



TACET TIMES – 5

Not many people still sit down with pen and paper to write a letter, but my friend Helena (we first met as schoolgirls in 1975) and I write on a regular basis. For me there is something so pleasing about having words that I can almost hear – since her voice is so familiar - as well as read, that I can consider and relish in the way that one rolls a good wine around the mouth so as to extract the maximum pleasure.

From her latest letter came the observation *The lack of 'social contact' doesn't really matter – I phone and Facetime, it seems to do. I think the lack of social obligation is wonderful; no committees or actions to be taken, no visits, lectures, films, no popping in to see how someone is – a quick call suffices.* Maybe it has been good for some of us to have to stop and ponder, to have time to 'stand and stare'.

But now the slight relaxation of restrictions seems to have had a curious effect on my friends and family. The younger ones are anxious to get on with things, but the ones like me and, I'm sure, Helena, are suffering a new malaise – FOGO: fear of going out. Well, not exactly fear, but maybe a combination of the recognition that this period of constraint has had some distinct benefits, together with an abiding anxiety about keeping the virus at bay. We will have to come to terms with the risk/benefit analysis as things change, and that is something that we each have to do for ourselves.

In the meantime we should be so grateful that the sky is a clear, azure blue and that (mostly) the sun is shining. Imagine how we would all have been feeling if there had been continuous rain and grey clouds! Even if you can't go out of your front door, all that beautiful light raises the spirits and encourages us to keep going until things here on the ground become a bit clearer.

Joanna Mace

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News update:

- **AGM:** Dates to note: Wednesday 27th May 19.45 – practice run

Wednesday 3rd June 19.45 – online AGM

You should see the relevant reports, agenda etc coming out any time now. If you haven't received them by 27th May, please let the Secretary know. If you know anyone who would like the information but cannot access it online, please let the Secretary have their name.

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

- **Ben Westerman** – watch out too for Ben's video focussed on the Verdi *Requiem*. It's just over two hours long, but is accompanied by a 'roadmap' that will suggest where you can pause the video, and also lists the books etc that Ben refers to.

It is really worthwhile to watch it all the way through. I have sung the work on several occasion, and watched the video three times – and each time I learned something more about this magnificent work!

OPERAS THAT
VERDI WOULD WRITE
TODAY

LA FORZA
DEL TWITTER



UN BALLO
IN MASCHERA
WITH THE STARS



IL TRAVIATO
(STARRING
SILVIO BERLUSCONI)



Memories are made of this

Who will believe it was like this when they read about 'the year of the virus' in their history lessons of future decades? I wonder what Brian's grandchildren will tell their grandchildren in fifty or sixty years' time:

Home Schooling

Our son is a young widower so, when the schools closed in March, our granddaughters aged 10 and 8 came to stay with us. Together with the challenge of doubling the number in our household, we also had to take on the responsibility for home schooling during term time, which included music practice. Helena, the 8 year old, is a keen flautist, though her flute is unusual in shape, as it resembles a shepherd's crook. I had never seen one like that, but I understand they are an adaptation to make them shorter and therefore easier for a child to play.

I am designated to sit in the room with her as she plays various pretty cascades, and I then hum as accompaniment to her renditions of *The Londonderry Air* and the *Skye Boat Song*. This annoys her, so I am ordered to be *tacet*. Her 10 year old sister, Olivia, practices scales on the piano while I do the crossword, keeping a good social distance when she lets rip with her singing, which comes with a lot of vibrato. She likes the hymns from church: *Dear Lord and Father, O Jesus I have promised* and, because my brothers are Trinity College Dubliners, they have encouraged her to sing *In Dublin's fair city* and to bring Molly Malone to life.

There are aspects of the work with which I refuse to help – especially the warm up exercises with Joe Wicks on YouTube. At Tonbridge Phil we do warm up exercises of the vocal kind, but Joe Wicks is beyond that, with burpees, kangaroo jumps, squats, rhythmic jumping, dancing, arm circling from the girls. But not from me, I hasten to add.

