

TACET TIMES – 18

The darkness and rain is taking its toll, although I am still knitting to fill the time and am on track to complete the projects that I want finished for Christmas. This time last year I was on board the Queen Mary II on my way to South Africa, with sunlit, increasingly warm days when we sat and watched the magical flying fish tracking our progress.

Because of that trip, I missed the November concert, a fact that made me very sad. I thought of you singing and playing the wonderful *Stabat Mater* – and I recalled the sadness in missing out on singing when Eileen Best (soprano) emailed to remind me that this year's big concert would have taken place this coming weekend. She wrote:

I believe we should have been performing the Verdi Requiem next Saturday I was so looking forward to this.

One of the most exciting performances of this work that I can remember was in Arundel Cathedral with TPS and the Arundel Choir (in 1995). We used to do joint concerts sometimes as Robin Morrish was leader of their orchestra as well as being our Conductor. The Cathedral was packed, and the sound of the combined choirs was spine-tingling at times. I wonder who else remembers this?

Do you remember taking part in this? Would you like to write a few words about it? Are there other particular concerts that you remember for whatever reasons? Share them with us, we would all like to hear about them.

In the meantime, we are preparing for Christmas in a very slow way, with the usual dilemmas about who is going to be where, or even how many people will be permitted to join together. Whatever happens, there will be carols to listen to, puddings to be eaten, and hopes garnered for a better year in 2021.

Joanna Mace

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News

- Your new website is live! As of this week, the new and very exciting Tonbridge Philharmonic site is working. I do hope that you have a look and see what you think. Of course, as with any new programme, there are still a few wrinkles, but we are working them out and will gradually refine the content as we go forward. You need a password to get into the Members' area, and Steve Minton, our Orchestral Chair and the leader on this project, will be sending this out shortly, so watch out for his email.

This site has taken nearly eighteen months to get together and has been a challenge for all those involved – all in their own time and generously sharing their particular expertise with us. Special thanks go to Barry Foale, who kept our original site in such good order as technology was rapidly changing, even working from New Zealand when visiting family there. Support for the software for that programme will cease in the near future, so it was imperative that there we had a new platform to which we could transition.

I hope you will be as excited as I am by the opportunity to take the presentation of our Society into the new era of communications.

- Those who were at the choir rehearsal that was held at Hilden Grange are full of enthusiasm to do it again as soon as possible. Sue Gray (Deputy Orchestral Chair) and Ken Morgan (Choral Concert Manager) went to great lengths to ensure that all the regulations about recording those present, social distancing and hygiene were observed and, all went well albeit a tad chilly. Fifteen choir members attended, along with Ben and Jong-Gyung, and Ken has calculated that we can safely welcome up to 30 people in total.

Jo Willoughby, Deputy Choral Chair, reported to ExCo last night that it had been tremendously moving to be back among our singing friends again after so long. So, think about whether you could join with them when we are back to being able to

- Jo Willoughby has put together another quiz to challenge your little grey cells. It will take place on zoom on 7th December, with details of how to join being communicated in the usual way

Christmas edition:

I would like the edition of *Tacet Times* that will be published on 15 December to have a Christmas theme. I would love your help with poems, stories, thoughts about the season which, this year, will be like no other.

A special call to all you ex-choristers out there – tell me what it was like to wait for the tap on the shoulder for the one to sing the first verse of the first carol. Or turning out on Christmas morning for the service: did you open your presents first or later? What about singing descants when your voice is on the point of breaking? Let me have your memories and I will put them together into a piece that will interest all our readers.

Please let me have your contributions by 10th December so that I can collect them together.

Thank you – in advance - for your assistance.

Memories are made of this

Sukarno

It was my first Foreign Office *posting* - Djakarta, Indonesia, March 1963, where there was a brand new building on three floors, air conditioning, security grills *partout* and an unclimbable fence.

The Brits were unpopular, once again. HMG had decided to grant Malaysia independence; President Sukarno of Indonesia disagreed, and proposed an alternative, crackpot idea of Maphilindo (Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia). He sent guerrillas across the border into Borneo, but they were soon mopped up by Gurkhas.

