Memories & Meditations

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The theme running through much of this collection of reminiscences and musings is MUSIC which the author has been closely involved with for over 50 years as composer, teacher and examiner.

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Beginnings

I came into the world on January 18th, a few days before the onset of one of the last century's severest winters- that of 1947. The extreme cold, heavy snowfall, fuel shortages and post war rationing added up to one of the most miserable periods in recent history- but of which I, as an infant, was blissfully unaware.

My place of birth was Ruislip, originally a village in the now lost county of Middlesex, and by the late 1940s merely another suburb of West London. Therefore, my earliest memories are suburban ones of rows of still new semi-detached and terraced houses in quiet tree-lined avenues; front gardens bright with flowering shrubs for most of the year, and rear gardens cluttered with sheds and bordered by wooden fences; terraces of shops, bus stops, parks, and two railway stations: Ruislip Manor and South Ruislip, and all of these relatively new at that time. Remnants of open country were still to be seen as occasional fields and patches of waste land. There was even a small farm not far from the newly built houses and shops of South Ruislip, but I think all these have gone by now- the whole area having been covered in brick and concrete years ago.

During my earliest infancy, I must have had numerous toys, of which only three stand out clearly in my memory, except that two of these were not really toys at all. For both my amusement and education when I was 2 or 3 years old, my mother used to empty the contents of her purse onto the carpet: mirror, scissors, thimble etc. and ask me to point to these objects as she named them, which I invariably did correctly. Then there was my favourite cuddly toy, a brightly coloured androgynous doll that I called Bo-Bo and from whom I was almost inseparable.

The third item was a bull (or more likely a water buffalo) carved from a block of very hard wood and probably brought from India by my grandfather, who was stationed in Hyderabad for several years before I came along.

Fascinated by this monstrosity, I got into the annoying habit of wanting "Bully", as I called it, to have some of my food before I took each mouthful of it as it was fed to me on a spoon.

"Give Bully a bit!" I would cry. "Give Bully a bit; give Bully a bit" and so on. On one occasion when I was probably being more exasperating than usual my demand to "Give Bully a bit" was answered by "B****r Bully!" followed by angry words to the effect that I was to shut up and eat my food, either from my mother who was not averse to using the milder Anglo Saxon swear words, or maybe my aunt – I do not exactly remember. But I think after that my obsession with Bully subsided considerably.

Amongst our occasional visitors were two great aunts, sisters of my mother's mother, Auntie Rose, and Auntie Lil, both elderly spinsters. It was in connection with one of these two aunts- I cannot remember exactly which – that a memory of my earliest childhood has persisted to this day. We were on the point of going out and I was eager to leave the house, when to my annoyance one of these aunts delayed everyone by being unable to find her hat, which for some reason she must wear before being seen in public. "Where *is* my hat?" she repeatedly asked to which question I hastily and thoughtlessly replied "Blow yer old 'at!" (I had acquired a London accent by that stage, probably from my mother). Rather than being castigated for such an unseemly remark, it was greeted with much amusement, and I was told numerous times about what I said on that occasion, which is probably why I remember it so clearly.

Of Auntie Rose, another memory comes to mind: a dream. Auntie Rose was very fond of me and would often give me presents. I think I represented to her the child she never had, having never married, although I was told that she was good looking as a young woman. I have to say that in my teens, when what I am about to relate occurred, I hardly thought about any of my elderly relations, as is perfectly natural at that age. However, one night I had a strange dream. I saw, indistinctly, a bed and two figures near it that I knew were nurses. One said to the other "She's gone". The dream faded away. I woke and looked at the clock at my bedside. It was 2.00 am. In the morning, I already knew what I would be told, namely that Auntie Rose had died at 2.00 am that night, exactly at the time of my dream. How to explain this? I do not know. But it has made me aware of another reality beyond what we think of as the only reality around us of material things.

Cars do not figure much in my earliest memories, although I suppose there must have been some around, but I do recall my excitement at the arrival of the ice-cream van that announced itself by a jingle of bells, a brief tune played repeatedly, on hearing which my mother would give me some coins and I would run out to buy an ice-lolly. I still recall my favourite flavour- spearmint- and how the pale green chunk of ice splintered delightfully in the mouth when bitten.

Some of my earliest recollections pertain to the, then, recently ended war: I had been aware from as far back as I can remember that shortly before my arrival there had taken place a cataclysmic event, the after-effects of which could still be seen and experienced. When my mother went shopping, she

would place me in a push chair and make sure she had her ration book before leaving the house. What few shops there were nearby had little in them, and some things were still in short supply; a situation which did not completely cease until 1954 when rationing was finally ended.

We had a gas mask left over from the war and which was, fortunately, never needed during the conflict. I used to play with it, putting it on and seeing how long I could last before the effort of breathing would force me to remove it. I can still remember its acrid, rubber smell and of looking at myself with it on in a mirror, savouring my inhuman appearance.

We did not acquire a television-set until about 1956, but my parents enjoyed listening to the radio, especially at weekends. Their favourite programmes included several popular items of that period such as *Billy Cotton's Band Show,* at the beginning of which a coarse voice would exclaim: "Wakey, wakeeeeeeee!" - the final "e" grotesquely prolonged and distorted, to be followed by an equally coarse, but memorable, signature tune. Then there was *Educating Archie* -a ventriloquist and his wooden dummy made to talk like a "toff"; and of course, those inimitable comedians, the "Goons" whose programmes often featured that memorable line: "He's fallen in the watah!"

Comedians seemed much funnier then than now- or is that just my imagination? Was comedy, as we knew it for centuries, killed by Political Correctness, and the fear of offending sensitive minorities, around 2000?

Another memory associated with the radio is that of the week in 1952 when all the cheerful programmes were replaced by sombre news bulletins and solemn music on the occurrence of the death of King George VI. Although we had no television set at that time, our next-door neighbours did have one, and I remember watching the coronation of HM Elizabeth II as a small, flickering, black, white, and grey image on a screen about the size of an A4 sheet of paper.

Both of my parents came from quite humble backgrounds. My father was a printer by trade who, at the time of my arrival, worked in a print shop in nearby Ruislip Manor. Later he became his own boss as a director of James Ernest Regan & Co of Hillingdon, printing leaflets for companies including *Glaxo,* the famous drug manufacturers. I would occasionally have to visit the factory- a huge shed in which were several enormous machines all working at once and making a deafening racket as blank paper went in at one end and printed pages came out at the other. It was all very exciting to watch but was arduous work. My father worked long hours- sometimes all night if a machine broke down and needed attending to - and so I did not see him as much as I saw my mother. I grew up closer to her. It was only when in my teens and dad retired early that I got to know him better. However, I think it was because of his business, and the fact that there was always printed material around the house waiting to be proof-read, that I acquired my life-long attraction to books and magazines.

My paternal grandfather, of whom I have but very dim memories, was a soldier by profession. Hailing originally from either Mayo or Sligo, he became a sergeant-major in the British Army at a time, remember, when Ireland was still "British".

My mother, a native of one of the poorer parts of Westminster, was a housewife at the time of my birth. But she was never reluctant to point out that during the war years she worked in a nursery caring for infants whose mothers were on war-work and whose fathers were fighting Hitler. *Her* father was a lamplighter- an occupation which probably requires some explanation today: he was employed to light (and presumably extinguish) gas lamps on a daily round which would start in late evening during the summer months, and of course, get progressively earlier towards mid-winter. Despite this humble station in life, he had a love of music, especially opera. My mother maintained that my own love of music was inherited from him.

Of the many anecdotes told to me by my mother, two continue to stand out. There was an uncle- her father's brother, who went through the 1914-18 war without a scratch, only to be killed in 1919 or 1920 when a taxi, returning from a day trip to Southend, overturned with him inside it. And then there is the curious story of the frozen shirt. Now, I cannot remember to which one of my mother's relations this story refers, but he was a milk-rounds man, and this was way back before 1914. One frosty morning his shirt, which had been washed and hung out overnight drew the comment "Oh, Uncle T-----'s stiff!". This was said humorously- but how true it was! At that very moment he was indeed "stiff" having been beaten to death in an alley and robbed of his takings.

The first joke I can recall hearing, and one that I like to think helped in a small way to steer me on the path to music, was the "Rimsky-Korsakov Joke". Now, stop me if you've heard it…….You haven't. Well, it goes something like this:

There was once a man employed by the BBC to announce items on a daily popular request programme. You know- Mrs T from Ashby de la Zouche would very much like to hear that lovely aria from such and such by so and so. Well, one of the most popular items requested was "The Flight of the Bumble Bee" by Rimsky-Korsakov. Now, the announcer just could not get that name right. It would come out sounding like "Ritsi-Kormaskov" or "Riski-Mortakov" and so on. Eventually, one evening towards the end of the week, the director of broadcasting stopped the unfortunate announcer on his way out. "Now look here "said the director "That piece is one of our most popular requests." And indeed, it was, coming up at least once a week and sometimes more often. The director continued, somewhat more warmly "If you can't get that Russian bloke's name right, I'll have to find someone else who can, understand? Now go home and practise it over the weekend, and then I'm sure it will be alright next time." And that was what the announcer did. Over the weekend he repeated, for one whole hour, very slowly and in front of a mirror, "R-I-M-S-K-Y K-O-R-S-A-K-O-V", until it was perfect. Monday morning came, and with it the popular request programme. Sure enough, just half an hour into the programme came a request for that piece by you-know-who. Full of newly acquired confidence, the announcer launched into his introduction: "And now, Mrs F---- from Lower G------ would like to hear that old favourite-

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV'S----------

(deep breath)

the bum of the flightle bee…….

Holidays

My earliest recollections of these go back to our annual stay in Bournemouth, in which town my paternal grandmother ran a boarding house. This establishment did not look any different from all the other old houses in one of Bournemouth's back streets, and here we would lodge for one or two weeks most likely in August and partake of the same activities each year running: trips to the beach, walks in the public gardens, excursions to nearby places of interest such as Branksome, Christchurch and a desolate expanse of clifftop heathland called Hengistbury Head.

At the time of which I write, Bournemouth, already almost a city in size, was brightened by a fleet of yellow trolleybuses (alas, now extinct) that, together with its funicular railways, promenade, and pier made it a colourful and exotic place quite unlike drab and dingy London 100 or so miles to the north.

My parents felt obliged to stay in the boarding house every year for several years running - presumably there was no charge- but one year they decided they had had enough of Bournemouth and took the daring step of changing our summer destination to the West Country, of which more later.

Every now and again and usually at weekends, we would visit my aunt, (my mother's sister) and her two daughters who lived in an old house in Camberwell, South London. My father would dutifully drive there through the London traffic, which seemed as congested then as it is now, along the Western Avenue, through the West End and then south-eastwards towards what was for me the most exciting part of the otherwise rather tedious journey, where, just after crossing Vauxhall bridge, the road went for what seemed to my youthful eyes to be a long way under the railway lines at Vauxhall station, so long that it actually got dark halfway in. After that the streets got poorer and shabbier until Camberwell was reached, and we stopped outside an old house in Albany Road. This house, built c.1840 and now probably demolished, was constructed in such a way that no two ground floors were on the same level. At the back was a small plain garden and beyond that and behind a high brick wall were the premises of White's the soft-drink manufacturers. There was also a ghost – or so my grandmother believed. She told us that she saw, approaching her bed one night, a small girl, and not one of my cousins. This apparition, if such it was, just seems to have disappeared when my grandmother looked again more alertly…

Parts of this house smelt strongly of damp and when I occasionally smell that odour of ancient dampness, my thoughts go back to that old house and its occupants. I think that nearly all the old buildings in the Albany Road of my childhood have long been demolished and replaced by characterless modern apartment blocks.

Schooldays

Because my father was a Catholic, I was required (by the Pope) to attend Catholic schools in my early years.

Of my first school, Sacred Heart Primary in Ruislip Gardens, I remember little except that the headmaster often tried to convert my mother, a life-long Anglican, to Roman Catholicism, and that she would listen respectfully but always decline the offer.