VE Day helped us with history, and Granny set us to make bunting pennants depicting objects they had read or heard about - barrage balloons, gas masks, 'dig for victory', a Lancaster bomber, a dove of peace and various Allied flags. We sang *We'll meet again, the White Cliffs of Dover*, and *A Long way to Tipperary* as the bunting swayed in the breeze. I shared my memories with them of VE Day 8 May 1945 in Belfast, when we had a bonfire on the bombsite in our street. Then we had a party with cakes and sweets provided by US troops - and had a fine time of it.

For RE it has been Ramadan customs such as Iftar and Eid. Although we have not fasted, we do observe the rules of breaking the fast - it should be done by eating an odd number of dates. I am responsible for sourcing the Medjools and Deglet Nours. These are considered to be the finest of all the dates grown in the Middle East, and my own favourites are the big, succulent Medjools.

Lastly we tackle Latin. We study the use of Latin prefixes in English words and their meaning. We choose 'super' and so : superduper, supersonic, supererogatory etc etc, but not superb.

And it all makes me think - where would the world be without the superannuated to step in at a time like this?

Brian Stevenson - bass
May 2020



Taming the tenors

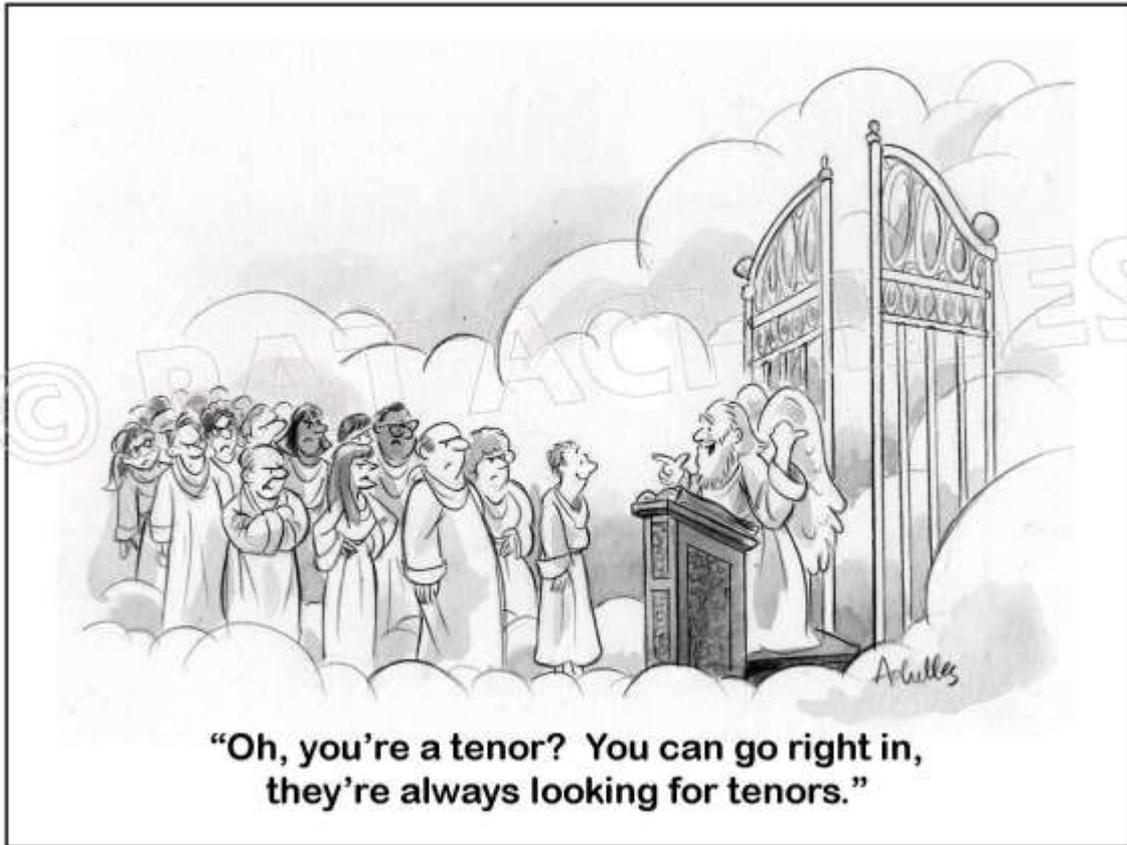
At my great age (81) I'm the third generation of Welsh tenors in my family. Maybe that's why I was appointed the tenor rep many years ago.