So he organised mob riots. It was now September; the rent-a-crowd turned up at the embassy in their thousands, backed by trucks loaded with stones. Stones came pelting in but the embassy grills stood firm. The mob leaned on the 'unclimbable' fence - and it simply buckled. The mob stormed into the building, but the grills and metal doors held. Then the embassy was set on fire, but the Indonesian marines who'd been watching moved quickly, clubbed their way through the mob, entered the embassy and escorted 25 staff out onto the lawn. Stones rained down, but the army was now thumping and beating away the rioters. One rioter broke loose, stark naked, and carrying a machete rushed at us, but he was shot dead at close range.

We were escorted to the Hotel Indonesia and flown out by the RAF next morning to Singapore then London.

It was the beginning of the end for Sukarno. The army and Islamic right allied against the Indonesian Communist Party and Sukarno, and for two years pursued a campaign of atrocity which has yet to be disclosed. Sukarno fled to China where he died of old age.

I was 24 years old and my wife 22, and we'd been married for 10 months



Composers and their dogs

This is really a digest of the talks that Professor Fiona Stafford gave in early November on Radio 3 on the subject of composers and their dogs. My labradors have never shown any interest in music, so it is hardly surprising that they do not appear.

Haydn was a dog lover and when he was asked by a pretty young woman to write a song in praise of her fiancé's poodle he did so, refusing her cash but asking instead for a pair of red garters! He was a crack shot and supplied the Empress Maria Theresa with game for her table, once delivering three grouse brought down by a single bullet.

He had a poodle for chasing hares and fetching ducks. Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein had poodles, as did Stephen Sondheim. Elvis Presley, when he was trying to impress his future wife Priscilla, sent her a poodle. He had three of his own.

It is thought that Chopin's Minute Waltz used in the programme 'Just a Minute' was composed in imitation of the antics of a lively dog, probably a poodle. In French the waltz is called 'La valse du petit chien'. The waltz takes at least two minutes!

Dachshunds were the dogs for Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears. When they bought the Red House in Aldeburgh, they bought a red dachshund from the dancer and choreographer John Cranko to guard their borders. Friends brought them notices 'Beware of the Dog' in various languages, which they displayed around their estate. When Leonard Bernstein conducted Peter Grimes, he met their dachshund, Clytie, and then himself had a whole series of dachshunds called Henry. Rostropovich came under their spell and had a dachshund called Spooks which could play the piano by running up and down the keys, but with his short legs could not employ the pedals.

In Remembrancetide our thoughts and moods are influenced by Elgar with *Nimrod*: the Enigma's 11th variation is about a bulldog that has fallen into the River Severn and then shakes itself when out on the bank. Elgar himself never owned a bulldog, and his favourite breed was a cocker spaniel. While his wife was alive he was not allowed a dog but after her death he bought Marco, a black and white cocker spaniel, which he loved. I have seen Marco's grave at The Firs, Broadheath, Worcestershire. At his 70th birthday concert, which was broadcast, Elgar said good night to Marco over the radio.

Another fan of cocker spaniels is Elton John, who had as his best man at his wedding in Windsor on 21 December 2005 Arthur Dwight, his cocker spaniel. Dogs are not allowed into Windsor Town Hall, but on that occasion Arthur was, being a key member of the wedding party. Arthur died in 2018 while Elton John was in concert in Las Vegas and to share his grief Elton sang 'Don't let the Sun go down on me'. Like many other composers for Elton John his Arthur was a loyal companion and a muse.

Brian Stevenson - bass.



Poetry corner

I thought this might make you smile as it did me, because it conjured an image of us all 'resting and saving ourselves to be right' for the next time we get together (although not for caterwauling, I hope)!

The Song of the Jellicles

*Jellicle Cats come out to-night
Jellicle Cats come one come all:
The Jellicle Moon is shining bright—
Jellicles come to the Jellicle Ball.*

Jellicle Cats are black and white,
Jellicle Cats are rather small;
Jellicle Cats are merry and bright,
And pleasant to hear when they caterwaul.
Jellicle Cats have cheerful faces,
Jellicle Cats have bright black eyes;
They like to practise their airs and graces
And wait for the Jellicle Moon to rise.