However, I did experience music at Sacred Heart for the first time. I learnt to play the recorder [not very expertly] and there were class singing lessons of which I have retained a memory over 70 years of rows of primary school children singing Sea Songs, some of which had very dubious words. Here is one example that has lodged itself in my memory, and I think you will agree that it is hardly the sort of thing that 6- or 7-year-olds should have been exposed to (but of course, we did not know what the text implied):

"O, Sally Brown's a bright mulatter,

Way, hey, roll and go

She drinks rum and chews tobaccer,

Spend my money on Sally Brown."

If Sally Brown, that "pretty young lady of New York City" ever existed, then she would have been dead, most likely from un-natural causes, for 100 years or more by now. But of course, this was well before the era of Political Correctness – those halcyon days when you could write or say pretty much anything about anything or anyone provided it was not actually libellous.

Of my second school, Gunnersbury Catholic Grammar, I have more concrete but rather mixed recollections. It was staffed by priests who, far from rejecting the world and all its temptations, seemed to live life to the full, judging by the crates of empty beer bottles (or was it altar wine?) stacked up behind the priests' house next to the school.

Masters were divided into two categories: There were those whom you could twist around your little finger and who could never keep an orderly class, no matter how much they threatened corporal punishment. An elderly mathematics master was a typical specimen. He would glare at a troublesome boy and murmur "I don't like your attitude. Go to the head after class for the whack "(a hard leather cosh used on the posteriors of offenders). But then at the end of the lesson he would relent and say to the same boy "Oh well, try to behave better next time".

And then there were those who inspired fear and inflicted pain. The most-feared master was Mr H., teacher of English language and literature, a hint of whose approach would instantly silence and petrify a whole class. A lesson with Mr H. seldom passed without violence. One of his favourite tricks would be to write on the blackboard with his back to the class, and suddenly, sensing some forbidden movement or sound, turn round and fling the wooden chalk-duster in the direction of the suspected miscreant, usually scoring a full-face hit. If by chance he hit the wrong boy, so much the worse for him, he was still guilty- by proximity.

It was from Mr H. that I first encountered that anti-American sentiment which has been such a permanent feature in sections of British society. According to Mr H., Americans could not speak or spell correctly, and that although as individuals they could be fine, as a mass they were obnoxious. Looking back, it seems incredible to me that a man who taught, and presumably loved, English literature should have thought so little of the nation that produced Melville, Emerson, Whitman, James, and scores of other great writers. My mother spoke more sense: "Never run down the Yanks; without them we would all be under the Nazis".

I cannot say that I was very enthusiastic about any of the subjects taught at Gunnersbury at that time. Mathematics, French, Latin etc. were tolerable, but sports and so-called "PE" were my particular dreads then as now. I still cannot believe that men (and women these days, I believe) enjoy rolling around in mud in sometimes freezing weather, playing Rugby Football. To me it was almost unendurable, and I always aimed to stay as far from the ball as possible. Cross country running was another source of anxiety. Once a month nearly the whole school trooped to nearby Gunnersbury Park and were made to run around its extensive perimeter. I can say with some pride that I was never last, but always in the last few stragglers, mostly the overweight brigade, who would end up exhaustedly walking or limping to the gates. The only game that I found mildly pleasant was cricket, although I was no good at it, but at least it took place in warmer weather.

During my secondary school years and maybe just before, I was obsessed by model railways and indeed by all mechanical things. I had been given a Meccano set around the age of ten and subscribed to "Meccano Magazine" for some years. I do not remember actually constructing anything workable- except maybe a "lever locking device" the plans of which were in one issue of the magazine. Similarly with the train set, it never seemed to progress beyond a circle of track, a couple of locomotives and a few trucks and coaches. The power would often fail leaving my engines unable to move, and my

pitifully scant layout never looked anything like the opulent and realistic examples shown in magazines such as "Railway Modeller" and so on. By the time I had gone into about the 3rd form at Gunnersbury, my interest in model railways had considerably faded. However, very recently and for some inexplicable reason, I have become obsessed by trams – those of the double-deck variety that used to sedately trundle their way through London's streets, mainly to the south of the city, and that were all quietly done away with by 1952. It is with a sense of acute nostalgia that I think of these vehicles that 100 years ago were to be seen in our local main roads in New Malden and Kingston. Alas, to be replaced by buses in the 1930s!

The Wild Places

From as early as I can remember I have been attracted to certain types of landscape: woods, hills, mountains, and moors. I think it started with holidays in the West Country spent with my parents from about the age of eight or so, and which continued until my teens. It is often averred that small children have no "eye" for scenery and are bored by it, but on the contrary, I was, from a very early age, thrilled by seeing bleak moors, devoid of human habitation, and, to me, menacing in their emptiness and silence. I loved to run free, savouring the windy heights of Exmoor, Dartmoor, and the great grassy cliff tops of Devon and Cornwall along which I would joyously run -much to the anxiety of my mother whose cry of "Don't go too near the edge!" would always accompany such boyish displays of daring.

It is to the last-named county that some of my fondest holiday memories pertain, when we would drive down - a two-day journey in those days, if you could not get over Dartmoor before nightfall- and stay for a fortnight in the small fishing village of Porthleven. We stayed for several consecutive years with a Cornish family- there were three delightful girls, one younger than me, one a little older and the third in her early teens. Their mother was a typical dark-haired and dark-eyed Cornish beauty, so different from the blonde Anglo-Saxon females that I was more used to seeing. It is a fact of old age, which I must acknowledge is just beginning for me, that one's early memories return in a heightened form and are much more sharply focussed than more recent ones- including those of even the last few days! Thus, if I close my eyes, I can still see a little boy playing happily on the sun-warmed sands of Marazion beach in the company of two small girls, while his parents and the girls' mother sit nearby in deckchairs; can still feel the gentle motion of the boat as it took us on the short journey to St Michael's Mount where we disembarked and wandered around that tiny island. And all this was more than 60 years in the past. Why- those girls are now, incredibly, in their seventies! But I still can only picture them as children and to me they will always remain so.

And then, there was "Fisherman's Cottage" – a boarding house in the remote village of Lee Bay on the North Devon coast.

My memories get a little confused as to whether Lee Bay came before or after Porthleven and whether we went there once, twice, or more times in succession. However, I certainly can remember a *sound:* the most mournful, eerie, distant, tenor voice of the foghorn, known to the locals as "Moaning Minnie", located either at Bull Point or Morte Point, that would sometimes go on all night and into the day. Just how the sound of this instrument could warn mariners of the dangers of this most dangerous and deadly of coasts, I have no idea. Possibly by the volume of sound they could tell how near to the rocks they were?

Near Lee Bay was a ruined manor house. The story told locally was that it was burned out one night by a careless vagrant. I know that my mother and myself on one occasion tried to reach it along a steep and very overgrown footpath, but that we turned back because of the increasingly sinister atmosphere around us that made progress less and less inviting.

Sitting alone in a room in a hotel in some great city, I take refuge in memories of how, as a boy, I used to wander through the woods adjoining the bungalow that we moved to when the end-of- terrace house in South Ruislip was deemed to be too small for a company director and his family.

These woods were and, mercifully, still are, quite extensive and in three sections, called Park, Copse and Mad Bess Woods. A fourth area, Bayhurst Wood, was somewhat further away. Park Wood could be entered from our rear garden and hardly a week passed (and often much less than that) when I would not take an hour or so to stroll through one or more areas of woodland. The trees were mostly oak and hornbeam with some chestnut and holly and I got to know the woods in all seasons from the hottest midsummer days of full and radiant foliage, deep black shadows and the blinding light of clearings in full sunshine in which the dust from the paths danced in the sunbeams, to those foggy late Autumn afternoons when dusk comes on early and the trees become dark poles against a grey background; from freezing but fine winter mornings of gold and pale blue, to the first, fresh verdure of early Spring with its drumming of woodpeckers echoing through a revitalised landscape.

I think it was my experience of, and empathy with, these woods that replaced religious belief in my teens. I began to doubt the existence of God, and the teachings of Christianity, and my readings and love of the Greek myths had, by then, turned me rather pagan. All I knew was that these woods were ALIVE with a life not human, and which long predated my own life, and that it was mysterious and somehow eternal. Even in the darkest and most stormy days of winter the life persisted just under the surface, waiting to reassert itself with the coming of Spring.

Some of this joy in wild and lonely places has occasionally returned later in my life, when I have been able to get away from the all-consuming activities of home and work: the great jungle-clad peaks visible from the ancient city of Machu Picchu in Peru, which gave me a strong awareness of the spirit world and the presence of God, and nearer home, the rocky outcrops on the Long Mynd in Shropshire, on which I sat one summer's day years ago- but it seems like yesterday- the warm coarseness of some of the earth's oldest rocks under my fingers. A few moments of keenest bliss- a fragment of eternity.

My work compels me to live in a city, but I chose the greenest quarter of London- the south-west- with its great parks of Richmond, Bushy, Wimbledon Common and Hampton Court. From the first floor of our house may be seen the North Downs upon which I can, in imagination, roam along their breezy summits and view in my mind's eye the great expanse of the Weald to the south with its hills and wooded valleys, and farther off, the South Downs and finally, the sea.

With this love of the wilds has developed a corresponding interest in the literature of rural rather than urban life and especially that of two writers, both of whose poems I have attempted to set to music and whose depictions of rural settings cannot be surpassed. Thomas Hardy was an author with an extraordinary insight into both human and natural life, and whose work can be read on a number of levels: as exact and detailed depictions of the human condition, as romances, and as including some of the finest portrayals ever made of the rural world which he so much loved and could see being overwhelmed by that creeping urbanisation, which was already well underway, even in the 19th century.

And in Yeats I have found some of the most evocative nature-writing, and startlingly exact in a poet generally considered to be concerned more with spiritual matters. For an example read *"Coole and Ballylee 1931*" in which with a minimal number of expertly chosen words Yeats paints a winter landscape as surely as any artist could do with oils or pastels:

Upon the border of that lake's a wood

Now all dry sticks under a wintry sun,

And in a copse of beeches there I stood,

For Nature's pulled her tragic buskin on…

Early musical experiences

I am sitting at a desk in an air-conditioned room, in some great Southeast Asian city. The room is furnished with an upright piano and one or two chairs. A few books are on view in display cabinets along one wall. From 9.00 a.m. until after 4.00 in the afternoon, a stream of girls and boys (mostly girls) enter the room in various stages of apprehension, nervously come to my desk to hand me their mark-papers, sit in front of the piano and, at my request, play a few scales, three pieces, attempt the sight-reading, answer one or two questions and undergo aural tests, finally to leave with a polite "Thank you, goodbye".

How did I get here? How did the small boy who loved to make up tunes on the black keys of an old piano end up spending months of his life in exotic places such as Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Bandung, Kuching, Singapore and Medan, listening, judging, writing reports, dealing with "reps", living in hotels and maybe even influencing the future courses of the lives of at least a fraction of the children who are required to hold his attention and gain approval for their allotted few minutes. It was the attempt to answer this question that led me to write this memoir and to try to unravel the convoluted but unbroken thread that has run through my life. This thread is, as the reader may now have realised, music.

The old piano was my mother's, and I cannot recall where she got it from; but, from an early age I was drawn to it. When I was nine years old my mother, getting tired of hearing my endless doodles (mainly on the black keys) suggested that I have piano lessons, to which I readily agreed. My first teacher was an elderly lady called Miss Street, who lived a few roads away. I do not remember much about the lessons, but I must have been a quick learner because by the age of twelve I was trying out the "*Visions Fugitives*" by Prokofieff, which I had heard on the radio, acquired a copy of and taken to Miss Street for her inspection. I can still hear her bemused response after I played one of the "*Visions"* - "Well, it's very clever. But it's not music".

In 1960, the end-of-terrace house in Exmouth Road, where I had lived the first 13 years of my life, was deemed to be too small and insignificant for a company director (as my father was by this time) and so we all moved to a large bungalow in North Ruislip. As a result of the move came a new piano teacher, Martin David, a former concert pianist, who lived a few streets away with his young Spanish wife. His teaching style was unique: throughout each lesson he would sit, sideways on, and smoke a large cigar, listening and occasionally removing the cigar from his mouth to pass judgment, and comment on what was happening at the piano. His favourite composers were Faure and Granados, and he introduced me to a wider range of music than I would ever have got from Miss Street, who only seemed to like Chopin.

