

TACET TIMES – 15

Well, we do live in interesting times, don't we? With the President of the United States gone the same way as our own dear PM, and apocalyptic messages all around. But the rain it keeps on raining, for which our grass is very grateful, and so are we. There is something very reassuring in the turn of the seasons, reminding us that it all goes on whether we want it to or not and regardless of the madness of the human beings.

As I write I am listening to Ken Morgan's wonderful recording of TPS's performance of Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, which I missed as we were on the high seas at the time. Such affirming music in an uncertain time. I was reminded once more of the pleasure that we are currently denied, that of making music together in person. I will never again take it for granted, nor complain when I cannot see the conductor, or the Recital Room is too hot!

Ken has been working hard on our behalf in the last week or so, facilitating Jong-Gyung's recording of Beethoven's Sonata 31 and Liszt's *Venezia e Napoli* suite. I have been privileged to hear a preview, and can assure you it is wonderful. I am including the 'programme notes' in this edition of *Tacet Times*, and the 'concert' will be broadcast in the next month or so.

We all know what a brilliant pianist Jong-Gyung is, but I never cease to be amazed at how many notes can be played so quickly with such small hands. Having turned pages for her in the past, I can also attest to the fact that she plays all the right notes – and that they are in the right order, too. So, you know you have this treat to look forward to as the days grow shorter. Pull the curtains, turn the lights down low and prepare to be dazzled by the music.

Joanna Mace

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News

Here are the programme notes for Jong-Gyung's concert:

This is the first of what we hope will be a short series of virtual concerts given by TPS's choir accompanist Jong-Gyung Park. Of course, such a description belies the virtuosity that Jong-Gyung brings to her playing, and the apparent ease with which she moves from sympathetic accompanist and répétiteur into the limelight as a concert pianist. We are very grateful to her for sharing such wonderful music with us.

These notes aim to put into context the two works that she will play for us, which may be unfamiliar to some of us.

Jong-Gyung explained that she did not come to Sonata 31 until relatively late in her studies – when she was in her first year of college. Her teacher waited until the students were able to fully appreciate the complexity of a piece of music before they were allowed to attempt it. She feels it a great privilege to be able to play it – there is so much going on and it is full of emotion that is buried deep inside. She says it is much easier to play the romantic music where the emotion is all on the surface.

This work comes from the later stages of Beethoven's life, and Jong-Gyung thinks that all he had experienced by this time means that there are many layers to the music. She described this as being like the later works of great painters, where the lines may not be as sharp but the colours are richer and the depth of feeling and understanding is much greater.

She finds this sonata very moving. She is now working on Sonata 30, so we can look forward to hearing that at some time in the future.

Ludwig van Beethoven: Piano Sonata no 31 in A flat major op.110

This sonata was composed in 1821, at the same time as Beethoven was working on the *Missa Solemnis*, although revision continued until publication in January 1822. The Berlin publisher Schlesinger had persuaded Beethoven to compose three pieces in the sonata form, of which this is the central one, and which would be the last sonatas that Beethoven completed. Each in its way would be a unique distillation of formal and expressive devices, and would continue the evolution of the sonata structure. Sonata 31 is in three movements:

Moderato Cantabile molto espressivo

Allegro molto

Adagio ma non troppo - Allegro ma non troppo

The first movement opens simply and softly with a theme that will form the basis for the whole work. It is marked *con amabilità* – with kindness – a very unusual instruction at this stage of the composer's work. The pause in bar 4 gives the listener a clue that this will not be a traditional sonata movement, but instead one full of small surprises and changes of texture.

The second movement is a scherzo (which, of course, translates as 'joke') and is full of odd gaps and explosive dynamic contrasts, an amalgam of short ideas in E flat taking us

first to the extremities of the instrument's high register and then a brief alternation of rising scales and falling fifths. Musicologist Martin Cooper, author of *Beethoven; The Last Decade 1817- 1827*, has suggested that there are musical references to two popular songs of the time buried in this music which lend it a boisterous, comic character.

The third movement is considered to be the real heart of the sonata. Opening with a recitative full of changes of tempo before the *Adagio* proper gets under way, there is a tragic melody over incessant semiquaver chords. This leads into a three-voice *Allegro* fugue which recalls the outline of the opening melody of the first movement – not a straightforward imitation, but rather a suggestion of it. The fugue dissolves into the *Arioso*, marked 'wearily lamenting', before returning with the subject turned upside down and leading to a triumphant coda.

