

A happy New Year to you all viola players and members of the BVS. The new year is often a time when we take stock, make new year resolutions which unfortunately, if you are anything like me, are soon broken, and maybe reflect on the previous year with its highs and lows. 2019 has been quite a memorable year one way or another. Joy for some, sadness for others with the so-called red wall crumbling and Brexit soon to become a reality. Climate change is pretty high on the agenda for the civilized world with bush fires in Australia, forest fires in the Amazon and floods here. Sometimes I envy the ostriches for their ability to put their heads in the sand until all danger has passed.

But amidst all this doom and gloom and uncertainty music is a wonderful panacea to offset what we can't control, even when things don't work out quite as we would like. Reflecting on last year I had lows but also highs with the viola. The low was at Pro Corda which made me evaluate the stage I was at and how I could improve. I discovered that trying harder isn't necessarily the key but to be able to relax into the music for which you need the technical ability to do just that. A good maxim which Lucy loves to give is that one should spend three times on technical exercises to one on your pieces. As Robin says, we practise our scales and studies in order to play our pieces beautifully. I can remember when Louise heard me warming up at Pro Corda before playing the Hummel, saying not to attack the music and get irritated by the fact it didn't quite work out as I would have liked but to stand back and say "now that's interesting, I wonder why it sounded like that" and to evaluate calmly how it could be improved.

The high was at Martin Outram's viola summer school at Benslow where I was affirmed by Martin on how far I had progressed and given direction on how to improve. It's the road that's important not our perceived goal although when I'm out walking it's rather nice to reach the goal and have a rest. I don't think we ever reach the final goal of perfection in our viola playing but we do pass significant milestones.

Talking about walking, Sue, our indomitable secretary, asked if I had any plans for this year. Rather too many I'm afraid for my viola practice. Some long challenging ones - Snowdonia Way from Machynlleth to Conwy, North Wales Coast path from Llanfairfechan near Conwy to Pwllheli, completing the Birmingham to Aberystwyth walk starting from Knighton this time, and other walks too numerous to mention. The further I go, the more I see and want to explore and get to know. A good analogy for viola playing.

I'm off to Pro Corda very shortly and have been preparing Frank Bridge's two pieces for viola. Beautiful music when played well. At least this year I'm going in with caution. No playing on the first night thinking I've got it taped which I know I haven't. One thing I'm sure of is that I'll be given technical and musical milestones to continue on my journey by our three superb teachers Louise, Robin and Lucy.

Trust you all have a good year and are given the strength to survive and grow with whatever comes your way.

Janet Pazio