Martin David detected musical talent in me and encouraged it to develop. He suggested that I apply for entry to one of the London conservatoires, which I duly did.

I was accepted at the old Guildhall School of Music & Drama (then situated in a large Victorian building in Blackfriars) at the age of 17, and thus began what was to be an almost unbroken life of studying and

teaching music, and of being part of the musical educational establishment, first as a student, then as a teacher, then as a student again and finally as an examiner.

Student

Music has determined the whole course of my life: listening to it, teaching both the practical and theoretical aspects of it, composing it and even at times trying to escape from it. Music has been the "thorough bass" upon which my life has played out its melodies of sometimes joyful and sometimes dolorous notes. Music has brought the keenest pleasures, has earned me a living, found me a wife, and sent me half-way around the world.

I regret to say that I was probably not the most brilliant or industrious student to have studied at the GSMD. I must have seemed immature and indecisive to my teachers and indeed I left after three years with just the licentiate diploma, having decided to avoid class teaching (no doubt influenced by memories of seeing the music master at Gunnersbury in tears on occasions after particularly harrowing experiences with tone-deaf pupils).

My teachers at the GSMD were Dennis Dance, for piano, elderly and given to digressing on his experiences in "the war" (it must, I think, have been the 1914-18 one). I remember the ritual that I was persuaded to perform before his lessons- of obtaining the key to his locker, removing from it an old and faded red cushion, going to his studio, and placing this item on his chair- (I was the first student of the day). Of his teaching, I remember little except that he often went on about his "ops" and about the war- "Dreadful, dear boy, absolutely awful! You're lucky to have missed it."

My first composition teacher was Buxton Orr, a Scottish ex-doctor, a few of whose works, notably "*A John Gay Suite"* for wind ensemble, are still occasionally performed. His language was colourful. I remember one occasion when he sat next to me during a piano recital given by a senior student. Her final piece, by Villa Lobos was summed up by Buxton in one concise, unprintable, four-letter word, much to my amazement, as I thought it was harmless enough and quite likeable.

I cannot say that Buxton taught me much, but then I was not writing much at that stage, and what little I started I could not finish. However, we were getting along quite nicely, and I was even being invited to his home for lessons because ill health prevented him from travelling until, foolish youth that I was, I made some joking remark about one of his favourite composers. Well, that was the end. From then on, I did not exist for him, and I do not think we ever met again. I regret now that I was estranged from him. I doubt that he was ever happy, being twice married and twice divorced. He died in 1997. By way of atonement for my disastrous gaffe I dedicated my "*Four Scots Songs*" of 2007 to his memory.

Peter Wishart, my teacher of harmony and counterpoint, I recall only with pleasure. Again, of his teaching little trace is left in my memory, but his classes were always enjoyable and consisted mostly of Peter, *Gauloise* on lip and filling the studio with a pungent and delicious aroma, enthusiastically playing through Haydn quartet movements, sometimes pausing to point out interesting features. It was usually Haydn, but occasionally one of the "moderns" of the time like Milhaud, or Kodaly. On one occasion he asked each member of the group to play something. When my turn came, I played Liszt's "*St Francis Walking on the Waters*" which I was studying at the time. When I had finished a fellow student commented approvingly "Wow, they don't make films like that anymore!" Peter, however, while liking the performance, expressed his view that Liszt was not among the greatest composers, with which judgment I would agree *today,* although at that time I was completely overawed by his music and even became a member of the Liszt Society for a few years.

My time at the GSMD coincided with the great "Mahler revival ". In the UK it was more like an introduction, as Mahler had never been well-known here. I was as bowled-over as anyone else - at the time- and revelled in the symphonies, listening to as many as I could and buying scores of the gigantic 2nd and more classically proportioned 4th with its delightful song-finale. My interest waned after a few years. Today I still occasionally listen to a Mahler symphony- my favourite is the 7th with its exquisite *Nachtmusik* movements, but he is, I think, primarily a composer for the young- they have more time to listen to his extended utterances and to react with more empathy to his often-histrionic emotional sound-world. Also, when under his spell, I did not really know any Brahms (apart from a few piano pieces). Now my intimate knowledge and love of Brahms has made me see the faults of lesser composers.

However, Mahler was just one of a whole series of composers, writers, and artists whose work has, sometimes fleetingly and sometimes lastingly held my attention over the years. The list includes: Prokofieff, Liszt, Britten, Tippett, Debussy, Stravinsky, Henze, Brahms and Palestrina, Klee, Miro and Moholy-Nagy, Melville, Mann, Axel Munthe, Yeats, Hardy, Eliot and Cage. In some moods they all seem to me to be like giants, like immortals- but sooner or later, I find myself contemplating some great natural wonder or convulsion (of which latter there have been so many lately) and then all the works of man seem insubstantial, fleeting and dream-like.

Maturity

After leaving the GSMD with my newly acquired LGSM diploma, I immediately began to teach piano and theory in private practice- an occupation which has lasted for more than 50 years and never failed to provide some sort of income. Students come in all sizes, ages, and levels of natural ability from the gifted (rare) to the hopeless (mercifully few). Most are somewhere in between, i.e., they have some interest and some talent but usually lack the willpower to do anything between lessons.

I have learned more through teaching than I ever learned at the GSMD. All conservatoires are only nurseries; they start you off, and give you a qualification, but the real learning process begins with your first lesson *as a teacher.*

The biggest danger for a music-teacher is staleness- boring students instead of interesting them. It happened to me. I was getting heartily tired of teaching and students were leaving. A refresher course given by the Associated Board helped. I realized that it was time for a fresh approach to lessons. I began to change my teaching methods: to ask more questions to engage the students' attention, not to spend too long on any single topic, to introduce popular music and jazz pieces. Also, I began to adopt a friendlier stance, conversing more with adult students to put them at ease, asking the older children about their schools, not being afraid to address little girls as "dear" or "love" to make them less nervous. To be, in a word, more human and less like the stuffy, elderly pedagogue that I was in danger of becoming.

Since then, my work as an instrumental teacher has been guided by two over-arching principles that I try to maintain in every lesson. One is that all lessons should be enjoyable: I want my students to look forward to their appointments with me with pleasurable anticipation and not with apprehension. Then, there should be something achieved at every lesson if possible. This could be starting a new piece, smoothing out imperfections in existing pieces, overcoming some technical difficulty, etc. The cost of putting these two principles into practice is keeping very patient with even the most apparently hopeless cases! In this respect my recent experiences of trying to master certain dance steps that my fellow students manage with ease has made me much more patient when my pupils seem to be unable to get the simplest manoeuvres right.

But let me go back to the point at which I had just left the GSMD and embarked on a career as a music-teacher in private practice. As I soon discovered, music teaching at home is a rather lonely occupation- when your last student of the evening has departed, it is too late to go out and seek society, and I craved companionship at that time of my life. I met up with one or two friends at weekends, and that was some compensation for the lonely weekdays, but I had other ambitions. My three years of study at the GSMD had left me still feeling somewhat unfulfilled. For a while I seriously contemplated becoming a concert pianist. With this aim in mind, I took lessons with an elderly Russian lady for about two years, assiduously attending her master classes and practising for 2-3 hours a day. It was during these years that I got to know much of the mainstream piano literature- the Bach Preludes and Fugues, with which I would invariably begin each practice session, and much of the piano music of Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann, Schubert, Liszt, and Debussy, together with lesser portions of Brahms, Prokofieff, Bartok and Stravinsky.

But we change! Like hills which seem so near when viewed from a valley, but which seem to recede as we set off to approach them, the goal of becoming a concert pianist seemed to move farther and farther away. The more I practised, the more I realized my technical limitations, and besides, I really wanted to write my own music, not spend valuable time practising that of others.

Hence the piano lessons stopped, and I did two things which proved to be of lasting significance in my life: I decided to study for a B. Mus. Degree, and I returned to the Guildhall School to study composition with Patric Standford. I chose Patric on the recommendation of a friend, Malcolm Dedman, who had previously studied with him, and he proved to be a superb teacher- just what I needed to cure the "composer's block" which was afflicting me at that time- able to begin works (I had ideas) but unable to get very far with them. Without imposing any sort of stylistic idiom, Patric got straight away to the root of my problem which was that I was not making full use of my ideas but introducing new ones when I got stuck on how to continue. I cannot comment on the quality of my music, but from that year's study onwards I have nearly always been able to finish a work.

I gained the Durham B. Mus. Degree in 1973, when degrees, even 1st degrees, were still attained by hard work and long years of study. (The Durham degree included a six-hour fugue paper(!) and one of the set works was the entire final act of "*Otello*"). Being armed, as it were, with a substantial qualification, I decided it was time to search for work outside of home, and so I duly wrote to all the music colleges in London to seek a teaching position. Nothing happened. I wrote again a year later- and this time I received a letter from Dr W. Lloyd Webber, the principal of the London College of Music, requesting that I come to his office for a short interview. Dr Webber (or Bill as he was affectionately known), father of the more famous Andrew, was a man of few words. All that I can recall of the interview was Bill asking me when I could start.

The LCM years

My first term at the LCM was in the Autumn of 1975. I was assigned to teach harmony and counterpoint to small groups of students on the Graduate Course. The coursework was solidly conservative in content: 2- and 3-part counterpoint, chorale-type harmony, string quartet writing "*a la* Haydn" and fugal exposition. There was a bit of modernism in the 3rd year work- how to write impressionistic piano pieces and the elementary use of a 12-note series. Remembering my experiences with Peter Wishart, I would often end classes by playing works on the piano for the students to listen to. Some of them later testified that this was the best part of the class.

During my 22 years at the LCM, I got roped in to teach a variety of subjects: keyboard harmony, aural training, composition, and even at one time, I think, 2nd study piano. The quality of students was of course, always variable but over the years they got worse. I do not mean that in any moral sense- they were all nice enough, polite, and so on. But something happened from about 1990 which affected the type of young person coming into music colleges. I think it was the relegation of "serious" music at secondary level to just one part of a plethora of "world music-s" which started to creep into education at about this time, and which had (and still has) a negative effect on the young people I was trying to teach. Put briefly, they were mostly surprisingly ignorant of the subject that they intended to study. It is no exaggeration to say that I was getting B. Mus. course students who found it hard to recognize a perfect cadence in a string quartet movement, and who indeed, did not even know what a string quartet was!

Now, I do not want to sound like an old "fuddy-duddy", but I have to say what I believe: that if you downgrade the classics, and by putting them on an equal footing with popular music, jazz, folksong etc., you are downgrading them, what you are in fact doing is possibly making yourself look foolish in the eyes of posterity. The reason is the extraordinary resilience of the classical tradition in music (i.e., roughly from Monteverdi to Maxwell Davies) which will ensure that it will survive and be listened to for its depth of expression and complexity of structure when today's popular, jazz, and ethnic music has been long forgotten. Do not misunderstand me. I enjoy much of the more popular types of music as much as the next man, I am sometimes moved by it, and it has influenced my own work. But, compared to classical music it lacks depth. I mean that you cannot dig deep into it. It is shallow- usually a catchy melody over well-worn chord progressions. I remember having to teach the popular music course for one term to groups of B. Mus. students at what became the new LCM, (see below). I dutifully played recordings and analysed popular songs from various decades of the 20th century. Usually after about 10 minutes of "analysis" there was little left to say, so meagre were the materials. I can compare that to the experience of spending an hour looking at a section of a Brahms piano piece. So rich was the material, and so full of references outside itself that one discovery led to another and another and so on. That is what I mean by "depth "- where you can go on digging down into the musical substance, seeing oddities, explaining relationships, references to other works, and how the composer has sought to express moods and emotions.