The pianist Alfred Brendel describes this sonata as: 'in a last, euphoric effort, its conclusion reaches out beyond homophonic emancipation, throwing off the chains of music itself'.

Franz Liszt

When asked why she put these two works together, Jong-Gyung's response was that this one is 'fun', and a real contrast to the Sonata 31. She is very fond of it, possibly because it is one of her first 'show pieces'. It suits her style of playing, and she found it really easy to learn – which only demonstrates her own virtuosity.

***Venezia e Napoli* Supplement to *Années de pèlerinage II* s162**

Gondoliera
Canzone
Tarantella

Beethoven had written Sonata 31 in 1821 in Austria, and some sixteen years later in the spring of 1837 Liszt was escaping Paris following a brilliant series of concerts. He travelled with his long-time mistress, Countess Marie d'Agoult, first to visit Georges Sand in Nohant, France and then to Switzerland and Italy, ending in Lake Como for the birth of their second child. For the next two years they would travel around Italy before settling in Rome in 1839. These journeys provided the inspiration for a series of seven piano pieces (composed between 1837 and 1849) published in 1858 as the second volume of his *Années de pèlerinage*, referring to his Italian travels. The title translates as 'Years of Pilgrimage', but could also be thought to indicate 'Years of Wandering'. In 1859 he published a supplement to this volume called *Venezia e Napoli* (Venice and Naples), which contained reworkings of pieces originally composed in 1840 and based on pre-existing melodies.

Gondoliera - the first movement is based on a popular song entitled *La Biondina in Gondoletta* (The Blond Girl in the Little Gondola) by Peruchini, a minor Venetian composer, and is called *Gondoliera* (Gondolier's song). As the movement closes the final statement of the melody appears over a scintillating accompaniment of trills and broken chords, as if the

gondolier has emerged from the darkness of the narrow canals into the broad waters where the sun catches on the waves.

The second – *Canzone* - takes its theme from *Nessun Maggior Dolore*, the soulful gondolier's song from Rossini's opera *Otello* (which is set in Venice and premièred in Naples). The sharp double-dotted rhythm that persists throughout this piece adds to the gloomy nature of the piece and relates to the text of the song drawn from Dante's words 'There is no greater pain than to remember happy days in times of sorrow'. The *Canzone* leads directly into the *Tarantella* without a pause.

The third movement, *Tarantella*, borrows the whirling 6/8 meter of the old Italian dance which is said to derive from the exertions needed to rid the body of the effects of the venom from a bite of the deadly tarantula spider.

As ever, Liszt sets a challenge for the pianist with this work. He wrote music that he, a virtuoso performer, could play but that dazzled and intimidated others. Added to this level of difficulty, each work requires sophisticated interpretation so as to let the pictures that he painted shine through.

Acknowledgements:

We thank Jong-Gyung for her generosity in performing for us, and her daughter Clara, who turned pages.

Clive and Wendy Davis were kind enough to lend us their wonderful piano and stunning house to provide a location for the recording, and we are grateful to David Doré and his team from Silk Purse Films for filming it.

Our own Ken Morgan, TPS Concert Manager, co-ordinated the event and facilitated communications.

And

Laurie Dunkin Webb, composer and long-time supporter of TPS writes:

I simply have to tell you about an AMAZING harp concert by Ruth Wall. If you are missing live music as much as I am, it's right up your street.

Listen to a sample here: <https://vimeo.com/455845874>.

I'm afraid it isn't actually live - though Ruth was definitely live when she filmed it! It will be available online at **7.30pm on Friday 30 October** - and if you can't watch at that time on that day, your ticket will give you access for a further 72 hours. More info about how to watch is at the bottom of this message.

Ruth plays a selection of music: her concert harp version of Satie's *Gymnopedie No 1'* is glorious - worth the price of admission alone. She plays mediaeval music on the bray harp (a kind of harp with built-in fuzz box), and a delicious pibroch of her own devising on Gaelic

Wire Strung Harp.

There's a rousing Piazzolla *Libertango* (it goes great on the harp!), some John Cage (not that one!) and a clapping piece by Steve Reich. There's a brilliant - and witty - performance piece with (and by) her husband, who is composer Graham Fitkin. Graham also supplies the finale, a gorgeously lush virtuoso harp piece, being performed for the first time.