It's a challenging duty as all the tenors are strong personalities and all are good musicians. Yet they put up with me. But the point I want to make is that women are always - and naturally - interested in tenors, as we are the romantic lead in most operas. We get to sing all the best tunes, we wear stunning costumes of tunics, breeches, a cloak, tights, thigh-high leather boots, a sword and, often, a magnificent plumed hat. Sometimes we're on horseback. But animals in opera are always a risk.

But there is one drawback - tenors rarely make it to the end of the opera. We face so many villains who've got it in for us, so we get stabbed, shot, poisoned, hanged, guillotined (*Andrea Chenier*), or even walled up as in *Aida*. We go down in glorious melody. Sometimes, although mortally wounded, we can sing for ages before we finally conk out.

I don't really tame the tenors; I look after their scores, their subs, sell them tickets and act as a lightning conductor for their points of view. So, ladies, don't hide behind your fans and drop handkerchiefs, come and get us while we're still in one piece!

David (AWT – ageing Welsh tenor)
March '20



Poetry Corner

The Kipling poem in the last edition prompted David Robins (Tenor 1) to suggest this work. He writes: from singing Finzi's arrangement of it, I have come to enjoy Robert Bridges *Clear and Gentle Stream*, which is much enhanced by listening to a performance of Finzi's version.

Here is the link to the Finzi setting sung by the Quink Ensemble:

<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=HBsOKFz0XaA&list=RDAMVMHBsOKFz0XaA>

Elegy – Robert Bridges

Clear and gentle stream,
Known and loved so long,
That hast heard the song
And the idle dream
Of my boyish day;
While I once again
Down thy margin stray,
In the selfsame strain

Still my voice is spent,
With my old lament,
And my idle dream,
Clear and gentle stream!
Where my old seat was
Here again I sit,
Where the long boughs knit
Over stream and grass
Thick translucent eaves:
Where back eddies play

Shipwreck with the leaves,
And the proud swans stray,
Sailing one by one
Out of stream and sun,
And the fish lie cool
In their chosen pool.
Many an afternoon
Of the summer day
Dreaming here I lay;
And I know how soon
Idly at its hour
First the deep bell hums
From the minster tower,
And then evening comes,
Creeping up the glade,
With her lengthening shade,
And the tardy boon
Of her brightening moon.
Clear and gentle stream,
Ere again I go
Where thou dost not flow,
Well does it beseem
Thee to hear again
Once my youthful song,

That familiar strain
Silent now so long:
Be as I content
With my old lament,
And my idle dream,
Clear and gentle stream!



Short Story

Cape Cod Morning



‘Will he come, Angelika?’ Her mother’s voice still pronounced her name in the European way, with the weight on the second syllable. The words faded into the darkness of the room behind them, and there was a rustle of movement as her father leaned in towards the figure on the bed. Annie rested her knuckles against the low windowsill and peered out into the cool morning light, but there was no sign of anyone approaching on the dirt road that pierced the forest. The paint beneath her skin was brittle, flaking here and there in corners and joints, loose along the grain of the wood. It was a long time since her father had hoisted his ladders against the wall and set about painting the whole house inside and out. One summer when there was no other work, this was all he had done, day after day, until the clapboard sidings had glistened in the slanted sunshine. She remembered how his fingers had been rimmed with white and his hair flecked with paint as he sat with her in this room, going through her reading exercises while the light of the day faded.