Life at the old LCM during the Lloyd Webber years was happy and comfortable, if unexciting. Bill, as I have mentioned earlier, was not by nature talkative, but he did from time to time tell, not exactly jokes, but humorous anecdotes. I remember his comment on the malfunctioning lift in his apartment building- "Yes" he remarked, "It has its ups and downs". He also had his favourite and less favourite composers, one of the latter being Nielsen, whose 4th symphony *The Inextinguishable,* Bill renamed *The Interminable.*

Of my colleagues at the LCM during my years there, a few stand out in my mind. There was John Vallier, tutor of piano and also a minor composer; Jonathan Melling, organist and teacher of General Musicianship, who once quipped at the time that the Royal Academy of Music advertised itself to the world as a "Centre of Excellence", that the LCM should style itself a "Centre of Mediocrity"; Stephen Pierce, tutor of clarinet who once said that he could tell how much the female students had practised by what they were wearing (or maybe not wearing) at the lessons.

Three times a year there occurred what were known as *Theory Boards* at which piles of grade and diploma papers were marked by a team of professors, presided over by Bill. I was invited to join from my first term. The other regular members were Martyn Williams, a genial Welshman, Charles Collins- professor of piano, Brian Trueman, the Schumann expert, Jonathan Melling, Dr John Burn the assistant director, and Dr William Pasfield, former head of the graduate course until his retirement in about

1985. These were all men of character, all with their opinions and mannerisms. But we were an amicable team, and more so after midday when the "refreshment" was served. Bill could not abide teetotallers, but unfortunately because of a medical condition, Dr Burn was forbidden alcohol. Therefore, to please Bill, he would drink chrysanthemum tea, the appearance of which vaguely resembled something alcoholic- although it was said that it looked more like a specimen!

There were occasional extra members at these meetings. One of these, who managed to mark one paper to everyone else's ten was only invited once, and another, the resident flute tutor at LCM, and who was known rather dubiously, as "an expert on wind" joined us for a few sessions.

Dr Pasfield was for many years a familiar face at the LCM, and even after his retirement he would often come in for a chat. He became a particular friend of mine and we often had lunch together in a cosy Italian restaurant on the corner of Carnaby Street. He seemed to live on a different plane from most of the rest of humanity. A typical opening from Dr P. would be, after inhaling the air deeply, "You know, as Nietzsche says in *Beyond Good and Evil*……. "But, of course, few of us did know, but we listened respectfully, paying due homage to Dr P.'s age and erudition. He was very active in old age- being well over 70 when I knew him. I can still see the way he would stride along Great Marlborough Street, like a country gent walking around his estate, sniffing the air, and smiling to himself, no doubt about some philosophical point in Nietzsche - or Sartre.

There were some amusing characters amongst the students at the old LCM, including the diminutive fellow who believed himself to be the reincarnation of Chopin, and dressed the part with black cape and silver topped walking-stick; and the disabled girl who, during hot weather, was seen to remove her wooden leg and fan herself with it. There was also a sizable number of overseas students, especially from the Far East, one of whom I got to know very well and who later became my wife.

I believe that nothing in one's life is ever accidental. Things grow out of each other. Thus, it is possible to trace a course of cause and effect backwards from the point when I met my wife back to when I was that small boy idly fingering the keys of an old piano. Looking forward: from that same point originates my long involvement with the Far East and especially Malaysia. But more on that later.

To return to my years at the LCM, those halcyon days under Lloyd Webber did not, of course, last. With his quite unexpected demise the running of the college passed into other, less capable, hands. There was eventually a financial crisis which resulted in the LCM having to move from Great Marlborough Street and take refuge in a new university- at that time known as Thames Valley University, in the west London suburb of Ealing. It was a move from which the College never really recovered, becoming just another university department with a depleted intake of ill-prepared music students, and mixing itself up with "media" - music technology, film, video and so on.

On the other hand, the LCM examinations department continued to flourish and has steadily increased its activities and reputation as one of the best alternative boards to the Associated Board.

Composer

I first knew that I wanted to be a composer from my early teens. I recall struggling to get beyond the first bar or so of a piano piece at about the age of 13, but it was not until just before I entered the GSMD that I did complete a few pieces, which I believe I still have filed away somewhere. They were immature of course, but nevertheless sufficiently promising to persuade my interviewers that I could go ahead and study composition. However, it was only after my year with Patric Standford that I

acquired any real fluency. This year was well rewarded by the appearance of my first published works: solos, duos and a trio for guitars published by Schott, but now for many years out of print.

I think the biggest problem facing the composer today -once he or she has overcome any doubts about the possibility of adding anything significant to the enormous quantity of work already there- is deciding exactly what sort of music to write and for whom. The 20th century was a chaotic time for the arts with so many disparate styles and fashions cropping up every decade or so. For the general reader let me give a personal and very brief account of serious music from 1900 onwards, as it appears to me. Firstly, until about 1910 there was *Late Romanticism* - massive orchestras playing over-ripe chromatic music still very much under the influence of Wagner. Some composers, born in the 2nd half of the 19th century never quite made it, stylistically speaking, into the 20th, e.g., Mahler, Elgar, Delius, and R. Strauss.

Then *Expressionism* burst onto the scene with the "emancipation of the dissonance ". Before this, notes were born free but were immediately bound in the chains of correct harmony and the strict classification of consonant and dissonant intervals. Now, in the works of Schoenberg and his followers, all was dissonance, the better to express the extreme emotional states of despair, anguish, bitterness etc., which these composers seemed to have experienced most of the time.

By about 1920 there was a (some might say healthy) reaction to this- *Neoclassicism* was in: principles of sobriety, order and a less dissonant style were now to be savoured in works by Stravinsky, Poulenc, and Hindemith etc.

BUT behind the scenes Schoenberg and his students were preparing to unleash THE 12 TONE SYSTEM" in which dissonances now became mathematically organised and any level of cacophony could be justified if it could be proved to be the result of the systematic use of a series of all 12 semitones. However, neo classicism managed to struggle on into the 1950s when suddenly everyone discovered:

Anton Webern

And the new order was *pointillism*, better known as "plink-plonk" music. You may know the sort of thing:

A high note on violin - pause- 3 notes on the harp- pause- a low note on bassoon- pause (longer) a flourish on celesta- long pause -double bass pizzicato -finish!

In the 50s and 60s the trend was to produce sounds as unlike traditional music as possible, and so we had *integral serialism* in which all the elements that make up music were subjected to mathematical ordering, *aleatoricism*- do what you like with what the composer gives you, chance music in which musical events were decided by random happenings or phenomena such as throws of dice or imperfections in the manuscript paper.

By the 1970s, tired of all this experimentation, composers were just beginning to write recognisable tunes again and employ rather more euphonious harmonies. Catchy one-word titles became popular. The Dutch were good at this sort of thing: I recall two pieces by Dutch composers, whose names escape me, entitled *Strides* and *Bint.*

By the 90s the desire for the bizarre and experimental was largely exhausted and a period of stagnation set in which is, I think, still with us, called *post-modernism* which means a synthesis of anything you like including early music, popular and ethnic music, and quotes from the classics. What matters is that we all should have PERSONAL ORIGINALITY and if you do not have it, you might as well be dead (or give up composing).

How far removed is all this from those not-so-distant times when a musically inclined gentleman could learn a few rules of harmony and counterpoint and produce a respectable (and even mildly original) trio-sonata or anthem. He would of course strive for good craftsmanship, but the idea of "originality" as we know it would have seemed ridiculous. To him there was but one style, with minor regional variations, common to most European countries and understood by cultivated Europeans everywhere. What has happened since then is the growth of the concept of personal freedom of expression, which began with the Romantics, firstly in literature in the late 18th century, and then spread to the other arts by the early 19th. Taken to extremes, as it was in the last century, this attitude to creativity has resulted in a plethora of styles and idiosyncratic musical languages: e.g., those of Messiaen, Ligeti, Stockhausen and Berio, all of whom have devotees and critics and all of whom sound different from each other.

Thus, a single musical "language" for composers no longer exists and this has I think been the most significant reason why contemporary music, of all the arts has not had the same impact on society as modern literature or the visual arts in which styles are more uniform. On the other hand, serious classical music from about 1700 to the present does continue to attract audiences worldwide and will probably do so well into the future.

As a composer I have had to rethink my position several times, usually as a result of comparing my own efforts with what is given critical acclaim and approval elsewhere by the established leaders of musical opinion.

Examiner

"We're sending you to Wigan"

Or words to that effect. I had just received the familiar telephone call from the LCM office, one of many over the last two decades telling me which places I was going to visit during the next examination session. My teaching at the LCM ended in 1997, when I took a year off to study for a M. Mus. in composition (passed with distinction), but I started to examine practical grade and diploma examinations in the same year, and since then have been sent to many places both exotic and humdrum, and both in and out of the UK until 2015 when I retired from practical examining.

Between the announcement of dates and venues and the examinations themselves a series of things must happen, some of them my responsibility and some of them other persons'

The first thing examiners must do is contact the local centre representative for each venue and check times, subjects, methods of transportation and, if necessary, hotels or boarding houses. Now, of course examinations must have examiners, but good, efficient and- above all else- friendly representatives are vitally important for the smooth running of exams and to ensure that examiners are properly cared for. I can say that in my numerous years' experience of "reps", nearly all of them have been all the above and more. I can only recall two or three who have not been up to standard, and that was not recently. One, the rep in a place that shall be nameless not only arrived late at the examination room, allowing myself and the first candidate to stand in the cold drizzle of a December morning, but on my departure pointed the way to the station before hurriedly getting into his car and driving away! Of another elderly lady who did, after some hesitation, give me a lift to a station, I have memories of her erratic driving- and of narrowly avoiding crashing head on with a bus!

There are rather a lot of syllabuses, sight reading books and tests to sort through for most exam sessions, and examiners must ensure they take all the relevant material with them. Therefore, they

do need to know from reps exactly what subjects they are examining, to avoid what can sometimes happen: arriving at a centre expecting, for example, just piano and keyboard, only to be told that there is a grade 8 bassoon on first, but due to an error on the part of his teacher he was entered as "pianoforte"!

As for transport, if the venue was within 100 miles I used to drive. I kept a complete stock of LCM books in the car boot just in case I forgot one. If the venue was in a big city, it was often less expensive to fly than take the train and often reduced the number of nights in hotels.

I also rather enjoy airports. They are probably the most civilised and orderly places of departure and arrival, being less overcrowded and cleaner (Heathrow excepted) than railway stations. Some airports became so well-known to me in the decade from 2005-15 that I felt almost like a flying commuter. Hopping on and off the little train that connects terminals at the International Airport for Kuala Lumpur became almost as familiar as taking the train to Waterloo from New Malden.

Candidates for music examinations come in all ages, shapes, sizes and levels of ability and preparedness. There are the tiny ones who gleefully bash their way through the notes – obviously learnt more by imitating the teacher than by reading the notation.

And then there are the adults, usually very nervous, who are prone to lapses in continuity invariably followed by the comment that "It went better at home".

Just a few candidates – two or three maybe – stand out in my memory as being deserving of the highest scores of 100 % or very nearly 100%:

The young violinist in Belfast c.2000 taking a mid-grade examination whom I expected to sound like most of the others, i.e. uncertain in intonation and timing, but who made the sort of sound that I imagined Menuhin made in his prime.

And the girl in Burnley to whom I awarded the full 100 marks for her performance during which I forgot that it was an examination and just sat back as if listening to a concert!

Two other things to note at Burnley: the railway station, proudly named Burnley Central, was at that time just a short platform and a hut through which I exited into the pitch dark of a winter's night and searched for a taxi. I eventually found one at another hut occupied by rather some dubious looking men of Afghan appearance, one of whom, rather reluctantly I thought, did take me to my boarding-house.

And the examinations were held on the top floor of some imposing building – a church hall - I think. After climbing up three or four flights of steps, candidates arrived with their knees knocking together in both weariness and nervousness.

Also, I must not forget to mention the girl in Penang who gave a superb rendition of Ginastera's *Danzas Argentinas* including the very demanding 3rd dance!

Marriage, Children & Old Age

The simple facts are that I married one of my students, Sonia Jong, in 1987 at the rather late age of 40 (the "right woman" - if there is such a person! - had not previously appeared). We now (2025) have two grown-up children, Zoe (b. 1996) and Ambrose (b. 1998). But from this point the personal part of my life is overtaken by another life, that of a husband and father, which is shared with others and hence not really my own.

