



TACET TIMES – 9

So here we are, gradually entering the world again, and it is a mixed blessing. The traffic is building and more and more people are to be seen in the shops.

We visited Peter's sister and family on Sunday, sitting outside for a lovely lunch overlooking an Oxfordshire chalk stream. There for a birthday celebration, we sat in the shade and heard children splashing in the shallow water upstream. From the other bank came the evocative sound of cricket bats on balls and attendant polite murmurs of appreciation or commiseration. Very English, it took me back to the middle of the last century when times were certainly quieter, although not necessarily easier.

The latest addition to the family (?step-grand-niece), nearly 3 months old, treated us to the marvel of a baby learning what hands and feet are for, testing boundaries of understanding and soaking up sensations and experiences. What times will she live through, I wondered, as she can expect to live until she is over one hundred, well into the twenty-second century.

As it seems likely to be a long time before we will be together again to sing, and I hope you are enjoying the work Ben is doing, and the other activities – the quiz, coffee mornings and other chances to catch up with those whom you would normally expect to see on a weekly basis. It is important that we stay in touch so that we can ensure the continuity of our venerable Society once things ease for musicians.

Have you made any resolutions to help you use this time productively? I had a good look at all my half-finished knitting and crochet projects and promised myself I would attack them and find good uses for the ENORMOUS stash of yarn that fills corners in several rooms. I have finished hats, a blanket and am almost at the end of a blanket for Oxfam that my mother started over ten years ago. (They sell them at festivals, so it might be a while before they can benefit). There were also a little hat and summer jacket for Hattie, the new arrival, much appreciated by the new mother on her behalf.

What are you doing to keep yourself occupied/amused during this period of restrictions? Let me know and I will share your project with our readers. My knitting/crochet will go to an organisation called Knit for Peace (knitforpeace.org.uk), who provide simple patterns and a wish list of items they would welcome. They will also take spare yarn and needles. If you have anything you would like to send them, let me know and we can get a consignment together.

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News update:

- **Lockdown activities:** our Choir accompanist, Jong-Gyung Park, has been keeping her fingers busy too – and you can watch as she and her husband, Anthony Zerpa-Falcon play Schubert's *Fantasie in F minor*, recorded for King Charles the Martyrs kcm music.

Click the link [Jong-Gyung Park](#) or find the recording on vimeo.com/433525923

- **Things to watch/listen to:** some wonderful and illuminating new programmes on music and musicians and free concerts – find the details on the last page

A little bird tells me:

- that we still need your favourite poems, especially if it is one that you learned at school and has a story to go with it



Memories are made of this

Bach before Seven

In February 1997 I received a surprising letter from Leipzig. It was from a former German POW who wished to return to West Malling to see where he was a prisoner. He wished to visit the church where he had played the organ when the prisoners had held a service of thanksgiving on their release and before their return to Germany.

He was asking for some addresses for bed and breakfast, so I sent him a list and forgot all about his enquiry until 1 May 1997. This turned out to be the day of the General Election and we were in the midst of all the confusion when Jochen arrived in the garden of the Vicarage. At first I thought he was the Labour Party Candidate and he thought I was the Vicarage gardener, but we quickly set each other straight. He had chosen the best and most expensive B&B on my list and was happy to be in Kent on a beautiful sunny day and after a huge full English breakfast - not quite the same experience as in the camp, which had been in the park across the road from the church.

He told me that he loved London, and on one of his visits to the capital he went to see Tony Blair arrive in Downing Street for the first time. During one of our chats I asked what he had played in that final service - it was a Bach choral prelude. We got on well, and the next year we were invited to Leipzig and Dresden. We flew via Dusseldorf and when we arrived at Leipzig- Halle airport there were Jochen and his son. I was delighted to see that there is a large statue of Handel standing proudly in front of the airport.