Jellicle Cats develop slowly,
Jellicle Cats are not too big;
Jellicle Cats are roly-poly,
They know how to dance a gavotte and a jig.
Until the Jellicle Moon appears
They make their toilette and take their repose:
Jellicle Cats wash behind their ears,
Jellicle dry between their toes.

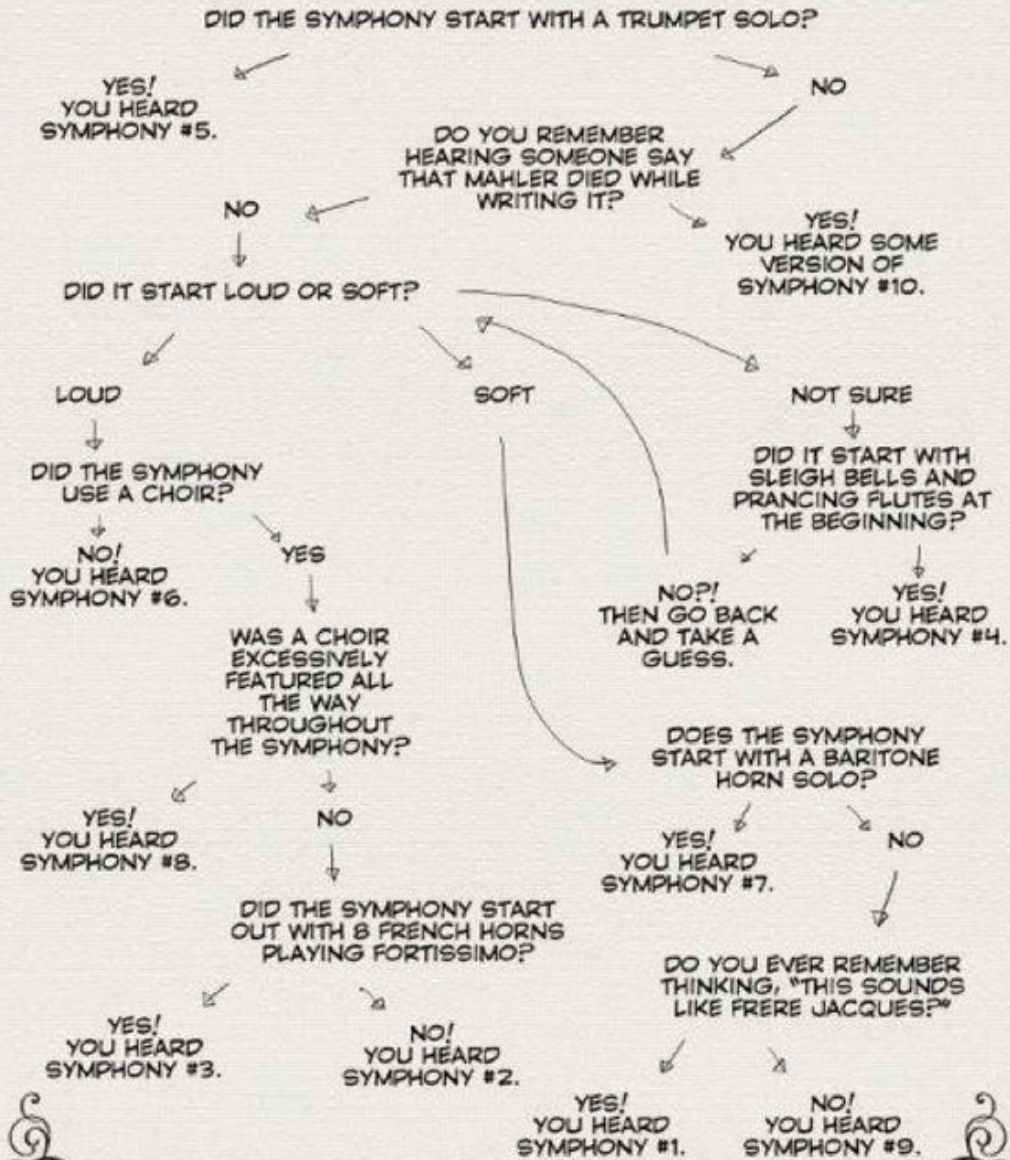
Jellicle Cats are white and black,
Jellicle Cats are of moderate size;
Jellicle Cats jump like a jumping-jack,
Jellicle Cats have moonlit eyes.
They're quiet enough in the morning hours,
They're quiet enough in the afternoon,
Reserving their terpsichorean powers
To dance by the light of the Jellicle Moon.

