



## **TACET TIMES – 13**

Many years ago I had the good fortune to visit a number of the islands that make up the state of Hawaii. We left Honolulu's golden beaches and many-floored hotels and took a quick flight away from the tourist areas of Maui Island. On 'The Big Island' – the island of Hawaii itself – we hired a car and drove away from the main city of Hilo. We drove through pineapple plantations, past some of the world's most famous surfing locations, and ended up in the south in what is now known as the Volcano National Park.

The most recent eruption had taken place a couple of years before, and we could see rusting cars, skeletal trees and the remnants of buildings which had been destroyed by the lava flow and now poked up above the solidified surface. Rivers of molten rock, still heated to more than 2000°F, ran through 'tubes' and down to the sea. We walked over the uneven, cracked pumice down to the water, marvelling at the smell and heat rising through the many fissures.

The lava left the tube above the black sand beach and descended into the depths in clouds of steam. The substance was a colour I could not begin to describe, all the shades of red and gold, blackened on top, exuding a sense of something primordial escaping from the core of our planet.

And why am I telling you this? Because I was reminded of how the fundamentals of nature have an implacable strength which man struggles to control, and it seemed very like the situation that seems to hold us in its grasp at the moment. And the languorous movement of the molten rock as it oozed out of the tube and down to the sea made me think of the speed with which things are moving (or not) as we attempt to resume normal life.

That doesn't mean that we aren't all striving to make things happen. We have been exploring the offerings of the National Trust gardens as they open, albeit with restrictions on entry. We have been up to London and out to eat. Slowly, very slowly, the things that are important to us are becoming available once more, and we have to believe that this process will continue as long as we are sensible. The new 'rule of six' will be very easy to follow, and will allow us to do some entertaining.

Do let me know what you have been up to, and share your own explorations with your fellow members!

**Joanna Mace**

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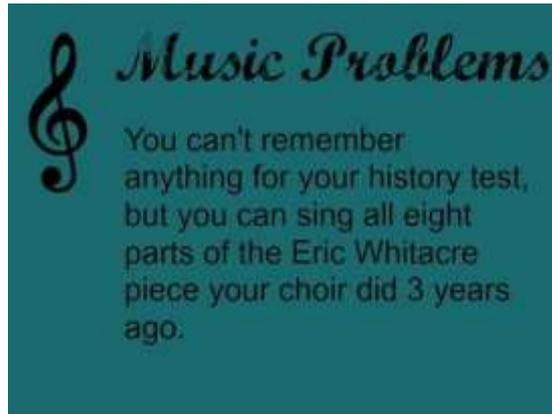
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**News:**

- Lots of work is going on behind the scenes to create a new format of singing from home. Thanks to Robert, Stephen and Stewart, who met with Ben and are working out what is needed for this to happen. The first session took place this week, with over 40 participants, and was very successful, although the technology needs some tweaking. Great to see Ben and all the members' familiar faces once more and to feel part of the Society again
- Sue Gray, Deputy Orchestral Chair, is also working hard on finding COVID-19 compliant venues in which members can rehearse pending the release of Tonbridge School spaces to outside users. If you hear of any locations, please do let Sue ([deporchair@tonphil.org.uk](mailto:deporchair@tonphil.org.uk)) or me know and we can investigate
- Organised by Jean Mills and Julie Buchanan, a chamber group of orchestral members has been meeting in gardens, and are currently tackling the Schubert Quintet Op 63 in C major – described by one of the group's members as 'challenging'
- Sevenoaks Symphony Orchestra are planning to resume rehearsals on 23<sup>rd</sup> September with a limited number of players (fewer than 30 and probably all strings) subject to the current meeting restrictions remaining in place

## And more news:

- Following in the illustrious footsteps of Sir Arthur Sullivan and Sir Henry Walford Davies, Alex Trigg (Tonbridge School) has taken up the position of Organ Scholar at the Chapel Royal, Windsor Castle. I don't know whether his predecessors were provided with the same accommodation as Alex, but I hope their first twenty-four hours in situ were less eventful. At ten o'clock on his first evening he discovered that if you drop something onto a hot 'hotplate', you are likely to set off the fire alarm!  
Many of our members have sung with Alex and his Tudeley Singers, and we have all performed with him when he joined the orchestra for a number of concerts. An amazingly talented young man, we will be following with interest as his career develops, and feel privileged that we shared in one small part of his development as a musician. Let's hope the rest of his tenure is more peaceful, and we wish him the best of luck.
- Katie Dearsley, Stewart's daughter and sometime member of the first sopranos, is off to Magdalen College, Cambridge this month, after having achieved stunning 'A' level results. We wish her good luck and hope she gets some singing in between her studies!
- Deborah Bruce is our latest 'new Grannie'. Jasper Haydn was born on 30<sup>th</sup> August to Deborah's son Andrew (with a little help from Sally, of course)



