



TACET TIMES – 4

It's been raining this week, which is something of a novelty of late. And it made me think of that well-worn Biblical quote 'to everything there is a time'. The fields and plants – to say nothing of our grass, which still hasn't recovered from last summer's harsh sun – really need this balm. The brilliant bluebells, harbinger of better times, have been glowing in the woods and verges, and we have all been turning our faces to the moment when we see life moving into yet another 'new normal'.

It is worth looking for the good news among the more depressing stories. The arrival of representatives of a new generation with a little girl in Peter's family – making him a great-uncle, and to Boris, recovery in time to welcome a son. The news that we have passed the peak of the current phase of the COVID-19 epidemic, even though the slope on the other side will be a long one. The sight of cherry blossom on the trees and the seedlings making their tentative way into the light.

And what better news than the amazing drop in pollution that has resulted from the significant drop in traffic both on the ground and in the air?

Joanna Mace

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News update:

- **ExCo meeting:** ExCo will meet on 6th May via Zoom to continue our planning for the virtual AGM and to discuss communications with members
- **AGM:** Dates to note: Wednesday 27th May 19.45 – practice run

Wednesday 3rd June 19.45 – online AGM

So – watch this space (and others) for more information nearer the time

- **Ben Westerman** – some people have had difficulties opening the choral playlist that Ben sent. Try with this one: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_3SNT_ZcEqSTIYKKjW-iFZFnS7QP6B58

Memories are made of this

Conductors and Settings – some thoughts from Brian Stevenson

What has been unique in the short time I have been with the Tonbridge Philharmonic is the number of conductors who have led us on practice nights and in the public concerts. Over the past year has it been six or seven, if we include the pianists/accompanists who have stepped up to the breach? I have been helped by them all but look forward to continuity in the future.

As a Cambridge alumnus my wife and I have attended the Alumni weekends held there in September, and one of the highlights has been singing with members of CUMS under the lead of the late Sir Stephen Cleobury in King's College Chapel, who died last November. He conducted the Alumni Choir for years with great patience.

Over a hundred of us come together at 2.00pm. on Saturday afternoon and practice until 4.00p.m., have a tea break, and then another two hours with the orchestra. Finally the Concert begins at 9.00 p.m. after a rushed dinner.

We have not practised together before the day, though we know in advance what we will sing. The paying audience completely fills the soaring chapel and the concert will finish about 10.30 p.m. We have sung a number of Requiems - Duruflé, Brahms, Fauré. It is tiring but leaves us with a great sense of triumph at the end of a long day.

King's Chapel is, of course, more beautiful than our music room or Big School at Tonbridge School, but what I like best are its stained glass windows. Being there for six

hours helps you to appreciate the colours and how the sunshine changes them. We face down the chapel towards the great West Window, which is the newest glass (by Clayton and Bell in 1879) and which depicts the Last Judgement. It was the only glass not taken down during the Second World War. It glows in the setting sun, particularly the blues used in the sky at the top of the window, and the reds and yellows in the main area. Nearly all the other windows are from Henry VIII's reign.

On one side of the choir I especially studied the Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the other, Jonah cast up by the Whale. Tonbridge School chapel glass is not on the same scale or variety!

After we sang the Brahms *Deutsches Requiem* my wife bravely approached Sir Stephen Cleobury and said that it must be a change to conduct the scratch Alumni Choir compared to the regular Kings College Chapel Choir. Sir Stephen replied 'I have learnt to take the rough with the smooth'.

So have the amazing windows.....

Brian Stevenson (bass)

More History

Brian's piece (above) made me think about the notable people with whom the Society has performed over the last seventy-plus years. Saskia Cogill (Sop2) who is keeping the archives at the moment, had a look and came up with the name of Vernon Handley. He conducted TPS between 1958 and 1961, one of his his earliest regular commitment. We may even have a few members who remember his time with us – even if they would have been very young at the time!

