

## News from Janet Pazio - February 2017

A belated happy new year to you all! As mentioned in my last blog I spent the New Year with my brother in Australia. Quite a contrast to the weather you have been enduring in the UK. But from watching old Australian films I can understand why the men have corks around their hats. It seems to be a superb way of keeping off the flies, not having a tail to swish around.

I had decided that I would give my old viola to my brother as I hated to see it gathering dust in the corner of my bedroom. Instruments are to be played and loved. It was a bit of a pang letting it go as it was the first viola I ever owned costing me the princely sum of £70, which was a lot of money for a student back in 1968. It's kept me going for 46 years, but I have recently purchased a rather gorgeous and much more forgiving Tony Padday viola. There was an ulterior motive as I wanted to do some practice while I was out there. ( I hope you are reading this blog, Lucy, to show my unbelievable dedication. Pity it doesn't always reflect in my playing.)

Anyway I took along what I thought was a full set of strings. Well there were four of them. After a week of torturing my brother and his family the A string started to fray. Lucky I brought those strings I thought. There were three Dominant – C,G and D so I presumed that the Astrea was an A without checking the label. Couldn't understand why it didn't want to go much higher than a G and was just starting to think that maybe this isn't an A after all when with malevolent twang the string broke free from its moorings lacerating my face in its trajectory bid for freedom in revenge for mistaken identity. So it looked like I would have to buy another string. Richard, my brother took me into Bendigo, the nearest town, but the music shop selling viola strings was shut until a week after the New Year. You could almost hear my brother heaving a sigh of relief, but I was not to be thwarted. On returning to his place I retrieved the rather hastily thrown away string from the kitchen bin, then wiped away the debris that had stuck to the string and replaced it on the viola. Job done.

I have found out some very interesting facts about frayed strings. Besides the fact that it wrecks your fingers when you try and change position (that eventually goes as the string frays further towards the top) but you also have to stretch your fingers further to play approximately in tune. Maybe this could be a new Bruno exercise. Problem is that I'm still overstretching on the A. Not pleasant for octaves or anything else for that matter.

But to return to the ill fated Astrea. I can remember with fondness the rather twangy banjo sound it made. (Apologies to all banjo lovers). Now you must be asking yourselves, if you have the stamina to get so far with this blog, how on earth do I know what the Astrea sounded like? I shall let you into a dirty little secret, besides the fact that I would contemplate using an Astrea in the first place. When on the odd occasion I change my strings, those that still have some wear in them or at least haven't frayed I save for future emergencies. I bet moths and purses must be going through your minds. But seriously, strings; how often we should change them and what strings we should use is something I certainly struggle with. Alistair Rutherford wrote a very good article about strings a while ago for a BVS newsletter. Unfortunately I've deleted it. I think it would do me good to revisit it if I can get hold of it.

Talking about strings, somebody said to me that if you want to make your viola sound like a more expensive instrument, play in tune. They are absolutely right. I have Evah Pirazzi strings on my Tony Padday and the difference it's made since working on intonation is amazing. The instrument rings out with joy.

A plug for my local area. We are fortunate in having the New Vic in Stoke, a theatre in the round. On 13<sup>th</sup> March Ensemble 360 are playing a variety of bassoon, clarinet, viola and piano pieces including

Schumann Märchenbilder for viola and piano, Mozart Trio for clarinet, viola and piano, and Sofia Gobaidalina Quasi Hoqeutus for bassoon, viola and piano. Box office 01782 717962.

Before I sign off I would like to say how interesting I found the hints on quartet playing from the Strad (see BVS January newsletter). When I go and listen to professional quartets I can now marvel even further at the dedication put in by these musicians. My friends and I feel that we've done well if we all finish together and don't break down too often when we play quartets.

Happy viola playing whatever standard you're at.

**Janet**

**29th January 2017**