Therefore, I will not say more about it as I am sure that my married life in its blend of joys, woes, harmony, and discord is much the same as everyone else's.

What I will conclude by saying is that as old age approaches, I am aware of its advantages as well as its problems. I do not yet feel age as a bleak winter but more as a ripe autumn in which I can look back on the summer of a largely fulfilled life- work that has also been a keen interest, family, a few friends, travel to distant and inspiring places, and encountering and being uplifted by great art and literature. I realised recently that I must appear to be old when, having to travel on the Singapore Mass Rapid Transit system, which is invariably overcrowded, several young ladies offered their seats to me. I politely declined the offers and just hung on more tightly to the handrails and with a more erect and, hopefully, youthful-looking posture. The resultant backache was a small price to pay for the preservation of my self-respect.

Music

Some thoughts addressed to a young composer

I have been writing music for half a century. Some of it has been published (mostly earlier works and now mostly out of print) and some of it has been performed, although much remains unperformed. I could be considered an "also ran" among composers – not well-known but not entirely unknown.

I would like to begin with three inter-related quotations by three composers regarding the purpose of music (and art in general):

"What is music? What does it do in the world? What does it do in society? "

Frank Denyer - from a talk given at Brunel University 13th Feb. 2013

"I am a composer. That is someone who imagines sounds, creating music from the inner world of the imagination. The ability to experience and communicate this inner world is a gift. Throughout history, society has recognized that certain men possess this gift and has accorded them a special place. But if such men – poets if you like – are honoured, are the products of their imagination of any real value to

the society which honours them? Or are we, particularly at this present point in history, deluding ourselves that this may be so?"

Sir Michael Tippett *Poets in a Barren Age* from *Moving into Aquarius*

" A work of art is identified by its complete uselessness"

Harold Budd (quoted from memory, so may not be the exact wording).

Considering the quote from Frank Denyer first, we could list some possible uses of music, e.g.

To enhance religious ritual or ceremonial events; to accompany some physical activity e.g. dancing, exercising, working etc.; for didactic purposes e.g. studies and exercises for solo instruments or voice, and teaching pieces for lower grades ; to enhance other art forms such as theatre [incidental music] film or TV programmes; to support some political, philosophical or sociological idea; or for a purely *aesthetic* purpose – music meant just to be listened to and "appreciated" for its own intrinsic beauty.

For the composer in the Medieval and Renaissance eras the question "why am I composing?" would hardly have arisen. One wrote mostly either for church or court. The only other option was to write music *to be performed* by individuals or small groups in a domestic setting, e.g., Elizabethan keyboard and consort music, and for which no mass audience was available.

From the Baroque period onwards, things changed. There was a growth of what could be termed a larger and increasingly less specialised audience, firstly for the new form of opera and then for music *per se* to be savoured just for itself as a source of aesthetic pleasure with the rise of concerts and purpose-built auditoriums in which they could be held.

Frank Denyer just asks the questions. His own music is strictly of the aesthetic kind, although it shows an awareness of the music of non-European cultures.

For Tippett, the solution to the dilemma of the usefulness of the modern artist was to write a number of works that reflected his left-wing and pacifist views, the most notable of which is "A Child of Our Time" (1939) and hope that they might be of some value in bringing an awareness of the problems that beset the modern world.

For Budd, and probably most other "serious" contemporary composers, the problems are swept aside by the assertion that "works of art are identified by their complete uselessness"; they have no purpose beyond their contemplation by the observer or listener. (This does not apply to literature which very often, as in the novels of Dickens and Hardy for example, does have the purpose of drawing the reader's attention to failures and problems within society).

For the contemporary serious-minded composer, the last of these reasons for writing music at all today seems to be the most prevalent. All the others are problematic.

Music for worship is a good choice if you have the flair for it and it can certainly serve a useful purpose. However, there is an awful lot out there already, good, bad, and indifferent, so it would be difficult to add anything of lasting value.

The Court – a non-starter unless you are Master of the King's Musicke.

Activity-music for dance, exercise etc. This is the province of the popular music "producer" using electronic means of composing and would hardly be of interest to the serious composer unless as a secondary and hopefully, more lucrative activity.

Music for didactic purposes: The advantages, if your work is published or otherwise made available are that it will be seen and played. The drawbacks are: (1) There is already much available and possibly too much of inferior quality, so will your work be noticed? (2) It is unlikely to be professionally performed, although amateur performances at student concerts are possible, of course. And (3) it must be easy to play, so you would probably have to adapt your style to a certain extent to cater for this limitation.

Film, TV and theatre work does give your music a purpose outside of itself, but this particular area is notoriously hard to get into, usually a case of "it's not what you know but who you know".

Politically influenced music is usually also concert music but with a "message". The advantage is that you may draw in those sympathetic to your views, but you must be prepared for those views to become outdated, irrelevant or derided with time, e.g., the left wing- influenced music of Eisler and Henze may not now have the relevance that it had when written several decades ago. The world is a different place now.

So, like it or not, the composer of serious work, or work that he/she would like to be thought of as serious, is left overall with no choice but to write for an audience. The biggest problem then is how to get that audience.

All composers in this group, and indeed many other creative artists have struggled with the perennial problem of the production (and now, more likely, over-production) of work for *which there is no appreciable demand*. I can only speak from my own experience, but I am pretty certain it applies to many others, in that I get ideas for works, produce them and hopefully try to interest, firstly, performers and through them possible performances and some sort of recognition by an interested section of the public. Then either the work is accepted for performance and most often for just one performance, or it gathers dust on my shelves! Why have I done this for 50 years? I do not really have an answer. Perhaps for self-expression. But as far as that goes, is my "self" interesting enough to be expressed. Why should anyone else bother about it? Did Bach express *himself*, or his complete mastery of the art of music in his time? Do we delude ourselves that self-expression is a valid reason for composing? A more pressing reason for my work is the rather pathetic desire to be remembered for something tangible and not to just disappear from human memory for ever. I am constantly haunted by this fear of oblivion even though on reflection I know that nothing on earth lasts forever. Everything returns to the void from whence it came. So why worry?

I now have well over 100 works on my shelves as scores. The vast majority of these are only *potentially* musical works. Until they are brought to life in performance (or at the least as recordings) they remain just ideas awaiting realisation. As composers we tend to think of our works as living and sounding in our minds, but in reality, they are for the most part dead and silent things until given an audible presence by performers interested enough to interpret them. I regard recordings of works as being half-alive in the sense that they have an audible form (we can hear them) but the sense of spontaneity and unpredictable-ness that only live performance can give is absent.

One seemingly more positive feature of contemporary life as compared to 20 or more years ago is that there are numerous ways of getting a hearing outside of the concert hall via electronic methods of the dissemination of one's work. *Sound Cloud, You Tube*, and *Musicaneo* are just three of these platforms for music that come to mind. I use all three and do indeed get listeners and printouts of works, thus bypassing the traditional and usually very slow-moving music publishers. So, some joy there – but the drawback is that there is a huge amount of stuff already on these sites, which makes

it hard to get *much* attention even if your work is good and deserving of a more prominent exposure. If you want the latter, you must pay for it!

As for live performances, I do get them, if somewhat infrequently. They are usually billed as first performances of *New Music* by me and other composers, all of us not (yet) well-known, and audiences are generally small, often being made up of those other composers and their family members or close friends. So, we seem to be writing just for each other…

In moments of despair at contemplating the plight of the artist, poet, or composer in the modern world I wonder whether to be creative in these ways is more of an affliction than a gift!

But no. The urge to create overcomes this doubt and I am spurred on by the hope that I may be able to leave just something, even one work, of lasting value and interest that, even if it moves only one listener, has made my struggles worthwhile.

On re-reading these notes it seems that I have asked more questions than provided answers. This is because there are no answers to the main question which is "Why do we compose?" But I can only hope to at least bring the problem to the attention of any aspiring (or even some more established) composer who is as yet unaware of the problems outlined above.

10/19

Taboos

As a composer I have throughout my working life been aware of "taboos" (A social or religious custom prohibiting or restricting a particular practice… OED) relating to what composers *must not do* if they are going to be taken seriously.

This is by no means a new situation: every age in music history has had its own "rules" concerning what is acceptable, i.e., would be deemed "good craftsmanship" and what is not. When I taught 16th century counterpoint on a B.Mus. course, I usually had to start by listing a number of things that were not done: e.g., no consecutive fifths or octaves, no notes tied to longer notes, no melodic diminished or augmented intervals etc., etc. The number of things that *could be done* seemed to be far smaller.

That rule about fifths and octaves was more or less obeyed right up to the end of the 19th century, although all the great composers broke it at times, but by 1900 or so it was being deliberately defied by the generation of composers born around 1860-80, as for example Puccini, Debussy, Ravel, Vaughan Williams and so on. Indeed, the use of these parallel intervals was so over-done that they again became relegated to the list of unacceptable harmonic devices!

By the time I began to study composition at the old Guildhall School of Music - first as an under-graduate with Buxton Orr and later with Patric Standford- a whole new set of taboos was in place: *Out* was tonality, sing-able melody, consonant harmony, easily assimilated structures (assimilated by the listener that is). *In* were the use of serial technique, disjointed melody, totally dissonant harmony, rhythms that were difficult to perform and structural methods that were not easily perceived by the ear. Anything that audiences enjoyed was suspect.

Now the whole point about taboos is that they are essentially illogical. If they were not, then they would not be needed. Rather they tend to be reactionary in nature: the accepted norms in one period become the taboos in another, as for example that restriction on consecutives mentioned above. To the medieval ear they were perfectly normal and enjoyable- but no doubt over-used. But by the 16th century they were deemed to militate against the independent movement of voices and so were "forbidden".

So, what of today's taboos? As I write (2017) there do not seem to be many. Almost anything is accepted in today's contemporary music that freely draws on stylistic references to every past idiom from the medieval up to 1960s-70s minimalism. If there is one very widespread idea- and most critical writing endorses it strongly-it is a condemnation against what I can only term "anonymity". Today every composer *must* be original- even to the point of idiosyncrasy. The result of this is that old fashioned technical adroitness is so often discarded in favour of a desperate search for being different from anyone else. We begin to see this trend as far back as the 19th century with a divergence in style between composers such as Brahms and Wagner, Saint-Saens and Debussy, Tchaikovsky, and Mussorgsky etc. This search for individuality accelerated through the 20th century until today it often seems like the only thing that matters when the worth of a composer's output is assessed. In recent times composers have been expected to have private and individual musical "languages". Characteristic examples are Messiaen, Varese, Stravinsky, Webern, and Stockhausen among many others. Of course, composers do influence each other (and always have done so), but any sense of belonging to a wider stylistic "school" such as the 18th century Classical, the *Stile moderno* and *Stile antico* of the Baroque and Renaissance eras and the *Ars Nova* of the 14th century has not been encouraged- the focus mostly being on the unique personal voices of these and other figures.

My own humble position is that of phases in my work that can be seen as reactions against earlier trends. For example, from about 2009 or so, I began to make use of good old 12- tone serial technique. I just thought I'd give it a try, and first results were not satisfactory. But with perseverance I began to be more adept at its use- albeit in my own way, using the series more as a springboard for ideas rather than strictly. However, probably as a reaction to all this, I have recently very much simplified my style. As a result of finding a lot of music that could not be regarded as contemporary, but not commercially popular either, and that made free use of tonal material, I realised that there were other ways of making viable and, hopefully, interesting music without a constant search for personal originality and without using any kind of "system" as a prop.

Another factor that has led to this process of simplification is the frequent inability of performers to give good accounts of new works- either through technical limitations and/or limited time for rehearsals or just disinterestedness. And even when first performances are good, subsequent performances seldom happen, most likely because there are always many other works waiting "in the wings" for an airing.

Hence my present desire to keep every aspect of a piece as simple and accessible as possible but still, I hope, making something of interest to performers and listeners.

08/17

The Exhaustion of Musical Resources?

The Composer at the Crossroads.