The records show that Mr Handley arrived in the autumn of December 1958, and his first concert was *A Recital of Christmas Music*. He followed this with an impressive selection of mainly British music for concerts in May and October of 1959, the latter being performed in the 'Dowgate Hall' – not a venue known to me, but I'm sure someone will explain. He led an orchestral event in the same location in July 1960, and his final concert with TPS was in November 1961, when the programme included Beethoven, Delius and the Kodaly *Te Deum*.

Vernon Handley (otherwise known as 'Tod') was born in November 1930 to a Welsh father and Irish mother, and grew up in their working class home in Enfield. He desire to learn the piano was thwarted following a hand injury, and he turned his attention to the study of scores and to listening to records borrowed from the Enfield Public Library.

Encouraged by the music master at Enfield Grammar, Vernon's career opened with the opportunity to conduct the school choir – and the die was cast. At Balliol he read English but his studies took second place to the opportunities that arose to conduct any orchestra, choir or music society. The resulting third did not deter him, and he had no qualms about

finding an income in road building, as a publisher's representative or as a supply teacher among many other roles. He would do almost anything as long as it left his evenings and weekends free to conduct. It was at this time that he started to come down to Tonbridge, where his 3 year tenure saw him conducting a number of concerts.

He had also enrolled for courses at the Guildhall School of Music, where he made up for his previous lack of instrumental experience by studying the curious combination of double bass, trombone and violin. His development in conducting was overseen by Sir Adrian Boult, whom he had first seen conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and on whose style he based his own. He held firm to the tenet expressed to him by Boult: *Do remember, won't you, that you are playing to the blind man in the audience.*

Vernon Handley's greatest claim to fame was his espousal of the 'new' British music that was being written in the twentieth century. He enraged his students when, as Professor for orchestra and conducting at the Royal College of Music, he insisted on using the British repertoire on which to base his curriculum. The ensuing row led to his resigning the post.

He made many recordings of modern British music by names now known all over the world, such as Arnold, Bax and Finzi, and also of the work of lesser known figures such as Robert Simpson and Sir Granville Bantock.

He had clear views on the styles of conductors, saying *music isn't mime; you shouldn't fraudulently convince people that they have heard what they haven't.*

Vernon Handley died at home in Monmouthshire in September 2008. He had received many awards in recognition of his life's work, including as a CBE, and a Fellow of the Royal College of Music. He had been a regular conductor at the Proms, and henceforth the concert performed on or near 10th September (concert 73) is dedicated to his name.

And even more history ... but not quite the same!

Munchkin

My rise and rapid fall in music theatre: in *The Wizard of Oz* I had the role of a non-singing munchkin. I had a black stovepipe hat, green trousers and yellow jacket. I also had a prop – a cardboard cut-out shrub which I hid behind until my pop-up entry. I crouched low and waited.

To my horror I suddenly realised was facing green branches and leaves; my shrub was back-to-front, so the audience was looking at brown cardboard .

My stage career never recovered from that; it ended that night, but at least TonPhil welcomed me.

Any offers, but agents only please.

David Price (Tenor)

What a picture David paints! And, did you know a 'munchkin' is also a breed of cats with very short legs? – but I don't think that was the sort David was portraying on stage.

Poetry Corner

This is a favourite of mine, and was set to music just over 50 years ago by a music teacher at my school. The choir learned it for the concert that we held at the end of the school year and I can still sing it to this day! Only wish my short-term memory was quite as good.

The Way through the Woods

– Rudyard Kipling

They shut the road through the woods
Seventy years ago.
Weather and rain have undone it again,
And now you would never know
There was once a road through the woods
Before they planted the trees.
It is underneath the coppice and heath,
And the thin anemones.
Only the keeper sees
That, where the ring-dove broods,
And the badgers roll at ease,
There was once a road through the woods.

Yet, if you enter the woods
Of a summer evening late,
When the night-air cools on the trout-ringed pools
Where the otter whistles his mate,
(They fear not men in the woods,
Because they see so few.)
You will hear the beat of a horse's feet,
And the swish of a skirt in the dew,
Steadily cantering through
The misty solitudes,
As though they perfectly knew
The old lost road through the woods.
But there is no road through the woods.

