

By the time you are reading this blog I hope that you will be ready for Christmas. A busy time for musicians with numerous Messiahs and carol concerts. This year the North Staffs Symphony Orchestra has joined up with the Ceramic City Choir to put on a Christmas concert in aid of Children in Need, to be broadcast by Radio Stoke no less over the Christmas period.

But besides the excitement and anticipation of Christmas, I have surprising news of a new convert to the viola world. I was staying with a very old friend, Edwin Paling, former leader of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra (RSNO), who has always rather sneered at violas and viola players. He invited me up to his music room to show me something, which is scary enough in itself. He produced this case. 'A new bow?' I enquired. Well, it was more than a new bow; he had also bought himself a viola as having heard 'Meditation on a Byzantine Hymn' for solo viola by Rubbra he was so struck by the beauty of the music he wanted to play it himself. He does find the alto clef a bit of a conundrum, but is enjoying some of our splendid repertoire and the instrument itself. Quite a convert!

Naturally I immediately told him that he should join the BVS if only to read my blog (joking, about the blog not about joining the BVS). His question was of what benefit is it to himself and what exactly does the BVS exactly stand for and do, which set me thinking. I know that it says on our website 'to promote the viola' and we do get discounts on strings, CBSO and the Strad plus free advertising for teachers and luthiers. When I was membership secretary and wanting people to stay in the BVS I would talk about keeping in touch with the viola world. But suppose that part of the viola world doesn't interest you especially if you are an amateur player. I suppose as an amateur myself I can marvel at the work the students put into the pieces they are preparing, but it's like a different world that I feel that I can't aspire to, time being one factor and the other that I have another life to live. But it doesn't stop me being impressed and maybe take up one or two suggestions for my own practice. Maybe my major reason for belonging to the BVS is that it does encourage aspiring violists and give them a forum to grow in their knowledge of viola repertoire and different ways of approaching pieces and practice. Even though not at the level of conservatoire students I find articles written by well respected violists and teachers very helpful, especially if they start to talk about basic stuff.

Talking about what the BVS does, we've recently had the Cecil Aronowitz competition at the new Royal Birmingham Conservatoire (very posh) which was sponsored by the BVS giving young violists under the age of 21 from all over the world a platform to show what they can do. Also some excellent workshops and master classes running alongside the competition. For the younger violists not yet ready for the major competition there was the opportunity to win various prizes. It will be interesting to watch them in the years to come. So much talent coming through. Congratulations to our Daisy for getting through to the finals. Unfortunately unable to hear her, but told that she played beautifully which is only what I would expect from Daisy.

My walking excursions (except for day walks) have come to a halt at the moment with the dark evenings and mornings so have been able to concentrate more on my practice. What a difference it makes! Lucy was actually pleased with me. Even took my viola down to Dorset, to keep my practice up. I was visiting another of my musical friends from way back, having both been students at the Northern School of Music. I think he was very surprised at how much better a viola player I am now than I was at college. This is all thanks to the inspiration from Louise and her inclusivity plus my very patient and brilliant teacher, Lucy. The reason I'm telling you this is to encourage all those in the twilight of their years, you can still improve. There's life in the old dog yet.

Seasons greetings

Janet Pazio. December 2017