The stuffiness held an underlying corruption that caught in the back of her throat. She had pushed open the shutters and now she wanted to heave the window up and let new air wash into the room. It would bring a reminder of the ocean even though you could not hear the sea from the house. For her mother, sick rooms had to be hermetically sealed against any incursion by the outside world, so the window would stay shut. Annie rubbed her hand up her arm, feeling the dryness of her skin. Her knuckles were dusty from the window ledge. The sea was only ten minutes walk through the trees. From the shore you could draw a straight line back to the world from which her parents had come, a mythic place that Annie had never seen and probably would now never see.

‘Yes, of course he will, Mutti, but it is a long way. I sent the telegram on Wednesday, just after I got here. I told you I had when I got back, and it’s only Friday now.’ With an effort she suppressed the irritation that rose within her, and pulled the curtain out from where it had become trapped behind a chair, noticing for the first time how the hem was hanging down at one corner. The bicycle ride of more than half an hour in each direction to get to the telegraph office had been uncomfortable, the wheels sliding on the sand blown onto the road by last week’s storm. That was two days ago, but it would take Henry all of that time and more to extricate himself from daily life and make the long journey from Chicago. No,

she reminded herself, she must call him Heinrich. Clutching her father's hand, she had watched as the priest gave him the name, pouring water over his forehead and making him scream. It would upset her mother if any other was used. She had insisted 'it was good enough for my father, and it is good enough for you. Heinrich, Heinrich, Heinrich...' and her brother would smile soothingly and reply

'Of course, Mutti, it's just that..' or maybe he wouldn't, not this time. She wondered how long it would take once he got here. Her mother would wait until then with the last ounce of strength within her. She swallowed the thought and turned back to the room.

'I'm sure he won't be long now.' Annie walked over to the high wooden bed and looked down at the woman who lay motionless, just the occasional flicker of an eye or movement of a finger to indicate that her spirit was still fighting the world as it had always done. She bent to straighten the faded silk coverlet and then carefully lifted the arm that lay on top to pull out the towel on which it had rested. The skin was stretched and shiny smooth with fluid pooled underneath it. Her mother's heart was no longer strong enough to pump it back into her system. For a long time now, Annie had hated to touch her mother's arms, covered as they were with loose soft skin that had hung unoccupied by the diminishing flesh. In the last few days that skin had become stretched tight as the structure beneath broke down and could no longer contain the fluids of her body. She slid a fresh towel underneath the arm and collected up the damp one.

'I'll take this down to the kitchen, Papa. You want anything? A drink, maybe?' The gaunt face that looked up at her held still the ghost of the vigorous, capable man who could mend anything and make most things, who she had trusted with all her heart. His eyes were rimmed with red, the tears indistinguishable from those that these days sprung from the cold or the wind. He shook his head.

Down in the kitchen Annie put on the kettle to boil. The tin of tea felt sticky to her fingers. As she opened it, her nose wrinkled against the smell. She noticed once more that the door of the cupboard from which she had taken her cup was marked dark where hands pushed it shut. She shivered with the thought of it. Her mother's failing sight had spared her from noticing what was happening as strength ebbed away. She had stopped the rounds of scrubbing and dusting that had filled her days out here, where there were few people to see the results from one week's end to the next. The kettle steamed its message and she poured boiling water into her cup through a strainer filled with the stale tea leaves. It would taste dreadful, there was not even fresh milk to soften it, but it would fill up some time. Annie sat at the table and cradled the hot cup in her hands. From time to time she had imagined this moment, the moment when one or both of her parents would leave her. She had always thought that her father would go first, that her mother's will would see her through the extra years that were owed the female of the species. But now it was her mother who struggled with the relinquishing of life while her little family looked on. Her mother who still had such a hold over her, whose voice she could still hear, would still hear in her head whenever she transgressed one of the many rules laid down for her when still a child. What would she feel once that power had gone. Or would it never go?

