

We now have a spanking new and impressive website! Many thanks to Alison, our web designer, and to Sue for all her hard work in the background, encouraging and pushing things through.

Sue asked me if I would look at my bio on the revamped 'About Us' page to see if it was OK. Had forgotten about that dreadful photo of myself. Need to get one of those with subdued and flattering lighting, not taken on my mobile phone by my eldest daughter. And the haircut! I look like one of Fagin's urchins although with more wrinkles. I'm sure I'm not really that ugly and crazy looking, but then I don't see myself as others see me. But they do say that the camera never lies. Anyway, less of this vanity.

Re-reading my history it again struck me how fortunate I was to be educated in the 50's and 60's when music lessons were free at school, giving an opportunity to many who would never otherwise have been able to learn how to play an instrument.

Watching Midlands Today amidst all the incessant talk of Brexit and the rise in knife crime, I was suddenly captivated by a feel-good story. The amazing sight of the whole of a year seven, first year at secondary school to us older folk, playing in a school orchestra. This took place at Nicholas Chamberlaine school whose catchment area is in one of the poorer areas in the West Midlands - Bedworth, an old colliery village between Nuneaton and Coventry. They have received funding so that children from a deprived background are able to learn a musical instrument which generally at the moment is limited to those who can afford it. It is proving very successful, the children enjoying the experience. This project at Bedworth was first launched in London with great success. Let's hope it starts to grow and go to other parts of the UK.

Music has been the Cinderella of the academic world for a while, the three Rs and sciences taking precedence over everything else. But those who devise the curriculum in schools are starting to realise that learning an instrument has many benefits. Such as learning about commitment, working as a team, that not everything comes easily in life, but that the satisfaction gained from achieving something you've found difficult is beyond price. As an aside, it's also good for us older folk, staving off dementia through using all those different neurological paths in the brain.

The fact that music has been neglected in many schools over several decades, unless you are lucky enough to go to a private school, has had the knock-on

effect of difficulty finding musicians, and especially string players, for amateur orchestras up and down the country. The number of students taking A level music has diminished sharply. Our local university - Keele - no longer offers a stand-alone music degree, you have to team it up with either mathematics or music technology. Although you can take music technology on its own. Keele University has its own student orchestra supplemented by 'outsiders' to fill in the gaps. Over the years I've been involved on and off with the orchestra, I've seen the number of music students taking part fall drastically. The orchestra only keeps going through students from other disciplines, many of them medics. I wonder why music and medicine go so well together?

We have a tough programme, both physically and technically, ahead of us at the NSSO, playing two pieces by Tchaikovsky - Francesca da Rimini and Capriccio Italienne. Not good if you are starting to acquire arthritis in the wrist or elbow with all that scrubbing, especially the storm scene in Francesca da Rimini, descriptive as it may be. My good friend, Edwin, is giving this concert a miss out of respect for his wrist. Our leader has acquired golfers' elbow through the intense action of purfling a violin she is presently making. So we totter on. Music may be good for the brain but the body starts to give out. But then how much of this is due to bad posture and poor technique or maybe just overuse.

Off to Yorkshire for my last extended walking jaunt before the clocks go back. Still going, although with the odd twinge which I'm afraid as an ex-marathon runner I tend to ignore and hope it goes away. As long as I don't get stuck up on a mountain!

Happy viola playing

Janet Pazio