Leipzig had been substantially rebuilt after the damage of British and American bombing during the Second World War. We wandered through the centre and, after a large coffee, we visited St Nicholas' Church with its fine vaulting and its memories of the peaceful demonstrations that eventually brought down the Berlin Wall and then the GDR .

Then on to Bach's church of St Thomas, where his effigy lies in the middle of the chancel. In those days there were no tourists in East Germany, and so we had the place to ourselves - apart from the organist, who was practising the 'St Anne' Fugue.

We went on to Dresden, which was still full of rubble. The government of the GDR had left it as a reminder of the city's destruction in February 1945, leaving only the crypt of the Frauenkirche usable. When we returned to Dresden a few years later, it had been rebuilt and we were delighted to see the Frauenkirche returned to its magnificence. It was full of school classes and their teachers, and the organ was gently playing .

Having been to Leipzig a number of times now our love of Bach has deepened, and I try to wake up for the short piece of ' Bach before Seven ' on Radio 3 on weekdays. Sadly Jochen has died, but the last time we saw him in Berlin he gave us a CD by his favourite composer - not Bach but Hummel!

Brian Stevenson (*bass*)

and this

Shakhbut and the rotting palace

It was 1968 and Her Majesty's Government (HMG) had decided to end its East of Suez links. All embassies in the region were instructed to inform the local sheikhs and rulers. Our sheikh was Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi. He was broke, mean and needed to be propped up. But things were about to change.

The ambassador, myself and the Arabist went calling. The palace was a single storey mud and limestone pile near the beach. A few palm trees, wild dogs, fine sand, mega-rubbish and scruffy armed retainers everywhere. We were admitted, walked the length of a tattered carpet and were greeted by a hawk-eyed ruler. The ambassador began his presentation. Then there was a loud crash and alarmed cries behind us.

We looked around and saw huge chunks of lime and dry mud on the floor. There was a lot of it. The retainers looked up nervously and moved back. There was a decent hole in the roof through which we saw the relentless desert sun. The ruler was unmoved, but the ambassador said, 'Your Excellency, you must get a new palace'. When we got back to the embassy, a cable was sent to the Foreign Office reporting the circumstances of the visit and the rubble.

Six months later HMG paid for a new palace further inland and all future rulers, diplomats and sundry visitors were assured of safe conduct and peaceful assembly. Then Abu Dhabi discovered oil and gas and the sheikhdom became very, very rich. Shakhbut was removed to the Dorchester in London and his brother, Zayed, smoothly installed as ruler.

Happy ever after

David Price
June 2020



Poetry corner

Silver

Slowly, silently, now the moon
Walks the night in her silver shoon;
This way, and that, she peers, and sees
Silver fruit upon silver trees;
One by one the casements catch
Her beams beneath the silvery thatch;
Couched in his kennel, like a log,
With paws of silver sleeps the dog;
From their shadowy cote the white breasts peep
Of doves in silver feathered sleep
A harvest mouse goes scampering by,
With silver claws, and silver eye;
And moveless fish in the water gleam,
By silver reeds in a silver stream.

Walter de la Mare

I remember learning this poem at school and loved it for the pictures of peace that inhabit the words. I then learned to sing it in the setting by Cecil Armstrong Gibbs – and it has been set to music by many others before and since he did.



Short Story

Moving

'Are you going to, then?'

'Going to what, Jon?' Steph's eyes, rimmed with kohl and mascara even at 10.30 on a Sunday morning, smiled across at him. Her jeans were impeccably pressed and her white shirt glowed in the bright sun.

The couple were perched on the uncomfortable metal folding chairs that went with the little round table, enjoying a leisurely breakfast. Anything bigger than this 'bistro set' wouldn't have fitted onto the balcony of Jon's flat, but the stunning view over the Thames to the O2 Arena more than made up for it. They watched as the airborne pods of the Emirate AirLine river crossing swayed their way across the slow-moving water. A light breeze was playing with the surface making it ripple like muddy blue silk. Steph was so happy to have him back home again she wanted to splash it on the front of *The Metro*.