All this for just £7.50! I'll be watching: will you join me? Get a ticket at:

fitkin.com/product/ruth-wall-kitchen-concert

I hope you will sign up to watch a superb concert, and help out two musicians who really deserve something good to come out of lockdown. I hope you'll join me - in an online sort of a way! - for a smashing concert.



Memories are made of this

From our peripatetic former diplomat:

Opera in Ireland

One Christmas in the 1970s we stayed with friends at the British Embassy in Dublin. A scary moment at Fishguard as a Special Branch officer called my wife aside and asked did she remember him? They were at the same class at grammar school!

Our hosts had tickets for Gounod's opera *Faust*, performed by Irish Opera. Good Catholic stuff of salvation and damnation. It was an odd production – Irish chorus and Balkan principals, I think Bulgarian or Romanian. They sang in their national language and the chorus sang in French.

The intervals were long as the audience was not in a hurry to return from the bar. The opera came to a conclusion; the soprano and tenor were, unusually, still alive. But Mephistopheles, the devil, was going down. The audience cheered and booed him. As the final chords crashed, he stood on a hidden trapdoor. The music surged but the trap didn't drop. He did a little jump, the conductor re-ran the music, the devil jumped again a little harder, but the trapdoor stayed closed. For the third time the music went round, Mephisto jumped harder. No luck.

The audience began to laugh and cheer. Then a loud voice from the gallery shouted: "Hurrah fellas, Hell's full up".

David Price (tenor)



And now for a different operatic experience from another of our singers:

Opera Buffa

The singing formation of the Tonbridge Phil is static, hopefully so for the bass section who occasionally have to sit high up at the east end of Tonbridge School Chapel, whereas my first choral endeavours were mobile and full of movement.

My school was very keen on Gilbert and Sullivan and every summer term there was a production of a G&S opera. As well as the rehearsing of *The Gondoliers* going on at one end of the school hall, at the other end the scenery was taking shape. This happened very slowly, but with a sprint at the end. Each morning at assembly we would notice that another brick or stone had been added to the campanile of San Giorgio Maggiore church on its island in the lagoon. The painter was viewing it from St Mark's Square. Until I eventually visited Venice, I always thought that St George's island WAS Venice. The priest who took us up the campanile thought so too, and described the monastery as an island of serenity and the monastic choir as strong on Gregorian chant.

Wherever we go we must visit any church dedicated to St Stephen and Santo Stefano in Venice is a find. When we spoke to the doorkeeper we asked her where Gabrielli's tomb was. She replied that as it was her first day as a guide she had no idea, but if we found it we must return to tell her where it was and she would direct others to it. She was delighted when we discovered it in a hidden corner. Santo Stefano is large and, like St Stephen Walbrook, a glory .

The other scenery I remember as it gradually took shape in the school hall was that of the The Tower of London for *The Yeomen of the Guard*. I had hoped for a lead part such as Jack Point or Sergeant Merryll, but instead was assigned to the part of The Hangman, (which is a non-singing role), although I was allowed to be a minor nobleman in the final chorus. The Hangman comes on at the end of Act 1 with a huge axe. I was chosen because I was tall, and good at looking miserable and cruel! There were four nights of the opera run, and after the first I was criticised by the director for blinking too much. The second night I was told that I lowered the axe far too slowly and gingerly - no dramatic effect. The third night I obeyed instructions and thumped the axe forcefully down on the beheading block, with the result that it completely disintegrated and bits were scattered around the scaffold. By the fourth night the director was up for beheading me if I got anything else wrong, but I survived.

There was no scenery for *La Bohème* when it was staged underneath the Arches beneath Waterloo station . The action/singing was spread over four of the Arches, which meant that we had to keep moving about in the poor light and hope to find Mimi and Rodolfo as the 8.05pm train roared out to Bournemouth. Not knowing the layout of the Arches, we from time to time bumped into the rest of the audience going the other way. It was not easy to concentrate. For a start the lead tenor had fallen and broken his leg and his part was sung over the loud speaker system by the lighting controller while the programme seller mimed the part. As we rushed from one arch to the other for different scenes we were encouraged to hurry, as up above the train announcer called out : 'three minutes before the next train to Surbiton leaves'. It was a fast moving, chaotic evening, and performances by Tonbridge Phil are islands of serenity in comparison.

Brian Stevenson (bass)

Poetry corner

As I looked out to my sodden garden this morning, a spray of apricot roses shone against the dark greens and made me think of this poem – which makes me smile and, I hope, will do the same for you.