## Memories are made of this .....

The Proms have been happening – sort of – with some great performances still available on BBC iPlayer. Brian Stevenson shares some Proms experiences with us:

### Factors in choosing a Prom Concert

Having lived within easy travelling distance from the Royal Albert Hall for sixty years, I have been to the Proms every year since 1963 - until this year, when it will be a blank. This year the choice has been taken away from us as it is not possible yet to be there in person. So, how do I choose which concerts to attend?

I try to attend any Prom given by The Ulster Orchestra. This is partly because tickets are cheap, they do not appear all that often, and it was the first orchestra I ever heard play. It was in the 1950s at the Ulster Hall, Belfast, and I can still remember the programme: Elgar's overture *Cockaigne*, Brahms' Violin Concerto with Ralph Holmes as soloist, and Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony. It was a revelation, and I have been fond of all these works ever since. Indeed, when I first attended the Proms in person in 1963 it was to hear Tchaikovsky's Second Symphony .

Tchaikovsky has featured in most of my visits to Proms with the Ulster. On August 7th 1998 it was Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony, but the finest music that night was Barbara Hendricks singing Berlioz *Les Nuits d'Été* - magnificent. On 21 August 2016 we were there again for the Ulster playing Tchaikovsky's Fifth and Haydn's Cello Concerto with Narek Hakhnazaryan, a young Armenian on his Prom Debut.

As soloists we follow Barry Douglas, the pianist, and on 22nd August 2011 we went to hear him play a concerto specially written for him - Kevin Volan's Third Piano Concerto, a world première although, to be honest, I have not heard it since. The highlight that night was Brahms' Symphony No. 1.

We like going to a Prom that starts at 7.00pm and last year we tried to book one on 13 August - *Enigma Variations* and VW's *Serenade to Music*. The booking clerk said that there was not one seat left in the Royal Albert Hall- it was not the Ulster playing! As I sounded dismal about this he suggested that we try the next day's concert that also began

at 7.00p.m. so we bought tickets for Berlioz' *L'Enfance du Christ* with the Hallé. It was far from being a consolation - it was awesome and brought the house down.

Finally, I like the Cadogan Hall and (as I was at school on the Grosvenor Road) I follow the pianist Benjamin Grosvenor. I went to hear him on 1 September 2014 in a programme about waltz rhythms including music by Chopin, Liszt and Ravel. Next at some point I realised the man seated next to me was the actor Clive Swift, who some years earlier had taken been in *Barchester Towers* in the BBC adaptation of Trollope's novels. At the end, I plucked up my courage and asked him if Dr Proudie (the part he had played) had enjoyed the concert. He replied 'The Bishop was entranced.'

**Brian Stevenson - bass**



## Poetry corner

Chloë Witchell has suggested a poem by John Freeman which made a big impression on her when she was young, and which was set to music by Philip Napier Miles. Chloë comments that 'As music is what we all strive so hard to do in Tonbridge Phil., it seems most appropriate' – and I agree!

### MUSIC COMES

Music comes  
Sweetly from the trembling string  
When wizard fingers sweep  
Dreamily, half asleep;  
When through remembering reeds  
Ancient airs and murmurs creep,  
Oboe, oboe following,  
Flute answering clear high flute,  
Voices, voices - falling mute,  
And the jarring drums.

At night I heard  
First a waking bird  
Out of the quiet darkness sing.  
Music comes  
Strangely to the brain asleep!  
And I heard  
Soft, wizard fingers sweep  
Music from the trembling string,  
And through remembering reeds  
Ancient airs and murmurs creep;  
Oboe oboe following,  
Flute calling clear high flute,  
Voices faint, falling mute,  
And low jarring drums;  
Then all those airs  
Sweetly jangled - newly strange,  
Rich with change.....  
Was it the wind in the reeds?  
Did the wind range  
Over the trembling string;  
Into flute and oboe pouring  
Solemn music; sinking, soaring

Low to high,  
Up and down the sky?  
Was it the wind jarring  
Drowsy far-off drums?

Strangely to the brain asleep  
Music comes.