Short Story

Passing Sentence

‘Muumm....’

My son is home for the first time in over a year. His lean figure and dark skin carry the memory of travels to the Far East and beyond. This man is no longer my boy but always will be.

‘What is it, Will?’

'...where did you put my ...' What is it with these guys who cannot see what's under their noses? His father was just the same.

'... rucksack? It was in the hall.' And I'd tripped over it at least three times before I threw into the cupboard.

'Under the stairs,' I called over my shoulder as I grabbed my briefcase. I was due in court at ten, needed at least half an hour's preparation in the office beforehand, and it was already eight thirty-five.

I sit as a magistrate in the County Court, have done for fifteen years now. No names registered when I glanced down the list for that day, although the crime with which one of the accused had been charged was a little unusual and caught my eye. I might not have recognized the man himself had I not glanced around the courtroom at the members of the public and seen Sally. Late teenage, long hair and fierce eyebrows. Not sulky today but uncertain, and on the edge of tears. She gazed around, looking bemused, and then stared intently at the young man. His name was Graham Sutton, and the charge was that he'd committed *arson reckless as to whether life was endangered*. He sat facing forward, eyes closed, hands clasped between his bouncing knees.

I had hardly noticed him at the wedding blessing nearly six months earlier, which was the previous time I'd seen him. We knew Michael, the groom, because he is Sally's father. He had few other supporters on his side of the church. His parents were dead, his brother unable to come over from the States, so his only blood relatives were the son and daughter from his first marriage. 'We' were four friends who wanted to be there to support him, in spite of our misgivings regarding the volatile woman who was now his wife.

We were well outnumbered by the bride's Liverpool Irish extended family. You could see the resemblance, narrow bodies and faces, deep-set eyes, from the 95-year old matriarch holding court on a chair placed almost in the middle of the room, to granddaughters and great-granddaughters who danced enthusiastically cheesy 80's music as the evening wore on. After the church blessing and wedding breakfast, this was the evening reception, to which additional people had been invited. We'd found a quieter spot in a corner away from the disco DJ, and I was watching a quartet dancing, clutching pints of beer and wine glasses as the young people do. Paul, Michael's son, had grown into an assured young man, with a friendly, open face. We'd known Sally - a troubled teenager who'd caused her father much angst as she struggled to cope with the family breakup. Now she displayed that sulky look that hinted at a capacity to cause trouble.

It had been clear that evening that the slim young man in front of me now was her boyfriend. I was struck me with how uncomfortable he looked, standing on the edge of things, one hand in his pocket jingling keys or coins. He probably knew four, maybe five, of the eighty or so people in the over-heated room. He'd looked shy, moving from foot to foot, not talking very much. When he did dance, he gripped his near-empty tumbler, and the remaining liquid jumped up and down in time to the beat. His smile was fixed. It was impossible to tell what was going on in his head, but I didn't get the sense that he was enjoying himself.

I couldn't remember the last time I'd heard a case of arson, but did recall explaining to Will, when he was doing a school project on the judicial system, that the motivation for such actions seemed to fall into two categories: revenge or political. Political with a small

'p': a protest against an establishment or organization. Revenge came from when someone felt they'd been unfairly treated. Will had been fascinated; he was preparing for an exam in psychology. Now the three magistrates, of whom I was the chair, were faced with a young man whose actions were as clear as his motivation was opaque. The report showed that he went in to pay, purchasing two cigarette lighters. He left and drove his car over to a bay where there was a pump to provide air for tyres. I saw that timed camera evidence showed him sitting with the door open until a white van pulled up to the pumps nearest the kiosk. Then he got out and ran to the far pumps, shielded by the van from the attendant in the kiosk. He pulled two of the nozzles off the pump structure, pushed something in so that they would deliver fuel and used the cigarette lighters to ignite the flow of liquid. The pictures showed that he ran quickly away to escape the fireball, and stood watching the flames from a safe distance. Luckily the white van had driven off by this time, so the attendant's view was no longer blocked, and his reaction was to hit an emergency cut-off button to stop the supply of fuel and then rush out with a fire extinguisher to douse the remaining flames.

