

It seems really strange that although I am writing this blog before Christmas, you will be reading it after the festive season when the indigestion and hangovers will be a distant memory - although my spare tyre accrued over those few days last Christmas (2015) lingers like an unwanted guest. I reckon he is waiting for his mate to join him this Christmas (2016).

We are playing Khachaturian Masquerade suite at our next North Staffs Symphony Orchestra concert in January. What joy! The violas actually have a cracking good tune with surround sound and with the rest of the strings and the woodwind chattering behind us. We all played with great gusto including the quiet bits. Juan, our conductor, did mention dynamics but when you are having a whale of a time, what the heck.

But it's Tchaikovsky 1st Symphony I would like to talk about which we are playing at the next concert along with the Khachaturian and a rather delightful Krommer concerto for two clarinets. Tchaikovsky writes good tunes of which the violas have their fair share. The tunes are manageable but it's in the 3rd movement where we encounter difficulties (not to mention all the other tricky bits). We are playing six semiquavers in 3/8. But instead of changing bows on the first beats of the bar we change on the first, third and second. It was all very disconcerting as Juan's arms weren't waving around in time to my bow. This isn't really anything new, but I was aware how awkward it was to play even with desperately tapping my foot in double quick time in order to fit it all in. It's one of those passages that you can play at home but it all falls to pieces when you try and play it with others. I suspect I may take some liberties with the timing. Anyway as a group we decided to approach Juan to see if we could change bow on the first beat. Juan was up for it as he could see us struggling and pointed out it was pp. This is something we're good at when not sure of the notes although it does rather sound like a mouse scratching their way through the skirting board. The only problem is that we play that bit with the first violins. Our leader insisted on us doing the correct bowing in order to bring out the cross rhythms. I thought she's lucky to get any rhythm out of us. Sadly, metronomic Nick's arthritis has flared up so he can't play with us at the moment. We shall all be glad when he is able to return, including the conductor. You know, it always amazes me how in professional orchestras their bows all move in the same direction. And not only that they also play in the same part of the bow. Its a miracle!

I'm off to Australia for Christmas to visit my brother who is a keen banjo and fiddle player with his old time musical friends so I should have a good time. It will be weird having Christmas in the sun but I'm sure I will bring you back news and adventures from down under.

Happy viola playing.

Janet Pazio

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