Jellicle Cats are black and white,
Jellicle Cats (as I said) are small;
If it happens to be a stormy night
They will practise a caper or two in the hall.
If it happens the sun is shining bright
You would say they had nothing to do at all:
They are resting and saving themselves to be right
For the Jellicle Moon and the Jellicle Ball.

T.S.Eliot

CAN'T REMEMBER WHICH MAHLER SYMPHONY YOU RECENTLY HEARD?

WE'LL HELP YOU OUT!



Short story

Choices



It was the neon sign proclaiming *Chop Suey* flaring pale in the remaining light of the day that'd caught my attention. Then, as I entered the restaurant, I noticed the two women sitting with a square red teapot between them. A small cup without handles was held gently between the pairs of hands. The sun painted oblique shadows across window ledges and white table tops. I lifted my hat to them, two women in their twenties and dressed like they had just left the office for the day. Friends, I thought, meeting up at a cheap Chinese diner before they catch a train out of the city, back to their suburban homes. They smiled up at me, acknowledging my gentlemanly courtesy. They both wore hats, as women did in those days, pulled hard down onto bobbed haircuts. The one I could see better had dark colouring, of Irish or Italian origin it seemed to me, a contrast with her harsh red lipstick. They hadn't eaten yet: the tea was a precursor to the quasi-oriental food promised in the menus they were handing back to the waiter as I put my hat down onto the table. There was not much space for me to edge into my place

I was waiting to take a train from Grand Central Station and had decided to catch a quick dinner to pass the time until the departure. I would sleep all the better between New York and Chicago on a full stomach.

'Oh, excuse me,' I said, as my jacket caught on the back of the chair nearest me as I sidled past. The dark woman had her elbows on the table and had lifted a tiny cup to her mouth. She half-smiled at me over it, not breaking her attention on her companion. The other woman turned and I saw her eyes were pale, green or grey, it was hard to see in the low light. The darker one leaned forward and continued the conversation.

'So I said to Dan, it'll never hold, not like that and, sure enough, it fell down soon as he stepped back.' The pale-eyed girl laughed quietly, almost apologetically.

'Well, I know he's your brother,' the first continued, 'but he never was any good at the handyman business, was he? I told him we should've just paid the janitor five dollars and he

would have done it for us, but he said I was such a spendthrift. As if! Hadn't I worked every night last week sewing that costume so as I'd have something new to wear to the funeral? After all, this is the third in two months, and I couldn't bear to have them see me in the same old black thing again.'

'I don't think anyone would've held it against you, Betty.' The voice of the pale-eyed girl was kinder on the ear, lacking the Brooklyn twang of the other. 'We none of us have money to spend these days, even if we're lucky enough to still be working, and with good wages.'

'It's all right for you, Meriel. You and Karl've already got your home, thanks to his Mom going when she did. We still have to pay rent on the apartment and try to save for the down-payment on a house.' Their conversation paused as the waiter placed a tray of food in front of them.

He explained 'Dim sum, madams, steam' pork dumpling, prawn ball, wonton and sesame toast. Would madams want more tea?' They shook their heads and picked up their chopsticks. They handled the thin strips of wood with some dexterity. Betty laughed and said

'*Madams* are we now? That would no doubt improve on our earning power, better than slaving over Remingtons in a typing pool! Not that your mother'd agree, I'm sure!' They both chuckled at that thought and bent towards the food.

