

Decisions, decisions! I was told by Lucy at my last lesson that my viola was in desperate need of a doctor. Cheered me a little as I thought maybe it's not just my playing but there actually is light at the end of the tunnel. But my other thought was have I been a bit like a neglectful or abusive parent and not given my viola the treatment it deserves. Anyway, who to go to? The maker, Tony Padday lives down in Somerset which is a bit of a jaunt from North Staffordshire although he is probably the best person to go to. Lucy recommended a repairer who lives in Sale but I eventually plumped for the easiest option for me, Tofts, a string specialist and repairer who lives only a bus ride away from me and who I knew would let me borrow a viola while mine was having its MOT. Not cheap, but they usually do a very good job. I left my viola with some trepidation in their hands (still to find out the result) and asked if I could borrow a viola with a similar stop to mine. I was taken upstairs to their room filled with violas of different sizes hanging from a bar. Amazing sight. Tried three and went for the one where my fingers automatically went to the right place or at least no more out of tune than on my usual instrument. Also thought that it sounded good. I know that the luthier looked at me rather strangely when I made that comment and said at least it will be played. I hasten to add that the luthier didn't make that particular instrument, which is a factory job. What sounded good in that very flattering room didn't sound like the same instrument when I played it at home. As my desk partner in the Staffordshire chamber orchestra commented when I took the viola to the rehearsal on Sunday, 'What can I say?'. The conclusion that we came to was that it was hardly mellow.

I have to say that every string is very distinctive, starting off with a rather twangy C and G that sounds like a string stretched over a metal drum. Then the D – well, I've recently come down with one of those rather nasty viruses that are doing the rounds, this one was a stuffy head and scratchy throat – dare I say it but the D sounds a bit like that. Felt like giving it some lemsip but it would have made it rather sticky. When you moved on to the A it sounded like a completely different instrument but not in a positive way. It was as though the viola had moved into another room with the door firmly shut. Very interesting.

At our Monday night rehearsal for the NSSO I could see Juan, our conductor, looking at me rather quizzically as the sound coming out wasn't the same as usual. Gave me a warning look when he announced that we would be rehearsing the Ravel next week. Sadly, I shall still be playing on the borrowed viola. The Ravel we are playing is The Mother Goose Suite which, as I'm sure all you viola players will know, has a very pearly solo near the end high up on the A string where you need an oxygen mask (or at least I do) and going into territory unknown. As Captain Kirk in Star Trek says, 'to boldly go where no man has gone before' (or should I say where no Janet has been before). I mentioned that the A string sounded as though I was playing in another room. I suspect that next Monday night I will wish that I was. Still, it's only another week and I get my Tony Padday back.

Hope you are surviving the heat. Trouble with us British is that we are never satisfied. But what is the weather for except to moan about.

Happy viola playing

Janet Pazio

BREAKING NEWS

I now have my beloved viola back and needn't have worried as Tofts have done a brilliant job on it. I almost sound like a proper viola player. At my last lesson Lucy asked me to play the solo from Ravel's mother Goose Suite which I have been religiously practicing in the way Lucy suggested – a note at a time, trying to get as good a sound as I can on each note, concentrating on the shifts and intonation but there was one very important element I forgot. Lucy recorded my playing for me and I was expecting the worst but I was surprised at how beautiful it sounded, quite ethereal high up on the A string. But Lucy said that wasn't the response she wanted from me, apparently I've been playing my duplet and triplets at the same pace, so it's back to the metronome. So I shall continue my (almost daily) hymn to the viola god until the performance on July 1st. You know, I think I may make a decent fist of this one and it's all thanks to Lucy's excellent and patient tuition