It must have been a frightening incident for that man. The stills were were silent, of course, and black and white, but my mind couldn't help but fill in the 'whump' sound from the ignition of the fuel, and the colour and heat that would have billowed out in all directions. They showed the accused clearly, both in his car and at the pumps before and after he filled the tank, so there was very little argument to be made in his defence. His solicitor advised the court that his client was pleading guilty. We then had to consider mitigating circumstances, and a possible referral for psychiatric reports. I know that arson is viewed as a serious offence and can carry a life sentence, but no-one had been hurt and there was only minor damage to the pumps, so I didn't think we would be taking a really draconian view of things.

'Stand up please, Mr Sutton,' I instructed from my position in the middle of the bench. He was obliged to look up at my colleagues and me on our dais. I saw red-rimmed eyes, and heard shallow breathing. He couldn't have been more than a couple of years older than Will. 'Would you like to tell me how this all happened.' His solicitor half rose, subsiding quickly as I looked sharply at him. 'I'd very much like to hear it in your own words.'

Graham looked away at a middle-aged couple who leaned forward in mute support.

'It will help us to understand the circumstances in which you could take this sort of action.' And would help us to assess whether a psychiatric report was necessary. I offered him an encouraging smile.

'I'm not sure, I can't...' He gulped and looked down.

'Come now,' I prompted, 'just take it step by step. Had you been out that evening?' He nodded.

'You need to speak so that the court can record your responses.'

'Yes, out.' His voice was little louder than a whisper.

'And your car needed petrol?'

'Yes, I'd been up to London that day, so the tank was nearly empty.'

'And what happened then?' I was accustomed to patiently teasing information out of accused and witnesses.

'I went and filled up where I usually do.'

'So it was quite a normal thing?'

'Yes, then I went in and paid.'

'Do you smoke, Mr Sutton?' asked Ben Miskin, sitting on my right.

'No, I gave up two years ago.'

'Then why did you purchase the lighters?' Graham Sutton was withdrawing into the memory of that night. I watched the conflicting emotions rushing across his face like the flickering lights he would have seen as he drove through the dark towards the petrol station. When did he decide to do what he did?

'Mr Sutton...?'

'I ... I don't know.... it just came to me.'

'What was that, Mr Sutton?'

'She said I couldn't do anything, that I was boring, and she didn't want to go out with me anymore. She said it on the phone, before I left London, like.' The words were coming in a rush now, his eyes fixed on the royal coat of arms above my head. 'So I thought, I'd show her, like do something that wasn't boring and ordinary, then she'd have to take notice of me, wouldn't she?' The pitch was rising. Now he'd started talking, it had unleashed a flood of words. 'Then she wouldn't want to get rid of me, would she?' I wanted to put my arms around him and tell him that it would all be all right, that people would understand it had been a moment of madness. But it wouldn't have been true.

The gasp came from the public gallery. I looked over and saw Sally bend to pull tissues out of her handbag. She was crying, and the girl beside her put her arm around Sally's shoulder.

'I didn't think about what would happen like, I just wanted to do something, y'know, like dramatic. I thought it might get me in the papers, I thought it'd shock her back into loving me again.'

So this is what it came down to. Rejected suitor, heartless beloved – how many times had we heard it before? I recognised that each time it was an individual life a little more battered, a little more injured by what life has thrown in its path. Inside I prayed that Will would never have to face anything like this.

It would have to be a custodial sentence, his mother would lose him for three years, or at least eighteen months if he behaved well. How to bear that? I couldn't imagine.

Joanna Mace

Help to keep TPS going for another 75 years!