At the present time (2009) the resources available to the composer who chooses, or is temperamentally inclined, to work within the mainstream "classical" branch of serious music are not very dissimilar to those available one hundred years earlier. He (or she) has the 12 notes of the equal-tempered scale, the ready-made instruments of music, and the voice. Along with these there is a universally understood notation system, which if correctly used can make performance of the composer's work possible anywhere in the inhabited world. And there is no shortage of composers who fall more or less into this category- there are hundreds, if not thousands, in all the developed and developing countries, and many are very talented. But it will be apparent that these traditional resources *are* rather limited.

The limitations were indeed felt one hundred years ago. Looking back to the last century, it appears that there were two periods of innovation and searching for ways to overcome what seemed to be

an exhaustion of expressive means. The period from c 1909-1925 which saw the breakdown of tonality, the emancipation of the dissonance, a revitalised treatment of rhythm and the employment of instruments that were new or hitherto little used in "serious "music was, I think, the most exciting time in music history. This brief period saw a hitherto unprecedented rate of change and innovation in the spheres of harmony, melody and formal procedures, and although this stylistic upheaval was the product of just a few radical composers (Schoenberg and his followers, Stravinsky, Bartok and Hindemith for example), and although these new sounds were often found to be incomprehensible by the general public, the influence of the radical few reached far and wide so that even conservative composers were touched by them. One can mention as examples Strauss (a brief period culminating in *Salome*), Vaughan Williams (in the 4th symphony) and Nielsen (the flute and clarinet Concerti). The new sounds of this phase in musical style have grown more familiar with time and have now become assimilated into what could be termed a continuation of the Classical tradition- the mainstream of Western music as it is still exemplified in the work of all those composers who are still writing symphonies, concerti, chamber music and songs etc., for performance by classically trained musicians to more or less receptive audiences.

The second great upheaval in musical thought and style was from about 1950 to 1970, the period of the rise of the European avant-garde. The aims of this group led by Pierre Boulez in France and Karl Heinz Stockhausen in Germany, were even more radical than those of the earlier revolutionaries: they aimed for no less than the obliteration of all traces of "tradition" from their music (excepting the use of standard instruments, but with an almost obligatory employment of special effects). Notes were now ordered in serial sets, and the ordering was extended to other elements of the musical fabric such as rhythm and dynamics; melody was either avoided or obliged to be angular and chromatic; any hints of traditional regular meter and easily assimilated rhythmic patterns were generally avoided. All this now seems, after 40 years, rather dated. Much of what was produced at this time by the radical groups which sprang up in Europe and the USA has not survived more than the occasional revival. However, there were two unrelated, but not mutually exclusive, developments in the post-war years which *have* continued to exert an influence on the music of today: electronics and minimalism.

What has brought about these periodic stylistic upheavals is the trend towards novelty and originality observable in all the arts, and which has gathered momentum since the Renaissance and accelerated almost out of control in the 20th century, during which a plethora of, often conflicting, musical idioms became the norm. From 1900 to 2000 the following may be noted (in approximate chronological order):

Late romanticism, impressionism, atonality, 12-tonality, neo-classicism, integral serialism, experimentation (chance, graphic scores, concept music, minimalism etc.), electronic music and *musique concrete,* neo-romanticism, and post modernism!

Of course, music everywhere changes and develops, even in the much more tradition-bound cultures of the Middle and Far East. What is notable in Western music is the extraordinary pace at which change has taken place over the last 100 years, and which has been fully documented but probably not yet satisfactorily explained. Suffice to say that the composer working today feels, more keenly than any of his predecessors, the obligation to be "original" and to have something new and fresh to say. The demand does not come from the public, who are generally indifferent to such matters, but from informed critical opinion, which in the present climate is always on the lookout for an "original voice", a personal way of saying things, but is not so interested in traditional values like craftsmanship.

Given this ever-present burden imposed on the composer always to say something new, even the expanded resources which have been made available during the last half century in terms of stylistic

plurality, developments in performance techniques and the use of electronically produced sounds may be felt to be too restricted. What composer working today has not at some time felt that everything has been said before, and that there is nothing of significance that can be added to the countless works already in existence? Creative artists everywhere whose work lies in those fields touched by the new technology, seem to have come to a crossroads and need to decide which route to take- whether the well-established way of tradition or the still young way of the new possibilities opening before us. But before we can decide where to go, we need to know where we are now.

It might seem as if we are approaching the end of a long chapter in the history of music, stretching from the Renaissance to the present day, in which, despite all the surface changes to the *sounds* of music during these four centuries, there has been an underlying consistency in certain fundamental areas, namely:

The use of *voices and instruments* in live performances.

The relationship of *composer- performer- audience* (usually gathered in one location in which the performance takes place).

The *notes* used in modes, diatonic major and minor scales and the chromatic scale have persisted over many centuries. Thus, the notes in, for example, Palestrina's Ionian mode are basically the same as in our C major scale.

Harmony and counterpoint, i.e., notes sounding together in restricted combinations whose make-up has varied through the centuries according to the prevailing rules or lack of rules.

The *technology* with which music can be *made* - (mass-produced instruments with standardised tuning systems e.g., the equal tempered scale of 12 semitones) -and *disseminated* (printed copies).

In the music of the new era (which has already started) it will be seen that nearly all the above fundamentals have changed. *The principal agent of change is the technological revolution which started during the last quarter of the 20th century and is still going on.* Thus, we now have:

Voices and instruments live, and electronically modified and recorded.

Electronically produced sounds.

Music *without performers* (electronic music for example).

The ever-increasing difficulty in attracting audiences to live-performance events, but a corresponding rise in "private" listening (on CD, MP3 etc.)

Notes: electronically produced microtones are now possible. Some traditional instruments are now frequently given ¼ tones, e.g., flutes and strings. The range of permitted musical sounds has been expanded to include virtually any sound, live, or recorded. This trend was well under way by the mid-20th century with the adoption of "noisy" instrumental effects such as snap *pizzicati*, "breathy" woodwind tone and the expansion of the percussion section.

Harmony and counterpoint will persist in some form, but the "rules" current in earlier periods will probably not return.

Technology: *Creators of music have always used the technology available to them. Therefore, there will be increasing use of electronic and computer-generated sounds. Music has been increasingly disseminated as recordings rather than in printed copies and this trend will persist.*

But let us not forget that new technologies do not necessarily make earlier ones redundant and that there is a period (often a very long one) in which the old and new exist side by side. The technology which created a Stradivarius can still be put to use in the age of computers and sound samplers. So, where does the well-established "classical" tradition go from here?

We are in a period of stylistic overlap in which the "old" forms of music and music making outlined above and coinciding roughly with the period from Monteverdi to Maxwell Davies still exist along with the "new" music which may be seen as a continuation of some of the experimental trends of the late 20th century, notably electronically produced sounds and the widening of accepted "musical sounds" to embrace *all* sounds, both live and recorded in *Sonic Art.*

The music of the previous age *will* continue to have an existence, but in the same way as the Louvre or the British Museum will go on existing. I think fewer and fewer significant works will be added to an already over-stocked repertoire, but that the best of what is already there will continue to draw listeners by its depth of emotional content and its inspired power to hold our attention. Now, it is of course possible that some great genius will come along and say completely unheard-of things in the classical tradition. Or do we seem to have passed that stage in music history when "great masters" were busily composing the sort of public-statement works familiar from Beethoven to Britten and to have moved into an era in which the experimental trends of the late 20th century will coalesce into what will eventually become some sort of tradition, probably combining certain elements and rejecting others? I foresee a mixture of improvisation, notation, sonic art, and the full use of modern technology in the music of the next century. The trend will continue to be towards "private" listening.

Postscript

Let me add that what I have outlined above on the future of music is what I *think* will come about, but not necessarily what I would *like* to see. I personally have feelings of disquiet concerning the apparent drift away from what one might call the "human" element in music and music-making, towards an increasing use of mechanical and electronic methods. Just as mechanical ways of manufacturing articles for use or wear have led to a considerable decline in quality and a rise in disposability (so that more and more things can be manufactured to replace them), will not the widespread use of mechanical ways of making music produce similar results? This has already happened in the popular music field, with its 1000s of instantly forgettable songs, most of them with "backing" tracks made with computer technology rather than recorded live as in earlier times. I know that it is impossible to reverse the effects of technological development, but I sincerely hope that live performance on acoustic instruments to interested audiences will persist indefinitely into what is always going to be an uncertain future.

09/10

Apt for Voices or Viols

The inexorable rise of instrumental music

"…music grew too proud to be the garment of words."

W.B. Yeats[1]

This, by a poet who was, allegedly, tone deaf, is nevertheless a concise but very astute summing up of what has happened to music since about the end of the 16th century. Yeats' definition of music as "the garment" of words suggests admirably an earlier relationship of music to text- both adorning it and taking its form from it, as we can observe in the mass, motet, madrigal and other Medieval and Renaissance vocal forms in which the musical structures are largely determined by the words set. But

[1] From: "Dust hath Closed Helen's Eye" quoted in Larrissy, E. ed. (1997) W.B. Yeats. The Oxford Authors. OUP

after about 1600 music began to dissociate itself from words in earnest and go its own way, and the main cause of this was the rise in popularity of music purely for instruments. Of course, there had been instrumental music before 1600- lute and keyboard pieces for example, but it had been subsidiary and had never taken the chief place in the output of composers as it was increasingly to do in later times. Also, it was very much bound up with the dances of the period- pavanes, galliards and so on- and therefore not so much music for listening to as for directing and co-ordinating bodily movements. What was new in the history of Western music after 1600 was the rapid rise of what another profound thinker about music, Ernst Krenek[2] refers to as "autonomous music"- symphonies, concertos, string quartets, sonatas and fantasies etc., expressly written to be listened to and appreciated as things of beauty and value, and serving no extra- musical purpose.

This autonomous body of instrumental works, although highly regarded by musicians, composers and those who have both the inclination and time for its appreciation, has never been very much accepted by the mass of the population- for whom music-when not designed as an accompaniment to the dance- must retain its old association with words. Thus, the great bulk of popular music is- and has always been- vocal. It is the vocalists that capture the public imagination and, in general, teen-aged girls do not become hysterical over guitarists or drummers but over singers with "personality" and sexual attractiveness thrown in. In the popular imagination music is still, as it was to the ancients and up to the end of the Renaissance, very much bound to words in all current forms of popular song. The "man in the street" usually finds it easier to listen to the latest chart-toppers than to a Beethoven symphony which, bereft of lyrics and consisting merely of abstract patterns of sound, is more demanding fare.

The earliest pieces of instrumental ensemble music- for what were termed "consorts", usually of viols, or of the wind instruments of the late Renaissance and early Baroque periods, imitated both the style and forms of contemporary vocal music. In effect they were "madrigals without words". Indeed, we find the designation "apt for voices or viols" at the beginning of collections of works such as Monteverdi's *3rd Book of Madrigals* (published in 1592).

Very soon, however, a more defined instrumental style arose. Thus, in keyboard pieces from the late 16th century onwards we see an increasing display of rapid runs and figuration more suited to the agility of fingers rather than that of voices. With the rise of the violin in the 17th century instrumental music finally breaks from vocal not just in style but in form, with the introduction of purely instrumental forms such as sonata and concerto. Without the guidance of words, composers were obliged to think in terms of abstract musical designs, hence began the use of formal devices such as sequential repetition, binary and ternary structures and, eventually, modulation within what quite rapidly became a more prevalent major and minor key system. By the late 17th century an autonomous instrumental music, in the form of sonatas, suites, concertos and symphonies was well established.

But despite this, instrumental music has never quite severed its early association, by imitation, with vocal music. We can observe, in many an orchestral or chamber work, that the principal themes are song-like, and the developments of those themes presented in a more instrumental manner. The general public, which has never lost its love of the voice as the transmitter, *par excellence,* of musical expression, will always be more attracted to these song-like themes, as found in the symphonies of Tchaikovsky or Rachmaninoff for example, and will tolerate developments only when such themes are present in, and recurring throughout, a work. Otherwise, for most people the very term "classical

[2] Krenek, E. (1966) Exploring Music, Essays. London: Calder & Boyars.

music" most likely conjures up an image of a few score ladies and gentlemen in evening dress blowing, scraping and banging on various sound-producing items of technology while a mainly elderly and middle class audience listens appreciatively- obviously in–the–know, and enjoying some sort of aesthetic experience denied to those less fortunate beings who are unable, or have never made the effort, to understand what the sounds signify.

