

Re-reading the last BVS newsletter, January of this year, the tone that struck me was one of excitement and anticipation, including my blog. Louise telling us about Tim Ridout playing the Walton Viola Concerto with the Philharmonia and the up and coming Cecil Aronowitz international viola competition being held at the Birmingham Conservatoire in November. Congratulations very much in order for Yue Yu, known fondly to many of us as Daisy, who for a time was playing with the Constanze quartet. And my blog is full of the walks I had planned for 2020. Little did we know what was going to hit us a few short weeks after the newsletter was published.

I can remember seeing on the news around that time what appeared to be panic in China with the sudden increase in what looked to be like enormous prefabricated barns to be used as hospitals. There was talk about deaths from a highly contagious virus, part of the coronavirus family, which had been named Covid 19. I looked in wonder at what was happening. And then it hit Italy! Again, it didn't seem real. All this talk of lockdown, even churches were shut, unbelievable in such a staunch Catholic country. And then in March, things started to escalate here and panic to set in.

I risked travelling to Redditch on 17th March, thinking I'll fit in one last planned walk before the threatened social isolation went into force for those over 70 - I am sadly part of that age group. I can tell you I was none too pleased about it. Birmingham New Street where I changed to catch the train to Redditch was eerily deserted. Redditch bus station still fairly busy with pensioners like myself saying there's no way they are going to make us stay indoors. All of us in total denial. But I only managed one night of my planned three-night trip as reality started to hit and I thought discretion was the better part of valour, and still had public transport options from Pershore. Since then I've done nothing but cancel all my accommodation up to the end of July and haven't been on public transport or any sort of wheeled transport since 18th March. But to look on the positive side I have been able to revisit my old haunts and even find new ones accompanied by my son's little dog who, for all her short legs, has the most amazing stamina. Puts me to shame.

I suppose what most of us are doing now is trying to make the best of it but what a dreadful time for those involved in the arts. As an amateur it has hit me badly as I miss playing with my friends. Music, along with walking, being a major part of my life. But what about professional musicians? I know a lot of teachers have resorted to Zoom, but I wouldn't think it's as satisfactory as

actually being in the same room as the student. And all those students with their final year recitals coming up. And missing out on what a large part of going to college or university is about, the social interaction with others. And then there's the theatres. And, most importantly of all, when can I enjoy a decent pint of beer in a comfortable and hospitable pub surrounded by friends? Or even meet up with friends in each others' houses. So many things we took for granted.

But there are positives although they are sometimes difficult to find especially when I look in a mirror and am confronted by my wild pandemic hairstyle. Because I'm just walking locally and not spending hours using public transport, I have been able to do consistent viola practice. In a bit of a rut really. An hour before Bella (my son's dog) and I venture out for our daily jaunt and another hour after I've recovered from the walk when we get back. I actually thought I was improving until I played with my accompanist friend this morning (we've formed a social bubble) and realised I'm not quite as good as I thought I was. It's so hard to haul yourself up to the next level, never mind about how poor intonation is shown up when you play with somebody else, particularly the piano which is totally unforgiving. Still, as they say, keep calm and carry on.

I don't know about you but it's so strange how I've settled into this lockdown lifestyle and am almost afraid to move out of it. It's as though I'm living in a cocoon. But very good news on the horizon. It looks like Martin Outram's viola summer school is still taking place at the end of July. So I shall be braving public transport and you never know I may start hitting the hills again after that.

Keep safe, keep positive. See you on the other side

Janet Pazio