

News from Janet Pazio. March 2017

I'm sitting writing this blog in my room at Leiston Abbey near the end of the Pro Corda Conservatoire viola course feeling a mixture of exhaustion and elation from the few days I have spent here. We've heard stunning playing from the participants. Abbey House has been vibrating with the sound of two dozen viola players practising away.

You may be wondering how somebody as old as me (69 today as I write this blog) has sneaked onto a viola Conservatoire course. Well it must be five or maybe six years ago Louise asked me if I'd like to come and I've been turning up every year since then. She must regret her original generosity of spirit, but I love to see and hear all the students and to enjoy the improvement they make year by year. They have become really good friends and I look forward to meeting and following their progress and exciting plans. It also considerably widens my rather poor knowledge of the viola repertoire and I get superb advice from our excellent teachers – Louise, Robin, Lucy and Gary.

One thing that strikes me about the viola is how completely different each person sounds. It's almost as if their individual character comes through the instrument. It really is a unique instrument. But the amount of dedication and practice each student puts in makes me feel rather guilty about my poor efforts. If I manage 2 – 3 hours I am well pleased. I tend to escape from time to time to enjoy the rather wonderful scenery around Leiston Abbey. Strange how three hours walking goes much quicker than three hours practice.

I mentioned in January's blog about the awkward passage in the 3rd movement of Tchaikovsky 1st symphony. Well, one rehearsal I got it right! But not the next one. I folded altogether. I thought this doesn't look good for the principal viola (yes, believe it or not I'm principal viola, more by default than anything else as nobody else wants the hot seat) to suddenly come to a stop and not even pretend to play. So I thought about what my excellent teacher, Lucy, told me: that an amateur practises it until they get it somewhere near right (hence the fact that I managed the tricky passage that once) whereas a professional practises it until it won't go wrong. So, in order to save face, I spent more time on that passage, even practising it after I thought I'd got it right. Well, at the final rehearsal it was spot on. But I'm afraid that complacency set in and the same thing didn't happen at the evening performance. Fortunately I'd got better at miming it.

A reminder for April 1st when Emily Pond is coming to play the Walton viola concerto with us (North Staffs Symphony Orchestra) at the Jubilee Hall in Stoke which is above the King's Hall, all very confusing. Also a plug for Martin Outram's viola course at Benslow in July. He came to Leiston Abbey during this year's course and we were able to sit in and watch him teaching some of the students. A master class I suppose you would call it. He was excellent and I've had good reports from students who have attended previous course at Benslow. Unfortunately for Martin, I'm free then. So watch out, Janet Pazio is about. Shall have to buy a map as I've heard that Benslow is in a beautiful spot and too much viola can be bad for the soul.

Enjoy your viola and its delicious sound

Janet Pazio