**John Freeman**  
1880 - 1929



## Short Story

*Another story inspired by a painting by Edward Hopper*



## **Gas Station Tale**

‘Well, Gina,’ said my grandfather as he shifted position in his chair, causing it to creak in protest, ‘did I ever tell you of the time when...?’

So many of his stories started like this, with me always ready to listen. We were sitting on the porch in front of his house as the day slid away into calm, noisy night, the cicadas and frogs setting up a Greek chorus for his tales. I was around ten then, and knew little of the world, even though we had been discussing the progress or otherwise of the Vietnam War. I was born and brought up on this land, starting off in the little cottage over there when there was just Mom and Dad and me, and then coming here to swap it with Granpa for the big house once my brother and sister were born and my Granma’d gone ‘to tend the flowers in heaven’. That was Granpa’s saying, reminding us of how many times she’d complained about her struggle to grow anything like a garden on such swampy, acid land. So that evening I settled down happily with him, picked at the scab on my knee, and looked forward to passing the hour before Mom called us in for supper in the world he had inhabited long before I was born.

‘It was round ‘bout end of September 1940, I remember ‘cos those idiots down in Washington’d recently agreed to draft all of the young men into the army in case we got involved with that fool war over in Europe. I suppose we had to help the Brits, but it’d been better if they’d just sorted it all out among themselves.’

I nodded, having just seen a Paramount News newsreel about the Battle of Britain at the new drive-in theatre, and thinking that I knew what he was talking about.

‘I was 37 at the time, and your Daddy was just a little babbie, so I was real glad when we knew they were only going to take guys who were 36 or younger. I told your grandmother it was lucky, since I couldn’t see her tending the gas station with a little one at her skirts and another one (that’ll be your Aunt Laney, we named after that movie star Marlene Dietrich. Later wished we hadn’t given her a German name and no-one ever called her by it) about ready to be born.’ Aunt Laney was the flighty one of the family, who’d long ago gone to California to seek her fortune, and then had become a secretary at Metro Goldwyn Mayer. She got my Dad and Mom the autographs of all their favourite stars; I’ve seen the box they keep them in.

‘We’d had the gas station for going on five years by then. It was right on the route to the state capital from the coast, so there was a fair amount of traffic for those days. We kept it clean and tidy and our regulars told us it was a pleasure to stop there. I can tell you, after the Depression we were so pleased at the steady income, even if it did mean long hours. You young ‘uns don’t know what hard work means now. We opened up six in the morning, and didn’t shut shop until ten or so of a night. Even then, there was a bell folks could use to wake us up in an emergency, since we lived in the house behind.’ Granpa had told me lots of stories of that time and showed me pictures of the gas station. It was pulled down in 1960, before I was born, but it hadn’t been working for some time by then. Now there was a grand new Texaco station, full service with attendants who washed the windows after filling the automobile up with gas, and best of all (for me,) a soda vending machine.

His voiced had tailed off, so I nodded just enough to break into his memories and persuade him to continue. ‘I was just tidying up for the evening. It was around seven thirty and we didn’t usually have anyone through after that on a Sunday. Everyone’d made their ways home from church by then, and there was nowhere to go out to. I’d wiped down the pumps; everything got so dusty at that time of the year, and the long grass round us had all turned that rusty yellow colour by then. I was just giving the cans a final straighten when I thought I could hear an automobile approaching. And a real sick automobile it sounded to me, coughing and spluttering like it was asthmatic or something. (You know, like your brother gets when he’s been near the horses, that kind of thing.) I stood by the pumps and waited to see what’s happen.’

He described a big old blue Buick, would have been real smart in the 1920’s when it was first new, but it was many years since the whitewall tires could have been called white! Now the canvas roof was tattered and rust was showing on the bottoms of the doors and in other places. ‘There was black smoke coming from the exhaust, leaving a calling card in the air to say it had passed by. I watched as it lurched and jumped towards me. When it stopped right by the Mobilgas sign I could tell it wasn’t like to be going any further that night.’

‘So what did you do, Granpa?’ I asked. He looked down at me and chuckled quietly.

'Patience, young Gina, patience and all will come clear.' He got up and stretched his back out before settling again into his chair. 'Well,' he said, once he was comfortable, 'well, I just stood there and waited to see what would happen next.'

'Who was in the automobile, Granpa, you got to tell me!' I looked up at him and saw from his small smile that he was teasing me, stretching his tale as long as the road to Texas to tease me.