One Perfect Rose - Dorothy Parker

A single flow'r he sent me, since we met.
All tenderly his messenger he chose;
Deep-hearted, pure, with scented dew still wet –
One perfect rose.

I knew the language of the floweret;
'My fragile leaves', it said, 'his heart enclose'.
Love long has taken for his amulet
One perfect rose.

Why is it no-one ever sent me yet
One perfect limousine, do you suppose?
Ah no, it's always just my luck to get
One perfect rose.



Short story

What next?

The sun wakes her, touching her skin with its warmth. Rowena comes up through the layers of sleep. Her hand flaps above the covers and eventually connects with the button on the top of the radio. Andrew Marr's voice announces *Start the Week*. Her feet hit the carpet before her brain finishes processing the information. She only ever hears that programme live if she's on holiday, or off sick. She peers at the green numbers. 09.06. What the hell is she still doing in bed?

The toothbrush buzzes in her mouth. She glances up and sees herself looking back in the mirror. Slowly, the truth trickles into focus. She does not have to get up. She does not have to go to work. She does not have to do anything. She. Is. Retired.

The bouquet of flowers is still sitting in a bucket. She hadn't had the heart to arrange them in a vase when she got home on Friday. There'd been three of them leaving that day, so the pub had been quite crowded and she was grateful you weren't allowed to smoke inside any more. At least her clothes hadn't stunk the flat out when she got home.

The weekend had passed in a daze. Rowena hadn't been able to set her mind to doing anything. The whole situation felt unreal. For forty years and more, Monday to Friday, she'd been woken by the shriek of the alarm clock. It had become harder in recent years to drag herself out of bed. Now she won't have to do it ever again. No more making like a sardine on the train. No more being splashed by huge lorries as she walked to the office. No more enduring feeble jokes from men who should have known better.

Coffee is what she needs. She collects the paper from the front door and sits at the kitchen table. She does the Sudoku puzzles, just like she used to do on the train, and then puts the paper to one side to read at lunchtime. Just like she used to do. Checks her phone for texts and emails, checks her Twitter and facebook accounts. Trump's off on one again, it must be hell working for him.

Sunlight catches in the twist of steam rising from her cup. She always takes hers black, she learned to drink it like that in Paris. Well, you have to drink coffee there. *Pas possible*, her colleagues had protested, *vous êtes un rosbif, il faut que vous buviez le thé*. But she's never liked drinking tea. She worked in the railway industry then, on the international service. A brief smile crosses Rowena's face, as she thinks of Paris. She's always said she'd go to live to France in a flash if she could. Maybe now she will. She's seen enough of the world to be able to decide where she wants to be. Daughter of an Army family, ex-wife of an airline pilot, she has always travelled.

Occasionally she wonders if she might have travelled too much. Her place of birth is just a name on a certificate. Once she wrote a list of all the places that she'd lived - it came to nearly fifty addresses. She was fascinated that her parents-in-law were still living in the house they'd moved into when Rob, her husband, had been eight months old. What would it be like, she wondered, to have that sort of history? To still be in touch with those who were at primary school with you? She isn't even in touch with Rob any more.

The flowers are lovely, white roses and pink peonies, with gypsophila and eucalyptus leaves to provide a background. She buries her nose in the roses, but they have no scent. Still, it was an extravagant bunch and they make a good display when she places them in the middle of the dining table. She's wiping a drop of water from the polished surface when the phone rings. Some young man from the Indian subcontinent calling himself 'Simon', who wants to help her with her computer. She always replies courteously, aware that they are only doing a job, but advises him that she's sure there's nothing wrong with her machine.

She worked in an airline call centre once, just for a few months. She saw those who could speak Spanish and Italian standing to talk to customers, so that they could move and gesticulate, whereas those who could manage in German or Dutch did just as well sitting down. She escaped that drudgery pretty quickly, but it instilled in her a respect for people who had no other option.

With the balcony door open to the warm air, she can see that her pots need attention. The lettuces are drooping for want of water, and she'd better pick some tomatoes before they go squashy. She fills a watering can and sets to. She and Rob tried to grow tomatoes once, when they lived north of Edinburgh, but even with a glasshouse and lots of TLC the plants hadn't done well. Couldn't have been a lack of daylight, you could read a book outside at midnight in midsummer, but it was rarely hot enough for tomatoes.