All was so still that she could hear the approaching vehicle from a long way off. Her brother would have changed from the express onto the small line that served the town, leaving the glamour of the long-distance train for something much more quotidian. Once he

reached his final stop, he would take down his suitcase from the rack and descend the steps onto the wooden platform. Did he pause and hope to smell the sea? Did he recognise any of the faces? The only way to get out here from the station, other than walking, and she could not imagine him doing that, would be to stop by the general store and get old man Scantleberry's son to drive him out here in his truck. They had been at school together that first summer, before Henry was sent away upstate. He would trade on that to get his ride. The whole town, more of a large village really, would know what was happening. Doctor MacDonald must have told them, and people were so good at this sort of time. There had been a steady flow of pot roasts and pies, a manifestation of the neighbours' awareness of their inability to console. Annie put her cup down quietly, stood up and went to the little piece of mirror her mother had hung inside the larder so that she could make sure she was presentable when answering the door. She smoothed stray hairs back into her bun and pulled the collar of her dress straight. Opening the side door of the house she heard the rumble of the truck over the uneven track that heralded Henry's arrival. When she judged it the right moment, she closed the door silently and moved back through the house to open the front door.

The familiar tight feeling rose within her as her brother took the front steps two at a time and clattered his suitcase carelessly onto the top step.

'Hey, Sis, how are you?' Henry dropped a kiss on the top of her head as he swept past. It did not matter that he was four years younger than she was, a wave of insignificance swamped her as he took over the space around them. She felt as the small crustaceans must do when the tide runs in to fill the rock pools where they used to go shrimping.

'Shhh!' Annie put her finger to her lip in a futile attempt to constrain the exuberance of his presence.

'That bad, eh?' He dropped his voice but it still reverberated in the narrow hallway.

'She's been waiting for you,' Annie said quietly. She could not help looking like a schoolmistress, as she knew she must, hands held tightly in front of her and lips a straight line of disapproval. Henry glanced up the stairs and back at his sister, and for the first time in his life he appeared unsure of himself. He took a deep breath and slowly started up towards the bedroom. The stairs creaked, fourth and seventh, as usual.

She was not going to follow him, she was not going to be there when he greeted his mother with a kiss on the fragile skin of her desiccated cheek. Before that, as he entered the room he would shake her father's hand and maybe clap him on the shoulder, giving himself a moment's grace in which to absorb the sight and arrange his features.

Turning back to the kitchen, Annie picked up a cloth and ran soapy water into the sink. The cupboard doors first, she thought, and then she would wipe all the pots and jars on the shelf above the cooking range. She had just taken them down and was wiping the shelf itself when she heard the sound. Her father howling like a wounded animal.

Now she would be able to open the windows in that room.



Background to the story: some years ago I was given a calendar with reproductions of 13 of Edward Hopper's paintings. I found them so evocative of the time and place in which they were set that I decided to write stories inspired by some of them. Here is one of the first I wrote.

If you would like to see more of Hopper's paintings there is an online exhibition by a Swiss gallery at <https://www.fondationbeyeler.ch/en/exhibitions/edward-hopper>

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, including **The Giving Machine** (<https://www.thegivingmachine.co.uk/sign-up/>) and **amazon smile** (www.smile.amazon.co.uk). 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. If you need more information, refer to *Tacet Times* No. 4 or contact the Secretary

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

- **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
- Stephen Hemsted has been busy transcribing piano trios into Sibelius (music notation software) and then generating audio versions with one part missing, so that you can play along. In the following link you'll find everything you'd need to take part in an isolation version of Beethoven's Trio Op 1 No 1, Haydn's Trio No 21, Mendelssohn's Trio in Dm Op 49, or Schubert's Bb Trio No 99: *for security reasons, the dropbox link is not shown on the website version of Tacet Times. Please contact the Secretary, who will be happy to provide it*
- City Lit: this organisation specialises in short courses both live (sometimes in conjunction with other organisations such as The British Museum) and online. The latest online offering includes a two session course on Verdi's *Requiem*. It will take place on 13th and 20th July at 13.30 for two hours, and costs £39 or £31 for seniors. For more information go to www.citylit.ac.uk and type Verdi Requiem in the search bar
- and if you fancy a break from music, go to nationaltheatre.org.uk and find the details of the plays they will be screening online

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