'You know, move in like?' He raised his hand and pushed his heavy fringe away from the top of his glasses. *Very Hugh Grant*, Steph thought, one of the reasons she loved him and wanted to be with him. Then he yawned with his mouth wide open and made no attempt to cover it. One of the reasons she didn't want to be with him. But he would have every excuse for being tired, having landed back yesterday from the Japanese tour that was part of the prize for the Best Game at the *Best Game Awards* last September. Jon was quite well known in the game design world these days, and the prize money had grown his savings into the sort of amount that had made a decent deposit for the flat. In his search for perfection he had chosen this place after looking at what had felt like hundreds of other homes for sale.

Steph did love Jon's flat, did love being there with him, did love being with him. He only had to look at her with those deep-set dark eyes and she was lost, in love with him all over again. He leaned over and touched the side of her mouth, moving toast crumbs with his gentle gesture. She was a south-of-the-river girl herself. She'd grown up in Peckham, and her parents and sister still lived there. She and Jon went once a month to her parents' house for Sunday lunch – epic for her Dad's amazing roast potatoes. Her family thought she'd been very adventurous when she'd bought her tiny place in Battersea. *Tiny, maybe*, she'd defended her choice to them, *but it's mine and I love it*. Top of the building, flooded with light, there was even a little patch of roof that she could climb onto and sunbathe. It wasn't shiny and new and full of stainless steel like Jon's, but it was hers.

'What are you saying to me, Jon Reynolds?' She raised one interrogatory eyebrow. He always said he found it devastating, incredibly sexy but at the same time leaving him feeling like Miss Bolton had done at primary school.

'Well, babe, aren't you fed up of going home on Sunday night, of having two toothbrushes and your clothes always in the wrong place?' This was right, she was tired of this to-ing and fro-ing. 'Let's give it a go, see if I can put up with you in my space?' She looked across at him. 'No, I mean, being in Japan, so far away from you for so long, it got me thinking.' He smiled, but it looked like he was being serious for once.

Sometimes Steph thought it was his job that did it. Living in a fantasy world every day how easy was it to come back to reality, to taking out the bins (which she had done last night, they were really rank) and making sure there was milk? You couldn't programme a avatar to do that for you.

'I thought, you know,' he continued, 'it would be great to have you here, to be sure I was always coming back to you'.

She gave a sharp intake of breath. This sounded as if he was proposing. She'd done the usual thing of fantasising about how it would feel if they were together forever. She loved it when they snuggled up on the sofa of an evening and watched a film, or went to buy furniture and crockery; the things that couples did. Jon even knew how to unblock drains and change fuses. Then he added,

'But we don't have to get married to do it, do we? Like, that would be too heavy.'

Not for her devoutly Catholic mother it wouldn't. It might be 2018, but her mother, and all the Irish ancestors before her for that matter, still considered that *living in sin* described what he was proposing.

'This is a bit sudden, isn't it?' Steph asked.

'Well, maybe, but I missed you so much babe.' Jon got up and pulled Steph into his arms. This was the nearest he got to being romantic, and Steph knew exactly where it would lead.

A couple of hours later she stood on the balcony ready to go out, waiting for him to finish calling MegaGames, the company he worked with in Australia – where it was two thirty in the morning. What were they like, these guys, didn't they even sleep?

They were going to be late for Keira's second birthday party, but work was more important than friends to Jon. How would it be for her patients if she arrived on the ward whenever she chose? That's not what nurses could do.

The air was soft on her cheeks as she watched the river traffic coming and going. It didn't look so much different from this side, did it? Well, yes, it did. From here you could see green trees and hills, and people-sized dwellings. Looking over this way from her side of the river it was glass, concrete and steel reflecting the sun off the huge surfaces. *A giant's looking glass*, someone had called it.

