Take your time turning pages, especially when there's a difficult bit on the next page.
6. The right note at the wrong time is a wrong note (and vice versa).
7. Strive for maximum NPS (notes per second). It makes you feel good.
8. If every one gets lost except you, follow those who get lost.
9. Markings for dynamics, slurs and ornaments should not be observed. They are only there to decorate the score.
10. If a passage is difficult, slow down. If it's easy, speed up. Every thing will work out in the end.
11. If you are completely lost, stop everyone and say "I think there's something wrong" or alternatively maintain you have to tune up.
12. Happy are those who have not perfect pitch, for the kingdom of music is theirs.
13. If the ensemble has to stop because of you, explain in detail why you got lost.
14. Words of wisdom from Shakespeare:

    a rest is silence (Hamlet)

    my foot my tutor (the Tempest)

    my kingdom for a fast run (Richard III)
15. When everyone has finished playing, don't play the notes you've got left. It doesn't matter any more.

PLAYING CONTEMPORARY MUSIC.

Vee Margolis and Mike Macey

We enjoy playing all those masters of the baroque, classical and romantic traditions so much that we sometimes forget, in our musical minds at least, that we live at the end of the twentieth century, and things have moved on somewhat. This is in itself a tribute to the composers in that 400-year period when so much wonderful music was created.

Some amateur musicians in the UK are not satisfied with insulated contentment, and want to try something by the ***undecomposed*** *. There are two thriving organisations in the UK, COMA (Contemporary Music-making for Amateurs) on the Web at http://www.coma.org/ and the London Chamber Group at http://www.argonet.co.uk/users/ataylor/lcg/ also directed at amateur musicians. One of the aims of both groups is to play and perform contemporary chamber music written for, and performable by, amateur musicians, providing mutual benefits for musicians and composers. Anyone visiting the UK could possibly benefit from a visit to either of these groups.

Vee Margolis, who visited us recently from the UK, has given us a short account of her experiences.

What do I get from playing with COMA? Well, the joys of participating in a musically rich and complex work, when it is written in such a way that players of all levels of technical ability can take part. It is good to be part of music when it is taking shape. Most classical works have associated with them rigid orthodoxies about the way they should be played, and it's a refreshing experience to explore the possibilities of new sounds and new combinations of instruments. So the experience is empowering in the sense that it is part of the here and now of music and that we have contact and can communicate with the composers while we are rehearsing their music. This is quite a different experience from interpreting established music. It does not mean that I have lost my appreciation of classical and romantic works. It just helps to make my musical outlook more complete.

What Vee says here about accessibility is all important. Modern scores often contain signs and symbols which are unfamiliar to players who have only played music from the classical and romantic repertoire, unless they have recently graduated with an advanced musical education. Furthermore it is apparent that composers associated with these groups have an obligation to keep technical problems within the compass of the average amateur. It is perhaps worth trying to think of ways in which our Society might facilitate this sort of interaction between amateur musicians and new composers.

* Ted Davis hacked into my brain with this virus. He plays the viola, of course. - MM

WOLLONGONG – THE INSTITUTION

Alexandra and Rod Tuson

It is very gratifying that the Annual Wollongong Chamber Music *Event*, the brainchild of Nils Korner, has become such a popular part of the Society's activities, since we were both closely involved with it for over six years. It has, since then, continued to gently evolve and develop with successive managers adding their particular subtle influences. **This note is intended to help members gain the maximum enjoyment from their participation.**

Wollongong differs from a normal playing day in several important ways. Firstly it is *longer*. So the opportunity presents itself to improve one's playing (in technique, familiarity with more of the repertoire, sight-reading ability and ensemble of a regular group) either *with* the help of tutors, or just because of the sheer *amount* of playing.

Secondly, there are attendees from all over the country - new people to play with who would otherwise be geographically impossible, opportunities to renew old friendships and make new ones.

Thirdly, there are more attendees covering a very wide range of instruments and abilities. Larger groups are practical, and there is the extra time available to improve the standard of a difficult larger group work.

Fourthly, the self-arranged sessions enable the putting together of a group either containing the distant players you yearn to enjoin, or a group to play that elusive work that is so hard to organise at any other time (like an octet, for example).

To take best advantage of these unique features of Wollongong, it is necessary to first decide, as soon as you have sent in your application, *exactly* what *you* want of the event. *But beware*! Do not pre-plan *all* your afternoon self-arranged sessions in advance – you may discover a new attendee with whom you simply *must* play, or a new work that you simply *must* read. If you are fully booked, those opportunities are *lost*.

Further pre-planning rules: Do not, on pain of death, *double-book*! No one will forgive you. Always ensure that your fellow players agree to what you have arranged and have **also** *written it down*, preferably on their *dance card* – otherwise known as the *timetable*. Do not *lose* it!

When there, keep your wits about you. Do not spend too much time over lunch or afternoon tea and consequently arrive late at your self-arranged (or any other) session. Check where you are meant to be playing next so you do not have a panicked sprint from one end of Kooloobong to the other or, worse, to Gleniffer Brae. Why not arrange to have lunch with your first afternoon session group – a convivial prelude to playing together that ensures timely arrival of all. If you are providing the *music*, make sure you take it – to Wollongong *and* to the session!

Playing music to the best of your abilities requires intense concentration and all your faculties at their peak. Get into condition the month before – lips and fingertips should be ready for three days' onslaught. While the environment at the introductory meal, the Barbecue and the Dinner provide great opportunities for socialising, too much imbibing wreaks havoc on one's usual abilities, particularly sight-reading, for the following two or three sessions at least. Lack of sleep has a similar effect. The combination is fatal.

Finally, at Wollongong more than at any other time, the social etiquette of chamber music ensemble playing is important, as your exposure to others is more repetitive. Misdemeanors are less easily forgiven and forgotten. The article herein by *anonymous* should *not* be used as a guide, except, perhaps, to indicate what *not* to do. But here is not the location for a dissertation on etiquette. Suffice to say that planning, common sense, tolerance and courtesy go a long way to achieving fulfillment.

Enjoy!