The waiter was hovering. I ordered, choosing one of the set meals for simplicity, wishing I could've had a beer. I pulled documents from my bag and sorted through them. Studying the gloomy story told by the sales graphs while waiting for my food sure was not going to help my appetite any. The construction business was sliding away from us; only in California were we seeing any progress. We'd managed to secure a big contract with Metro Goldwyn Meyer for work on their studio back lot. They were having to put up another sound stage for the new 'talkies' and doing a whole bunch of renovations as well. Here in New York we'd been second in a bid for a new skyscraper on Seventh, and hadn't even got to do the School Board work we had gone for. I knew what the underlying problem was: we hadn't paid enough to Franco Giacomo to be sure our names would be top of the list. Still that was then, we'd made the decision to stay away from the New York mob long before that, and now my challenge was to make the numbers work.

A sudden gasp called my attention back to the two women.

'You don't say! But when, how long, when did you find out?' Betty was demanding of Meriel, who put up her hand to tuck a stray curl back under her cloche.

'I went to the doc last Friday and he said, yes I was, and it would be due in May.'

'Wow, you don't say!' responded Betty. 'Does your Mom know yet?'

'Not yet, you are the only person I've told, other than Karl, of course.'

'What did he say, I bet he was pleased as anything?' replied Betty.

'He sure was! He hugged me and danced me round the room, upsetting that little table you gave us, and then up the hall and back into the kitchen. Then he got all serious and said, should I be sitting down, put my feet up, all that sort of thing. His grin was so huge it was

hooked all the way over his ears. He wanted to tell everyone straight away, but I told him we shouldn't, not for a few weeks yet, just in case.' 'Oh, yeah, remember what happened to Barbara. I felt so awful for her that she had to give all those gifts back.'

'But I told Karl we should let you in on it right away. I knew you would be so pleased too.'

'Of course I'm thrilled for you. But I can't help wondering what sort of a world he's going to find when he pops out.'

'He, what do you mean 'he'. I'm having a daughter! I swung my wedding ring over my stomach and that's what it said, so you can start in with the pink wool.'

I had to move my papers to one side as a small plate of wontons and sesame toasts was placed in front of me. I remembered the excitement when Janet told me our first, Bobby, was due. I know it's a cliché, but I really felt my heart swelling with pride fit to bust. It may be twenty years ago and him in college now, but the wonder is still there inside me at having been part of creating a new little being. I crunched a toast and could feel the sesame seeds catch in my teeth. After Bobby there'd been Jeanette, and then, just when we thought it wouldn't happen again, Janet'd announced she was expecting again and we had Marylou. Janet wasn't best pleased when the doctor described her as an elderly mother since she was only thirty-five, but we made sure she took great care. She took lots of rest, ate the right things, you know, all the rules the doctors lay down.

'How much longer will you work?' Betty asked.

'Oh, as long as I can, I guess,' Meriel replied, 'but the other bit of news is, Karl's gotten a promotion. He's been made a supervisor, so there'll be a bit more money coming in. He was so funny the other day, you know, he came marching into the yard and said, "Mrs Carsten, you are now married to a supervisor, so I'll have none of your fresh talk when I see you in the lobby or if I have to come to the Accounts office!" Well, I was real surprised, he hadn't said nothing to me about any chance of this. Anyway, we had a laugh and then he told me all about it. It's so great we're in the same company, but I guess I shall have to mind my manners around him at work after this!'

'A supervisor! ' murmured Betty, 'that's just so wonderful for you, Meriel, when does that happen?'

It wasn't any of my business, but I wanted to lean over to the new mother with her quiet, happy face and whisper *take care, take care, you have no idea what awaits you, for all the good fortune you may see in front of you right now*. I know too many people who've slid from exultation to despair with barely a moment between them.

'Well, Karl says it just needs for the paperwork to be gone through and then the company will start the new payments. It's not as if I don't know the system at Macy and Mahoney's, is it?' I could hear the smile in Meriel's voice.

‘That’ll make up a bit for your wages when you have to stop, won’t it?’ Betty responded quietly.