Eventually they arrived at Manda and Greg's, where the barbeque to was well underway. The little girl was dressed in sparkly pink, and loving the attention from the dozen or so of her parents' friends. Greg worked with Jon, and Manda had gone to the same school as Steph, albeit a couple of years below her.

'Greg,' Manda called out, voice high-pitched and betraying her stress. 'Greg, we've run out of beer'. Steph saw the pinched look on the other girl's face, dark bags telling the tale of sleepless nights. She'd put on loads of weight too, and was patting at the back of her new baby as it dribbled down her blouse. Greg grimaced as he passed Steph, and called out to his wife,

'There's more beer in the cupboard under the stairs.'

What is it with couples? she thought. They always seemed shattered, burdened with nappy bags and baby wipes, struggling to find babysitters if they wanted a night out, scrimping and saving to be able to afford a holiday. *Why would you want to do that, to swap freedom for these responsibilities?* She couldn't see it herself, much to the distress of her mother, who was desperate to be a grandmother.

Steph turned to see Jon walking towards her. He had his *time we split* face on; she supposed he was running on empty now. At least he hadn't had much to drink.

'See meeeee,' they both turned to see Keira running towards them. She loved her Uncle Jon and now squealed with delight as he hoisted her up and twirled her around his head. Then he dumped her on the ground and chased after her. *He's such a child*, Steph thought, *no wonder*

children love him. Something glittered and caught her eye. She bent down and picked up Jon's phone, which must have fallen out of his pocket when he put Keira down. She dropped it into her bag and followed him out of the garden.

She went back to Battersea that night. Jon didn't have to go back to work till Wednesday, so she could leave him to recover. As he stopped the car outside her building he leaned down and said quietly,

'Don't forget my question. You've got till Friday to give me your answer.' As he drove away Steph wondered why the time limit. He'd said nothing about a deadline earlier in the day.

She climbed the stairs to her flat and stood at the living room window. The sun was lowering itself to the horizon and the sky was painted with amazing shades of apricot and purple. Moving in with Jon would be a big step. How would she tell her Mum. Her Dad and sister wouldn't mind, but she could imagine the shouting. But it was her life, wasn't it? She was entitled to be happy, even if it didn't fit with other people's rules.

She heard the ping of the message notification and reached into her bag. The phone she pulled out was Jon's. *Oh shit* she thought, she'd forgotten to give it to him. NEED MY FONE. The message came from Rob's number. He lived around the corner from Jon. She rang Rob, who said Jon was spark out on his sofa. She asked him to tell Jon that she would take the mobile into MegaGames' London office tomorrow and leave it for him at reception.

Steph sat at the kitchen table and poured herself a glass of cold wine,. What she should probably do is take the mobile over to Jon's now, but it would be past midnight when she got back and she had an early start in the morning. Besides, he was the one who'd dropped it, and he was lucky that at least he knew it was safe. The phone pinged again. CANT YOU COME OVER NOW? No, she thought, she couldn't. What was to stop him coming south if he was that fussed. Surely there was nothing that couldn't wait until the morning?

She took another mouthful of wine, turning his phone over in her hand. *Would she? Could she?* For such a techie he had a limited range of passwords. She tried his initials and birthday. No joy. Then her name and flat number. Didn't work. The her birthday and his run together. Success.

The screen indicated he had 16 messages waiting. She hesitated. She wouldn't have opened his letters. She wouldn't have listened to the answerphone messages in his flat. So why did she think she it was all right to read the messages on his mobile?

Because there might be something urgent to do with his work, that's why. It still didn't seem right, but she tapped on the screen to open the mailbox. Her eyes ran down the list. MegaGames, but nothing that couldn't wait. Steve, Jon's brother, wanting to know if they were going to be around for his mother's birthday. Three messages from someone called Suzee. Steph pondered. Suzee – not a name Jon had mentioned in connection with work. Her thumb hovered. She hesitated, then tapped the icon.