'See, as I stood there I saw a youngish man get out, reckon he must have been in his late thirties or so. His face was pale with road dust and he rubbed his eyes with a filthy bit of cloth pulled out from his pocket. This did not make things much better, and he seemed to blink many times before he saw me standing there. "Good evening, sir," I offered as an opening to the conversation.

"Hello there," he responded, and coughed as if he had as much dirt in his lungs as in his eyes.'

I knew all about that dust, Mom gave me such trouble when it was all over my shoes and clothes. Granpa went on,

"Guess you got a problem with your motor" I asked, which I am sure you will think was pretty obvious, but I was giving him time to catch his breath.' I nodded encouragingly at Granpa, so he would know that I didn't think he was being obvious at all.

'Well, you can imagine my surprise when I bent down under the canopy and saw this young girl, must have been no more than fifteen, clutching her hands under her full belly. "What's this?" I asked the driver.

"That's Marianne, my wife," he replied, "she's just about due and we've got to get her to her Ma's before the baby comes, but I guess we ain't going much further tonight. Only, we've got to get across the state line as quick as we can." He looked up at me and his face, pale in the moonlight, was full of fear. Then there was a wail from out the automobile.

"It hurts so much," a thin, scared voice called out. I looked him straight in the eye and said "Don't sound as if that young one is going to hold on much longer, give me a moment." I called out for your Granma and she came out wiping the flour off of her hands.

"What's all this fuss, Gene?" she asked. I could tell from her tone she was not right pleased to be interrupted in the middle of her breadmaking.

"Come and help, this girl here is about to drop her baby sometime soon." You remember Granma's *what have you done now* face? I nodded. It was the sort of face that you don't want to wait about to see what happens next. 'Well, she had that face on as she snapped "What do you want leaving her in the automobile then, Gene? Help her out, you two useless guys, now this minute!"

We opened the door and gently took an elbow each. The girl swung out her legs and gradually the rest of her emerged. She bent double as another pain ripped through her.

"Come along, my dear, let's get you inside where you'll be more comfortable," said your Granma, as she threw her kitchen towel in our direction and instructed us to clean up the inside of the automobile.'

'What did you have to clean up, Granpa?' I asked.

'Well, Gina, (I was named for him, you see),' he replied, 'you remember when your Aunt Janet started her baby in the middle of the Christmas dinner, and you remember what happened when her waters broke?' I nodded, and remembered too how repulsed I had been. I swore then that I would never have a baby, and I never did.

'Your Granma helped her up the path towards the front door of the house, waiting by the porch so the girl could hold on as another pain went through. "Them contractions are

quite close now," she said and then, over her shoulder at me, "I'm going to set her down in the kitchen and put the water on to boil." "Do you want me to go for help, Myra?" I asked, helpfully. "And me having birthed six myself," she snapped. "Just you go and find my bag of clean rags, you know the one." And I hurried off to do as I was told.

When I got back, the young man was standing in the doorway, looking for a role in the drama that was unfolding in front of him. He did not have to wait for long.

"Get in here and hold her hand!" your Granma instructed. "It's as much your doing as hers, so you might as well provide some comfort if you can't do anything else." The man hurried over and grabbed at the girl's pale hand.

"Oh, Marianne, I'm so sorry, I did so want to make it to your Ma's before the baby came. You said the automobile wouldn't make it, the state it was in, but there wasn't any money for the mechanic."

At this point, Granpa told me, it was time for him to find some task to do someplace else, so he went outside and busied himself with taking in the sign and putting up the chain that showed the gas station was closed. Just as he was going to turn out the light that stood high on the top of the building, he heard the high wail that announced another soul entering this world. At the door to the house he had to shoo away the dogs who had been roused by all the commotion.

'It was a regular menagerie, the house at that time,' he said, 'and all the animals, dogs, cats, goats and cows, were seeming to take an interest in what was going on.' He opened the door and went in, 'and there they were, Gina, mother and father and baby, and your Granma, of course, all glowing in the light of the oil lamp. Your Granma always lit them when there was a birthing to be done, said the light was gentler on new eyes.' I smiled at this and remembered my Granma and her 'ways', which were not to be challenged.

'And then guess what happened,' he commanded. But I couldn't guess, hadn't any idea and I hadn't heard this story before.

'Well, no sooner were the little one and his mother asleep, there came a knock on the door. I went out and saw a vehicle and two men and a woman standing staring at the broken down automobile in which the couple had arrived.

"Say, Sir," he told me one of the men had said, "'whose Buick is that over there?"

"Whose asking?" asked Granpa, and I could imagine him putting on his fierce face, the one that used to reduce me to shrieks of fear and laughter.