So what is she going to do with herself now? She doesn't have a husband to consider, doesn't have grandchildren to babysit, doesn't even have a dog to walk. She likes to think she goes through life hardly touching the sides, helping people, not being unkind, but not needing others either.

Opening the fridge door, Rowena decides it offers nothing that would make an evening meal. She will walk into town and do some shopping. Maybe she'll stop for a coffee. She's unlikely to bump into anyone she knows, most of her friends still work and she's never cultivated a circle of 'ladies who lunch'. Still, she will be able to stroll around and be leisurely about her purchases, not hurtle in and out as she had to in the past.

She has accumulated a surprising number of carrier bags, treating herself to some clothes for days spent at home but nothing yet to eat for that evening, and it's a relief when she finds an empty table outside the café. Having given her order, she watches the passing crowd. Young girls pushing buggies bulging with overweight toddlers. Dressed in tight leggings that do not always flatter, each girl has a mobile phone clamped to her ear, even when in a group of two or three. And if they aren't talking on the phone, they're thumbing messages at an amazing speed. She's about to gather up her purchases and leave when someone says,

'Rowena, Rowena Lawrence, it is you, isn't it?' The figure comes out of the sunshine. Rowena puts her hand up to shade her eyes.

'It is you, I'm sure.' The woman flops down beside Rowena, awkwardly trying to get her legs out of the way of yet another buggy. Now she can see her.

'I'm sorry, I'm not sure'

'Debbie Poyser, surely you remember? At the grammar school? In Miss Bayles class? We were the naughty ones at the back.' A picture of thirty girls lined up for their final assembly is clear in her mind.

‘Goodness, Debbie. I’d never have recognised you.’ The years show in Debbie’s face as they don’t in Rowena’s. A diligent regime of expensive moisturising night and morning – and no children or smoking - has seen to that.

‘Yes, well, I knew it was you. How are you?’

They exchange truncated histories of their lives since that last day at school. Rowena explains that she’s just retired from work. Debbie has four children and ten grandchildren, and a husband with a small business that seems to take twenty out of every twenty-four hours. She lost her mother and sister to breast cancer in the last three years.

‘And, you’ll never guess what.’ No, Rowena doesn’t want to come to the obvious conclusion.

‘It’s got me too.’

‘Oh, Debbie, I’m so sorry.’ She feels guilty for her judgemental take on Debbie’s appearance.

‘Yes, well, it looks as if they’ve caught it soon enough.’

‘That’s great news.’ Rowena’s never been good around illness, not her own or the terminal conditions of each of her parents.

‘I’m going to beat it, and I’m going to help others to do so too.’ Rowena doesn’t remember Debbie being a particularly forceful character at school. She was a follower, rather than a leader.

‘I’m working for a small charity that helps women locally who are going through it. We make bags to hold drips so they can walk around when they’re having the treatment, and heart-shaped cushions that help after a mastectomy, keeping the arm away from the wound.’

‘That sounds like a marvellous thing to do.’ Rowena can see that having a purpose would give you strong motivation to get through the cancer treatment. Her last job had been as a hospital manager, so she understands a little of what’s involved, even if she was distanced from the medical side of things

‘There are twelve of us – we’ve set ourselves a target of raising £100,000 to buy a piece of diagnostic equipment that the surgeons need but the hospital cannot afford. We’ve got one of the specialists working with us, she’s great.’

‘That’s a huge target for a small local group,’ Rowena comments.

‘Yes, it is. That’s why we’re looking for someone really organised who can chair our group. Someone who’s not afraid of dealing with the bigwigs and the bureaucrats. Someone’ Debbie breaks off, staring at Rowena as if a light has just flashed on.

‘No, no really....’ Rowena protests.

‘Yes, yes really!’ Debbie pulls out her phone and dials. ‘Can I speak to Helen Keavill, please?’ she asks. She puts her hand over the phone and says to Rowena ‘that’s the specialist I was telling you about. Yes, Helen, yes, I’ll bring her over.’

‘Done,’ Debbie announces. ‘You’re the answer to our prayers. When can you meet Helen, this afternoon or tomorrow morning?’

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:

- **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 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 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.
- **Merry Opera** - locally-based group have announced that they are planning to surface into the real world once more in April 2021 with a production of *Mikado* - a delightfully feel-good show directed by John Ramster, who directed our *Pirates of Penzance* (2019) and *Don Giovanni* (2020) productions. www.merryopera.co.uk

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