Her mouth was dry. Suzee – whoever she may be – obviously knew Jon quite well. And wanted to know him better. The last message read *I'll wait till Saturday for your answer.*

One thirty, two forty-seven, ten past three. Steph saw times on her clock that she hadn't seen for years. It reminded her of not sleeping before exams. She repeated the words she'd seen over and over again. *Miss you ... and ... such a long 3 weeks ... and ... tonight?* She got up and walked around her little space, picking things up and setting them down again, her head full of voices telling her to do this, not to do that, that no-one should get away with this sort of thing.

The sky turned gold, then grey, then blue. At half past six she phoned in sick to work, claiming an upset stomach – a no-no in a clinical environment. At eight she showered and dressed

even more carefully than usual. She picked up her bag, dropping the two phones into its depths. The air was heavy, the weather forecast predicted a storm. It was gross in the stale air of the Tube, armpits and bad breath, bodies packed like anchovies in those little yellow tins, with sun cream replacing the olive oil.

Steph walked along the street to the building where Jon had his flat. She let herself in, watched herself in the lift mirrors, wondered just what she was going to say. She looked pale. The doorbell sounded hollow in the corridor, but there was no reply. She wasn't surprised. *He must be fast asleep, perhaps he took a pill last night.* She would have to let herself in. The door swung open as she was raising the key to the lock.

'What the fuck...?' Jon pushed his hair out of his eyes and yawned. 'Hey, babe, what're you doing here, not at work?' Steph held out his phone. 'Thanks, but I thought you were going to MegaGames' He made no move to let her in, His hand reached out to caress her cheek but stopped in mid-air. He looked into her face and back down at the hand proffering his mobile.

'You had some what looked like important messages, ' she whispered. 'I thought they couldn't wait.'

'Um, I'm sure nothing that's urgent, you know, but thanks so much for bringing it over. Hope you won't be too late for work.' He took the phone and looked at it. He frowned as she didn't move except to put her hand back into her bag. Steph heard a door close quietly inside the flat.

'You'll be wanting these,' she said, the door keys held out to him on her flat palm. She took a deep breath. 'I won't wait till Friday. You can have your answer now.'



There are lots of opportunities to carry on making music and listening to it. Here are just a few together with some other things to interest you:

- **BBC4 (and iPlayer)** – *Being Beethoven*: the conductor Marin Alsop heads up a group of musicians and passionate lovers of Beethoven’s music over a three part series. Given five stars by the ‘i’s reviewer, Sarah Hughes.
- **BBC4 (and iPlayer)** – *Tunes for Tyrants*. Another three part programme with some compelling snippets of music put into the context of their time. Suzy Klein is a very intelligent presenter who roves over recent (for most of us) history in Europe and how music has been put to sometimes malign purposes. Shostakovich and his fellow Russians were surprising omissions, but if you only have three programmes over which to cover such a wide premise, something has to give.
- **BBC Proms** – selection of music from the *BBC Grand Virtual Orchestra*, and also broadcasts of archive concerts. 350 musicians will be brought together electronically to perform the Beethoven 9 on Friday 17th July at 19.00: rather more technologically demanding than we can manage at the moment!
- **Glyndebourne Open House** – opera on Sunday evenings at 5pm (you could dress up and make like you’re there!) and at other times via YouTube. So far *Falstaff*, *The Barber of Seville* and *Billy Budd* are there for your delectation. You can now visit the gardens but I’m afraid tickets for the Garden Concerts and Outdoor Opera are all sold out!
- **Royal Opera House** – wonderful operas and ballet available for watching and listening
- **London Philharmonic** - fortnightly streamed performances with something for everyone. String players on 15 July at 7.30, Wind on 29 July, Brass and Percussion on 12 August and Beethoven 250 on 26 August
- **Classic FM** have a wonderful collection of live-streamed online concerts and performances listed by date

**I’m sure that there are lots more like this – if you send them to me I’ll add them to the list –
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