'The man said "Cos if it belongs to Joe and Marianne then we've come to find them. This here is her sister and we're her brothers-in-law. Marianne's mother sent us out looking when they didn't arrive."

'Don't know why, but I was real suspicious of this,' said Granpa. 'It seemed a bit of a chance to take, they might've missed them on the road for any number of reasons. Anyhow, I thought I could take the woman in and see if the girl recognised her. So that is what I did. And sure enough, as soon as I opened the door to the kitchen there was a caterwauling and crying, which I guessed meant they did know each other. I left them to it and went out to the men, who were still standing by the automobile.'

'Then what happened, Granpa?' I asked.

'Well, then I went back in and found your Granma and the new aunt cleaning things up. They looked up at me, and Granma said "They ain't going anywhere tonight, we've just got them settled down. The men can sleep in the automobile and Suzie here is going to stay here with her sister and the new baby. We'll see how things are in the morning. But for

goodness sake, turn off the roof light.” There was no gainsaying her once she had made up her mind, but I thought I had turned off the light just before they arrived. I went outside and, sure enough, there it was, shining just as clear as the evening star.’

‘So what happened the next day,’ I prompted Granpa.

‘Once they’d had their grits and eggs, off they went to Marianne’s mother’s house, promising to come by again on their way home.’ He was beginning to tire of the story and but I did not think we had come to the end of it.

‘And then?’

‘How do you know there was an *and then*?’

‘I know ‘cos I know you and you haven’t finished, you’ve just lit up your pipe again.’

He laughed and said ‘Oh well, you really do know me, don’t you, missy? So, and then we settled down for another day’s work. It was getting cooler and it was time to do those bits of jobs before the winter set in. I had just finished touching up the front of the house with paint when an automobile screeched up, creating a huge cloud of dust all on the wet surface. I called “*slow down, where’s the fire?*” to the men who were tumbling out. “Where are they?” they shouted. “Where are who?” I asked. “Joe and Marianne Harley” came back the answer, almost right in my face. “Who are you?” I demanded, and they thrust their badges at me. The poh-lice. “There’s only me and my wife and kids here. Anyway, what do you want them for?” They looked hard at me. The older one said “She’s under age in this state, and we’ve come to find her”.’

‘So, what did you tell them?’ I demanded.

‘Well,’ Granpa said, looking down at me, ‘I don’t know, but she didn’t look as if she wanted rescuing to me, and anyway, they’d come up from Virginia, and they let them marry real young down there.’

Mom called us in for supper.

‘Do you know if the police got them, Granpa?’ I asked as I helped him to get up from his chair.

‘They sure didn’t. It took Joe and Marianne three years and some to come back, by which time young Gene was a fine lad, and had a sister n’all.’

**Joanna Mace**

**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:**

- **BBC Proms** – the ‘Last Night of the Proms’ is going ahead, albeit without the familiar crowds and with a bit of controversy. It was suggested by the conductor that *Land of Hope and Glory* should be played without words (as Elgar originally intended) because of the imperialist sentiments, but the outcry at such ‘political correctness’ has overruled that decision and we can expect singing! Experience it live on BBC1 and Radio 3
- **Wigmore Hall - 100 concerts confirmed for New Autumn Series**

Director John Gilhooly introduces Wigmore Hall’s new autumn series, beginning with Christian Gerhaher (baritone) and Gerold Huber (piano) on Sunday 13 September 2020 at 7:30PM. All 100 concerts will be live-streamed and free to watch on demand for 30 days after broadcast on Wigmore Hall’s website ([wigmore-hall.org.uk](http://wigmore-hall.org.uk))

Detailed plans have been drawn up to ensure that most concerts will be in front of a limited, socially distanced, live audience in the Hall. More details on how to access tickets will be released in the coming weeks.
- **New Paths Music** – this may not be a name that is familiar to you, but it is a small group based in Beverley, Yorkshire who put on music festivals in the Minster and travel around the country giving concerts. Have a look at their ‘postcards’ project on [www.newpathsmusic.com](http://www.newpathsmusic.com) and enjoy a super rendition of Britten’s setting of *O Waly, Waly* sung by baritone Johnny Herford in the Minster itself
- **For the Rutter fans among you** - [www.stayathomechoir.com](http://www.stayathomechoir.com) will be taking part in what they call ‘a global Christmas’, featuring Rutter’s music and that of other composers and giving singers the chance to practice their part with the help of professionals.

**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](mailto:secretary@tonphil.org.uk)**