It is in making clear "what the sounds signify" that instrumental music cannot compete with vocal, in which the words (provided they are clearly audible) give some help to the listener in determining the intended meaning. Unless the composer resorts to obviously onomatopoeic devices such as cuckoo calls or conventional "storm" music, for example, then it is by no means so easy for the listener to identify emotionally and cognitively with purely instrumental sounds. Two distinct branches of instrumental music developed from the 18th century: the *absolute* and the *programmatic.* In the former, the music is not meant to express anything outside of itself; it is not descriptive of a scene, mood, event or personality. It is meant to be appreciated on its own merit as patterns of sounds giving aesthetic pleasure. Typical examples are Bach's two books of preludes and fugues (the "*48*") and the Beethoven string quartets, what the average person would term serious or intellectual music.

With programmatic music, on the other hand, the composer gives the listener some help in relating to the work by saying, in more or less detail, what the work depicts. This aid may be simply a title, "*The 1812 Overture"* or "*From the New World*". Or it may be a quite detailed set of notes, such as those which introduce Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, explaining what each section of the work is about. Note the irony here in that, to refer to our opening quotation, music dissociated itself from words but then composers began to need words in the form of titles and descriptive notes to give meaning to their purely instrumental music. There is, however, a certain type of instrumental music, which may be absolute or programmatic, which *does* attract more general attention, namely that which is written for virtuosos- those gifted performers who can play very difficult pieces to perfection. Regardless of the musical quality of these works- and this varies considerably from the sublime (Chopin studies for example) to the merely showy- audiences will usually respond positively to the excitement of hearing and seeing apparently incredible feats of dexterity.

Meanwhile, what has happened to vocal music since 1600? We may note two inter-related things: Music for unaccompanied voices has declined in importance, and instruments have become increasingly prominent in vocal genres such as the mass, oratorio and opera. Regarding the last-named it might not be impertinent to say that from about 1750 to the present day it has changed from being a vocal form with instrumental accompaniment to an instrumental form with additional parts for voices! A look at scores by Handel, Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, Strauss and Berg will I think verify this statement. In the works of these composers, we notice progressively more dependence on instruments to depict dramatic situations, together with an increase in the number of instruments used, until the potential volume of orchestral sound- if not kept firmly under control by the conductor- can easily overwhelm even the most powerful solo voices.

And yet despite the marginalisation of unaccompanied vocal music there exists an enormous repertoire of works for this medium, and such works are still being written and performed. The voice has one great quality lacking in any other type of musical sound – it is living. Instruments are dead things- mere sound-producing objects- from which we try to coax meaningful and expressive music. And are not their days numbered? As I have mentioned elsewhere, composers always use the latest technology available to them, which today means an increasing employment of electronically generated sounds in both music and sonic art. It appears that the rise of instrumental music after 1600 is being replicated today by the rise of sounds produced by the new technology. In one hundred years from now it is more than likely that instrumental music as we know it will have been long since

relegated to the status of a comparatively rare form of music-making, and that synthetic sounds will dominate the musical world.

05/11

Is There Too Much Music?

"Music is God's best gift to man; the only art of heaven given to earth; the only art of earth we take to heaven" (W. S. Landor)

"Music is for me like a beautiful mosaic which God has put together" (Jean Sibelius)

If we agree with the spirit of these quotations, then should we not be concerned about the state and status of music in today's world? I want to consider two related aspects of these, which could be termed the *quantity-aspect* and the *value-aspect*. Namely, is there too much music around us, and if so, because of this, do we devalue it?

The ubiquity of music

Music, in all its multifarious styles and idioms, is everywhere, 24 hours a day. It never rests, and we can hear just about everything of significance ever composed, performed and improvised, at the touch of a button, on recordings and on the radio. If we live in or near a large town or city, we can attend a concert (or two) every day of our lives if we have the inclination. In this brief investigation into the effects of all this I will be concentrating on classical- or "serious" music, but the same points made here could be made of popular music, jazz and "world" music –they are all continuously available on the air, on disc, online and in "live" performance.

Thus, regarding classical music, we may perceive several differing, and sometimes opposed effects of its proliferation and availability. On the positive side, we are now in the situation where we can get to know very much more than our predecessors. Next to nothing is now out of our reach, whether it be some obscure Medieval motet, a 19th century piano piece by a forgotten minor composer, or the very latest work by a composer living and working in say, Lithuania or some equally remote region. All the great masterpieces of the past five or more centuries are regularly performed, or failing that, recorded, often numerous times. Works of lesser stature by minor composers continue to be rescued from oblivion and given their chance on disc and in the concert hall. In addition to this a steady stream of new music by composers from all six inhabited continents is performed and recorded.

This easy access to all types of music is no doubt very useful to the scholar and interested layman- but to the creative artist is it not more of a hindrance than a benefit? Who, among the composers working today, has not felt at some stage in his or her career the oppressive presence, not just of the quantity of works being produced right now, but of the almost infinite number of works of music from the last 500 years or so, no longer hidden away on dusty shelves and mostly unknown as was the situation in earlier times, but now more and more fully exposed to inspection and very much part of our consciousness. A big and almost insoluble problem for all composers today is how to say anything of significance that has not been said countless times already, and usually in more vigorous form. A young composer must be either very thick-skinned or very sure of him- or herself to set about producing yet another symphony or concerto. Even "modern" music is aging now- those ground-breaking works by Schoenberg in which atonality was first tried are over a century old! It has become almost as hard to say anything fresh in the language of modern music as in that of the mainstream. No wonder that some composers have determined to forget the past, including the recent past, and start again by exploring and re-assessing the basic elements of music: rhythm, pitch and timbre. Even this attitude to the art is not so new- the American, Harry Partch, for whom Western classical music was complete and could not be added to, was re-inventing music and musical instruments way back in the mid-20th century.[3] More recent attempts to "begin again" are found in the work of the more extreme minimalists such as Young, Glass and Reich, and in the ascetic limitation in choice of pitches found, for example, in the music of Giacinto Scelsi. [4]

But however we regard the continuing production, or over-production of music, it must be said that the stream of new works *does* demonstrate the sheer power of that *creative urge* which tends to over-

[3] Partch, H. (1974) Genesis of a Music, New York, Da Capo Press
[4] An Italian experimental music composer and improviser.1905-1988

ride all obstacles, including lack of opportunities for performance, lack of funds, limited time and imperfect technical abilities. Serious-music composition is one area where supply does not create demand as witness the small audiences for new works and the miniscule sales as well. Being that sort of composer is all a great gamble: One could spend hours and hours of time and maybe, just possibly produce something of *lasting* value and interest. Or not! In the realm of popular and commercial music there is of course a constant demand for new work (but it must not really say anything new) to keep publishers, record producers and radio stations commercially viable.

Is music special anymore?

With such a vast quantity of music around, have we not lost that sense of the value of music *in and for itself* that seems to have been a feature in the lives of earlier composers and listeners? Who now would walk 250 miles, as Bach did in 1705 to meet, and hear perform, a renowned organist and composer (Buxtehude) -when we could contact the same performer by telephone or on the internet, and hear him, in the comfort of our own homes, on the radio or on recordings? And so often these days is music and sometimes great music, used, or rather misused, for purposes for which it is unsuited or was never intended. No play, documentary, soap opera or advertisement on television is without its own musical theme. We get music in shops, cafes, pubs, restaurants, lifts and sports centres whether we want or need it or not- usually not, as hardly anyone takes any notice of it. Even the great classics, which surely deserve our reverence, have become just another commodity- "The Beethoven Symphonies" on three or four compact discs alluringly packaged and competitively priced! Art-music has become confused in the minds of local government officials with "entertainment" when they bracket learning to play a musical instrument with swimming and flower arranging! How sad that so often in the present times, music is no longer studied for its own sake- to derive aesthetic fulfilment from- but as an aid to achievement in other areas such as academic success and proficiency in certain sports. And then there is the "points system" whereby the higher-grade examinations in music carry points for entrance to universities, another example of "using" music for a non-musical and basically self-seeking purpose.

The divine origins of music

A less obvious aspect of the all-too-easy availability of music today is that we have almost forgotten the mystery surrounding its origins- origins which ancient and primitive peoples commonly ascribed to divine intervention. Thus, music was either a gift from the gods, or else was given divine protection. In the mythology of Mexico and Central America, the great plumed-serpent god Quetzalcoatl was sent to the House of the Sun (from which all life comes) to bring musicians back to earth for the delight of mankind.[5] And we know from Greek mythology how the arts, music included, were inspired by the muses (originally three in number but later increased to nine); and of how Apollo was credited with inventing the lyre and of being its greatest performer; and of how the god Pan made the first *syrinx* or Pan-pipes to amuse shepherds and their nymphs in Arcadia.

[5] C. Burland, I. Nicholson, H. Osborne: Mythology of the Americas (1970) Hamlyn, London

Could we ever return to that awareness of the mystery of music, and of its divine origins, that ancient peoples had and that the few remaining so-called primitive peoples of today still have? When no other explanations for either the power of music to move us or indeed of the nature of sound itself are at hand, no wonder that supernatural sources are evoked to explain music's enduring and ultimately mysterious hold over our being, which we all recognise but which has not yet been adequately explained even by the most advanced thinkers on the subject.

To return to our opening questions: Yes, there is undoubtedly too much music both newly composed, and from the last few centuries, for any one person to explore even in several lifetimes, and this great wealth of music can be an obstacle to the continued production of new works. But we see (from the amount of new music around) how the urge to create does not take into account what is already there- but carries on automatically- instinctively one might say, from generation to generation. As for the problem of the value we place on music, this begins with the way in which music educators respond to the easy and constant access that our modern technology has given us to all kinds of musical experience. So often, in classroom teaching of the subject, is everything lumped together into just "music" and treated with equal degrees of respect, that no wonder our young people grow up unable to evaluate and form judgements on musical *quality*, which may always be subjective ones, but nevertheless do need to be made if we desire to bring back that aura which surrounded the music and musicians of earlier times. The music educator also needs to be on guard when he or she finds any music, clearly intended for listening to, used for extra-musical purposes, for anything which diminishes our attention to it *as music*.[6] Thus, for example, the use of the classics as film-music is always suspect. Although such usage may lead a few persons to a greater appreciation of the classics, we need to be aware that using, say, a symphony or concerto as "background" music to a film not only goes against the original purpose of the composer, which is that his work be given our *undivided* attention from first to last note in the same way as we would attend to a play or novel, but nearly always violates both the wholeness and continuity of the work by cutting, fading and repetition of parts of it in subservience to the demands of the action on screen.

As for the purpose- made music for film, television, advertising and so on, it is well understood that composers must make a living, and the provision of commercial music is very tempting in this respect. But one further question needs to be asked: *Does whatever the music is used for really need it*? Nobody ever seems to be consulted as to whether they *actually want* music in public places, or to advertise toothpaste, or sounding continually through some cartoon film. It is taken for granted that there just has to be music for virtually every activity! A situation that I am sure would have amazed and dismayed earlier generations for whom music making was reserved for special occasions and not to be taken lightly.

To end on a humorous note: How about a "No Superfluous Music Day"- possibly on November 22nd, St Cecilia's day?

[6] The recent *humorous* use of Barber's profound and moving *Adagio* in a TV commercial comes to mind as a particularly crass example of the maltreatment of music in our time.

Music as Meaning?

A Personal View

My dictionary defines meaning as “what somebody wants to express” and “what something signifies”. As a teacher I used to ask my composition students why they wanted to write music, to which question the most frequently occurring answer, and one that I suspected they had usually not fully thought-out, was “To express myself.” But how do composers express themselves in music, and is self-expression, or for that matter, any clear-cut expression really possible, or just an illusion. Can music, of itself, really express or signify anything, and if so, how?

Of all the arts it is music that is the least amenable to attempts at explaining its meaning. With literature and the representative visual arts meaning is usually obvious and intended by the author or

artist. However, music does share its reticence as to meaning with abstract art and with some experimental literature. Or it could be said that the latter two art forms have taken on the imprecision of meaning possessed by music.

