

News from Janet - December 2018

I don't know about you but the festive season seems to engender in me a sort of paralysis with so many demands made - Christmas cards, feasting, pressure to buy presents that aren't always what the recipient wants or needs. But desperation sinks in as I roam fruitlessly around the shops. Instead of getting on with preparations for Christmas I have been planning my extended walks for next year. I think I need to tackle Christmas like I do a tricky bit of music - one step at a time – and not to be lured into avoiding those nasty technical challenges but to embrace them. The reward is always far greater than the effort as is Christmas. I'm not an absolute Scrooge, just halfway there.

I've been following with great interest the running viola, now metamorphosed into the cycling viola's epic journey from Birmingham to Rotterdam along with the cycling toilet. It must have been hilarious to watch you both cycling by. I wonder how many people did a double take as you cycled along. But Alistair you look so serious in the photographs from Rotterdam. Although I don't think I'd find it too amusing having a scroll sticking out of my head.

Thanks to Louise for keeping us up to date with the rehearsals (and performance) of Viola Mania at Rotterdam with all those wonderful pictures. Looked good fun and Nick really looked the part. But I'm sure that we will be hearing more about the International Viola Conference from Louise in this month's newsletter.

I've just returned from a weekend at Benslow where we were coached by the Bingham Quartet along with Nigel Clayton who joined them for the Franck Piano Quintet which they performed on Friday evening. Our quintet, which met together for the first time (hopefully not the last), were rehearsing the Elgar Piano Quintet with that absolutely gorgeous slow movement, like hot chocolate. It is a piece I've bashed through a couple of times with my friends, but it was so good to actually rehearse it properly.

The Bingham Quartet and Nigel were all very good value, explaining the best way to play the quintet from different angles. They also appreciated the fact that we are amateurs and knew just how far to push us within our technical limitations. One suggestion which made for almost instant success - you could hear the difference in our playing - was to go near to the bridge with the bow as our comfort zone rather than near the fingerboard where most of us amateurs play resulting in a rather feathery and unfocused sound. I can

remember Louise telling me this when I first met her, it must be seven years ago. It takes a long time for things to sink into me and become part of my natural technique. Also to feel as though the bow was almost glued to the string. Once I'd followed these suggestions it made a terrific difference to those soupy solos for the viola in the slow movement of the Elgar. We sounded much better by the Sunday afternoon than we did on the Friday when we first met, and were pleased at the fact that we actually held it together. I think there may be a bit more to playing chamber music than just finishing together...

I've booked my train tickets for Pro Corda in February. I just hope the journey isn't like the one I endured from London to Stoke after the Benslow weekend where we were crammed along the aisles and the space by the doors. And then we had to change at Northampton to an already overfull train, with some of the passengers from the London train being unable to get on the next one (I have very sharp elbows). Passengers on the whole were trying to see the humorous side of it so there was a certain sense of camaraderie. It was either that or go into a rage. Not good for the blood pressure. And then poor Martin Outram will have me again at Benslow after a year out from that very intense and high standard course (for me at any rate) to see if he can work his magic again.

Where I live, in Stoke, we have a real shortage of viola players who are willing to play in a symphony orchestra, the better players preferring to play chamber music. (Chatting to other participants at Benslow I found this to be the case for them as well.) So I'm giving out a desperate plea for the North Staffs Symphony Orchestra. If there are any viola players out there who live in North Staffordshire or the east Cheshire area who fancy playing with a well established, good amateur orchestra please come and join us. To find out more look on our website. (Google 'North Staffordshire Symphony Orchestra' and it will come up.) We do some exciting and challenging music. Our next concert is Saint-Saëns Algerian Suite (complete with viola solo in the third movement), Saint-Saëns Cello Concerto with Graham Norris as our soloist, and Glazunov 'The Seasons'.

Festive greetings to you all and a prosperous and healthy New Year. Shall see what viola excitement next year brings.

Janet Pazio