A message from the Treasurer, Robert Skone James:

Did you know that you can help our Society by doing your shopping online – as well as protecting your health and that of others? And it doesn't cost you anything!

There are a number of ways to do this, just two of which are outlined below. The sellers will make a small donation to TPS every time you place an order, and with nearly two hundred members, lots of little amounts could add up to quite a lot.

1. The Giving Machine

How to register

Go to <https://www.thegivingmachine.co.uk/sign-up/> and click on "Join as a giver"

In the search field enter: Tonbridge Philharmonic Society, then click on Tonbridge Philharmonic Society where it appears under the heading "Matching Search Results". Click on "Join and Support", then fill in your details in the form and click on "Join"

How to use The Giving Machine

When you want to purchase an item online (except using Amazon), instead of going straight to the seller's site, go to <https://www.thegivingmachine.co.uk/login/giver/> and enter your details as set up on registration.

On the main page select "My Shops" and enter the name of your chosen shop in the "Search retailers" box, then click on "return". Then click on "Shop Now" and proceed as usual. Once you have paid, the donation will automatically be credited to the TPS account.

2. Amazon Smile

Although you can access Amazon via The Giving Machine, they are not able to give donations for legal reasons and so instead you can use Amazon Smile in a similar way.

How to register and use if you already have an Amazon account

Go to www.smile.amazon.co.uk. Enter your ID and password and then enter Tonbridge Philharmonic Society when prompted for your charity. Click on "Search" and on the next page click on "Select", after which you carry on as normal

How to register and use smile if you do not already have an Amazon account:

Go to www.smile.amazon.co.uk and click on "Create your Amazon account"

Enter the details requested and click on "Create your Amazon account". Amazon will send a code to your email address. Enter that code and click on "Create your Amazon account"

On the next page click on "Get started" and proceed as above by entering Tonbridge Philharmonic Society and clicking on "Search"

If you have any questions or difficulty in registering or using these sites, please let Robert Skone James know at treasurer@tonphil.org.uk

There are lots of opportunities to carry on making music and listening to it. Here are just a few:

- **Choraline:** join the Self-Isolation Choir which now has over 2000 singers around the world. They plan sing Handel's *Messiah* on 31st May, and rehearse live on Monday at 19.30 (but you can catch up later if you wish). Find out details at www.theseisolationchoir.com. The Choraline website also offers vocal exercises.
- **Wigmore Hall:** www.wigmore-hall.org.uk for lots of live-streamed concerts. Chris Brooks (bass) particularly recommends the masterclass by Thomas Quasthoff
- **Royal Opera House:** streaming of past performances on particular dates, find the list on www.roh.org.uk
- **Carry on singing**

Hello everyone!

I hope you're all coping during this new and interesting time, and not going stir crazy with isolation! Like many others in the performing arts industry, Coronavirus has really turned my world upside down, however I have bounced back with something which we can hopefully all do together!

I've set up an exciting, new 10 Week Online Singing Programme called 'Carry On Singing' to bring the joy of singing back into all our homes at this difficult time. This programme is totally flexible for entire families or individuals as one email address is valid for each household.

With 'Carry On Singing', participants will receive rehearsal materials every Friday (starting Friday 3rd April) as we get to know unique arrangements of three songs over a ten week programme.

In your own time, and from the comfort of your own home, you'll discover entertaining warmups and fun, useful exercises, before being guided through each vocal part with step-by-step video tuition. At the end of the programme, you'll then be invited to record your part (either audio or video) to be compiled in a Virtual Choir Concert recording that you can share with your friends and family – all for the price of just one singing lesson!

If you're interested and want to find out more, please visit my new website: www.carryonsinging.com

Thanks all and stay safe!!

Best wishes,

Laurie Denman
Carry On Singing

Laurie is from Tunbridge Wells, currently residing in Manchester

- and if you fancy a break from music, go to nationaltheatre.org.uk and find the details of the plays they will be screening.

I'm sure that there are lots more like this – if you send them to me I'll add them to the list – secretary@tonphil.org.uk