

News from Janet Pazio - December 2016

Hi. My name is Janet Pazio. I'm a keen amateur violist and have belonged to the BVS since its inception in 2012. The newsletters are always very interesting but seem to be heavily biased towards conservatoire students and professionals, so I thought I would rectify matters and stick up for us numerous amateur violists who may feel a little daunted and left out by the professionals.

Violists in my neck of the woods seem to be in short supply, so I'm very busy playing in various ensembles and orchestras. Here's a plug for the North Staffordshire Symphony orchestra which would welcome viola players wanting to join us. Just check us out on our website. We play four concerts a year. The latest was: Dvorak's Symphonic Variations, a delightful piece but very tricky to play with all its time changes, Schumann's 4th Symphony, and Elgar's cello concerto with Graham Norris as soloist - absolutely brilliant. Coming up in April we have Emily Pond playing Walton's viola concerto, and if that doesn't whet your appetite I'm sure nothing else will. She makes the most beautiful sound as well as all the other things that go with being a really good violist. So come along if only for that.

But to get back to the Elgar cello concerto. As I'm sure you are aware there's that horrid hairy bit near the beginning where the violas creep in with the tune that is taken up by the solo cello. I think creeping is a good description because it certainly wasn't bold. The realisation that we had to do it in 2nd position gave us the shakes as sadly it's a position we tend to avoid even though it's really useful. Hawkeye Bob, one of our faithful band, spotted on YouTube that although the viola section started in 2nd position they quickly moved into 3rd. Great, I thought, shall try that. But I don't think doing it at the final rehearsal was the best of times, Peter Stallworthy, our conductor, saying make sure your second A is the same as the first. Thought I'll stick to 2nd position it will be safer, which brings me to a viola joke. What's the similarity between lightening and a violist's fingers? They never strike the same place twice! But seriously we all struggle with our technique and fingering maybe this would be a good forum for you to share what works for you, maybe some tips so that we can make the sound and effect that we can hear in our heads but which doesn't necessarily come out of our instruments.

I have just spent a delightful morning with some of my musical friends playing piano quartets - Mozart, Mendelssohn and Faure. I once asked a member of a professional quartet the difference between coaching amateurs and semi-professionals. He said that amateurs like to play through, whereas semi-professionals concentrate on small sections to get it right. Maybe this is a bit of a generalisation, but we do have fun. However, I could feel my left hand position, which I'm working on at the moment, deteriorating and going back to old bad habits. A fine violinist friend of mine said that practising (and I suspect he meant good practice by that) is like putting money in the bank but playing is taking it out again. I thought about my playing/practice balance and realised that I was heavily in debt. So back to Schradiek and Bruno so that all that good work my very patient teacher has been doing with me isn't all undone.

If you want good tips and a fun day that welcomes to all violists you can't go wrong with a day with Robin Ireland and one of his viola workshops. The next one is going to be held at Ravenfield, South Yorkshire on Saturday 1st April. More details in the BVS November newsletter as well as an article

by Emily Dore on the last Robin Ireland workshop which makes interesting reading.

I shall sign off now. More next month. But do share your views and tips. Us amateur violists are an integral part of the BVS. Look forward to hearing from you.

Janet