So, we work for the same outfit, do we? I looked down the lists in front of me and, sure enough, there they were, Carsten K and Carsten M, he in the Supplies department and she in Accounts. Both with over six years’ service. And I seem to recall there was another Carsten, oh, ages ago, must have been a father or uncle or something, it’s not that common a name around here. Wasn’t he one of the three who fell when we were working on the skyscraper at 40 Wall Street? Well, it was nearly ten years ago now and it was kind of their fault - but we did do the right thing by the widows. Five years we paid them a pension, more than most employers would have done, but then money got even tighter and we had to stop.

‘And what’re you going to call her – or him, if it does happen to be a boy?’ The bowls and dishes in front of the women were empty now.

‘Well, I want Carole for a girl, after Carole Lombard, of course, and Clark if it’s a boy, but Karl wants some old family names. Greta wouldn’t be so bad, it was his grandmother’s name, but he wants Soren, after his Dad who died, y’know? I think it sounds miserable, ‘specially with Carsten.’

‘You’re right, Meriel, but I think you might have a fight on your hands. But say, couldn’t they have those as second names?’

‘Yeah, I guess they could, but I wanted to make it simple for them, you know I’ve always felt it was too much, weighing someone down with a whole lot of useless names, like I was. I mean, what’s the point of *Meriel Mary Millicent*? Once I had Meriel, it was too bad I had grandmothers whose names started with M!’ With that statement she reached for her coat. ‘Well, I’d better be going or Karl will think I’m never coming home.’ Their movement prompted the swift delivery of the check.

‘As if,’ laughed Betty. ‘Not that Dan’d notice, he’ll have his head inside that old Ford. He sure is determined he’s going to get it going again.’ Then she stood and had much less trouble than I’d had in manoeuvring between the tables. She turned and smiled her gentle smile at me, apologising for the disturbance. I smiled back.

After they had gone I sat on for a while, mechanically eating the food as it was presented without tasting it and drinking cold tea from a square teapot out of a small, fine cup. It was too small for my hands, felt fragile, like an eggshell. I looked at it carefully and saw the flecks and flaws in the porcelain, could almost see my fingers through it. It was so much easier to lay people off when they were just names on paper. Now I had a face to put to a name, and the knowing that there was an unborn child along with it. Before it’d all been just a matter of numbers, especially since I don’t go down to the shop floor very often. My job to do it and not think of the consequences. I looked at my watch; it was nearly seven. I had an hour until the Los Angeles Limited left and many hours on the train to think of a way around this.

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:

- **Music at King Charles the Martyr: A Vespers sequence for Christmas: music by Monteverdi directed by Steven Devine, Saturday 5 December, 7pm.** Click here for booking information: <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/mkctw/t-pdkmgy>. Tickets are available now, price £20, and are fully refundable in the event of cancellation. The concert will be approximately one hour in duration. With social distancing measures, capacity is limited to just 50. Of course, we are working on the basis that lockdown restrictions will ease after 2nd December. In the event that circumstances change, all ticket purchases will be refunded.

Monteverdi is most famous for the Vespers of 1610, comprising antiphons, sacred songs and psalm settings for a large and diverse group of singers and instrumentalists. Taking this as our inspiration, we present a selection of Monteverdi's music for the vespers service that would have been performed in the Christmas season. In the Baroque intimacy of King Charles, we can transport you back to 17th century Mantua or Venice for an inspiring evening of celebration.

- **Koor free courses** – each course will be led by musicians that make up the professional performing element of Koor; hand-picked singers and instrumentalists, many of whom are soloists in their own right: A stellar group of musicians who, under normal circumstances, would be performing with groups such as The Tallis Scholars, Tenebrae, The Sixteen, and the BBC Singers. They are bringing this incredible knowledge and talent together in three online courses:

Beethoven's Mass in C (Nov 11 to Dec 9): As we come to the end of Beethoven's 250th anniversary year, they offer an opportunity to learn a work that deserves to hear far more frequently.

Handel's Messiah - (Nov 12 to Dec 10): What would Christmas be without Messiah? Join us to explore this favourite in the contexts of history and performance.

Christmas Fantasia - (Nov 16 to Dec 14): A programme of beautiful Christmas music from the 20th & 21st Centuries with a satisfying balance of the well-known and new.

- **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.

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