Although we can easily see the meaning of any clearly written literary work or representative picture, or at least tease out a meaning from a poem which may at first seem obscure, ask even an experienced musician the "meaning" of say, Beethoven's 5th Symphony and the chances are that he or she will be unable to pinpoint any precise *extra-musical* significance that this work has, beyond the facts that it has for long been considered a masterpiece, that it has memorable and exciting ideas, and that it does indeed express some not-easily defined emotional states. In fact, it is easier to say what the work *is* but not what it *does* to the listener. That it does something to many is attested by its lasting popularity, but just what it does would always seem to remain a mystery, incapable of being satisfactorily and unequivocally clarified.

Concerning this problem of defining exactly what music expresses to the listener, and how it does so, there has for long been much debate on two related questions: "Does music have inherent meaning?" And "To what extent can music be called a language?"

To take the second question first: if we accept from our experience that music ostensibly *can* have a sort of "meaning"- by evoking for us certain moods, situations, emotions etc. then it clearly has affinities with language. But equally clearly music is not a language in the sense that musical sounds- except for those that are obviously onomatopoeic- will automatically evoke images of specific objects or concepts in the way that words do. We know that music can have "meaning" for us but are seldom able to translate this into words, beyond a vague description of the moods or images evoked. If we could translate music into words with any degree of exactitude, then the music would become redundant and hence unnecessary, which it certainly is not. Nearly everyone needs some sort of music in their lives- no matter how little real attention they pay to it.

Returning to the first question "Does music have inherent meaning?" all we can say with certainty is that music has always had the power to suggest things outside of itself, and we all recognise this. The questions then become: "How does music do this?" and "How much of this suggestive power is inherent in the sounds themselves and how much in our cultural backgrounds and upbringing?"

Stravinsky [7] said that music "is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to *express* anything at all". And Trevor Wishart [8] says that words "never mean anything at all. Only people 'mean', and words merely contribute towards signifying peoples' meanings." That is, that the actual sound content of words (barring those obviously onomatopoeic in origin) is meaningless, but *we give them* meanings. If we take this line of argument, and I am personally inclined more to this way of approaching the problem, music, simply as sounds, is meaningless, but *we give it meaning*. Furthermore, I would say that it is not merely the sounds themselves that have meaning for us but the context of the sounds

[7] A Chronicle of My Life, 1936 London, Gollancz.
[8] Sonic Art, 1996, Amsterdam, Harwood Academic Publishers.

and the associations they present to our minds when hearing them. A personal example will illustrate this idea:

As I was thinking about the subject of this essay, just before falling asleep, fragments of Schubert's string quartet movement in C minor came to mind and I considered their meaning (for me). Now this work is not well-known to me, and I have no special fondness for it, but it does present to me a definite meaning, or rather multiple meanings:

It begins with agitated minor key music, which I associate with negative emotions, possibly unease, worry, fretfulness. It is like much other agitated minor key music for strings in that respect, and I am pre- conditioned to connect such sounds with the appropriate emotions. But there are other factors which can be considered in respect of my reactions to the work:

It is by Schubert, whom I know to have had a short and not too happy life. Therefore, this fact reinforces my concept of this work's "meaning" in the context of a clearly defined tradition- that of European classical music, which is the tradition with which I am most familiar. Also, Schubert was Viennese. This last fact might be thought of as trivial- but the chain of associations here, i.e. Vienna- Freud- neuroses- troubled individuals in a troubled society, further reinforces my awareness of the work's meaning. Therefore, my own personal response to this work is conditioned by my previous knowledge and experience. Other listeners to this piece may have differing levels and types of musical experience, for example in popular music, jazz or the classical music of another culture, and will therefore have different and possibly contrasted responses. All music teachers know how responses to any piece of music can vary according to the psychologies and backgrounds of their pupils. But we also know well that music is not just a personal art form but can have a wide appeal both within and across different social groups. Thus, you do not have to be a Negro to like (or play) jazz, and many Asians have become enthusiasts for Western classical music- and so on. The fact that music can have a collective meaning as well as a personal one is embodied in the phenomenon of the "audience", whether gathered together in one place for a concert or opera or scattered and listening via the medium of radio or the recording.

Further to my experience of the Schubert piece, it will be seen that virtually all the meaning it has for me is by association. Just as I associate the word "chair" with an object with four legs, a seat and a back, so I associate minor key with negative emotional states (but I do not know why this should be) and rapid quiet sounds in a minor key with agitation. It would be absurd to say that the sounds themselves are either sad or agitated, but they do bring hints of sadness and agitation *involuntarily* into my consciousness. Any other meanings the work has for me are dependent on my previous knowledge of the composer and the circumstances of the work's origin.

But over and above all of this, I am also aware of the piece purely as *sounds*. I can shut out any possible meanings the music has and respond solely to the sounds alone- either enjoying them as timbres or as the play of patterns. With music from other cultures, of which I have had little previous listening

experience, this is just about the only response I can give. When attending to, for example, Indonesian Gamelan music or African drumming, the sounds do not convey *to me,* anything outside of themselves- i.e. they have no cultural associations for me because I have not been brought up in the cultural environments from which these "musics" originate. All I can do is to listen to, and more or less appreciate, patterns of pitches and rhythms. Therefore, it could be said that I am only getting, as it were, half the message that the musicians intend to put across in their performance. To get the whole message I would either need to have been brought up in their respective cultural *milieus,* or, as an "outsider", spend a fair amount of time in both listening and acquiring background knowledge of the culture concerned.

Meaning in music can be *implied*- that is the composer has a purpose to express some non-musical idea or picture, which he does by means of use of the basic elements of music including melody, rhythm and tone-colour. Alternatively, it can be *acquired*- in which case the listener attaches his own significance to the music. A very well-known example of the latter process is the association of Chopin's Prelude in Db major with drops of rain (it was composed during a wet winter in Majorca and there is a repeated note theme running all through it!) Acquired meaning may be personal- as when a particular piece suggests something to us or recalls some emotion we were experiencing when we first heard it. Or it can be shared. The *Adagio* for strings by Samuel Barber, because it has been so much used for funerals and solemn occasions, has now come to represent mourning and solemnity for many people worldwide.

Levels of implied meaning will vary from one type of music to another and from one composer to another. Whereas some composers definitely aim for some sort of expressive message in their works, others are more concerned with music as sonic structures to be listened to for the aesthetic pleasure afforded, or as timbre to be relished for its own sake. Thus- and this is a very brief sketch of what could be covered in a whole book[9] implied meaning is:

Low- in much contrapuntal music, for example, Bach's Preludes & Fugues. Moods may certainly be evoked in these, but the music is designed primarily to demonstrate the play of contrapuntal lines. We do not listen because of any extra-musical significance these works may have, but mainly for the intellectual pleasure of following Bach's "thoughts".

Medium- in descriptive instrumental music such as tone-poems where the composer sets out to depict situations, places, moods, etc., but meaning may be prompted by literary addenda such as titles and programme notes. In symphonic works and sonatas with only a number and key attached to them, the listener is left unaided to decide any meanings the music may convey.

High- in opera and oratorio. As soon as composers set words to music (provided they are audible) or join music with theatrical spectacle, they are, as it were, providing the listener with cues as to the exact expression intended. There can hardly be any doubt about the implied meaning of the *Hallelujah*

[9] See, for example Deryck Cooke, 1959, The Language of Music, OUP

Chorus or Siegfried's *Funeral Music*. In fact, in Wagner, music comes very close to being "a language" in which musical themes represent characters and objects (for example, the sword motive in the Ring). The themes transform in accordance with changes in the characters they represent, and in the unfolding of the drama. But like any language, we must learn it- (and have the inclination to do so.) The 20th century French composer Olivier Messiaen has also thought of musical ideas as corresponding to extra-musical entities e.g. the recurring themes in his *Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jesus* of 1944.

So, it would seem that meaning in music can never be absolute, but is always relative to variables such as: what does the composer (or performer) intend to say in the music? What aid does the listener get in terms of verbal addenda? And then, who is listening, and what previous experience do they have? How and in what context is the music played, or used? Does it have a well-attested collective meaning or is it solely a private experience?

By way of concluding, let me return to my opening paragraph and to my question to those young and inexperienced composers. What I was always hoping they would answer is "because I want to create music, *for its own sake*." If we merely have the urge to express *ourselves* then a better medium would be words rather than notes- which we have seen are poor communicators of exact meaning. Perhaps we should be thankful that music can never be fully understood in terms of its meaning. That power of music to suggest rather than to state outright is, surely, the greater part of its permanent attraction for us.

06/10

Five Paragraphs on John Cage -A Personal View

Every creative artist in whatever field of activity should read at least one book by Cage. Probably the best one to start with is Silence (1961) which was his first published collection of writings, and which usefully sums up his views on music, art, and life in often witty and sometimes amusing prose. Speaking only for myself, I have to say that Cage is one of the select few composers and writers to whom I have gone back time and again over the past 20 or more years and not tired of. (Others include Hardy, Yeats, and Eliot)

I think it is fair to say that Cage did not produce any new ideas. Everything he did or proposed can be traced to predecessors, and he frequently acknowledged the debts he owed to his numerous "mentors" including Schoenberg, Satie, Suzuki, Duchamp, Fuller, McLuhan etc. Even Mozart may be

cited with reference to composing using chance procedures. Cage's importance is as a focus and disseminator of diverse ideas and thoughts on art, music, and the purpose of these in our lives. Above all, Cage makes us question and re-assess our art as to its content, style, form, purpose, and value.

No more masterpieces. He redefined music as embracing *all* sounds whether organised or arrived at through chance procedures – and we cannot simply ignore the opening of possibilities and liberation of previously supressed or disregarded sonic material. For me, Cage's importance lies most of all in his liberating me from the weight of that heavy load of inhibitions dating from the mid-20th century, as to what I should or should not be writing, and showing the various possibilities open to the composer apart from the traditional ones: e.g. chance procedures, graphic notation, use of silence etc. However, I think Cage's music is not always as interesting as his ideas (or rather his gathering together & propagating the ideas of others). I find his earlier works such as *Sonatas & Interludes*, the other prepared- piano pieces and the orchestral *Seasons* more satisfying and engaging musically than some of the later "chance" works. Cage said that he was not happy with being a composer "telling other people what to do" and when, because of this, he gave the performers sometimes considerable freedom in determining the sounds of a piece, the results in performance can be decidedly variable.

Cage had his "blind spots". I think that he did not really understand the European classical tradition with its emphasis more on continuity of style and communication with an audience rather than with experimentation and personal idiosyncrasy, and he consistently objected to the importance of harmony in Western music. His assertion that earlier music was structured harmonically rather than rhythmically can be challenged: one need only look at the importance of rhythmic "cells" in much of the classical repertoire from Bach onwards to see that rhythm has been as important as harmony in determining musical form. And his use of chance procedures has, rightly I think, been the subject of controversy for decades. Can chance procedures always produce *interesting* music? Is using chance in composition really composition at all or just an amusing game? Can the innocent listener be aware that what he hears is the result of chance or deliberation? I have used chance procedures in a few works and found the results to be not very satisfying and in need of "tinkering" to improve them – which really nullifies the use of chance in the first place! Another "blind spot" seems to have been jazz – strangely for an American to have this aversion to what is perhaps the most quintessentially American music. Perhaps it was the reliance on harmonic structure and the persistent "beat" of jazz that Cage disapproved of? Cage referred to jazz as "discourse" (conversation?) - but surely it is more a music of ensembles alternating with solo "displays" of improvisatory skill?

Cage's mature worldview was very much influenced by Zen Buddhism. When a friend complained that there was too much pain in the world, Cage said that he thought there was just the right amount. Cage was no fool, and everything he said and did has to be considered seriously. "Just the right amount" can be taken to mean "just the right amount at that particular instant of time". The "now" must be accepted and cannot be altered, according to Taoist thought. We can only alter the future.

And I cannot help but think that Cage's anarchism, although he meant anarchism of the benevolent, non-governmental kind, is wishful thinking. Human nature being what it is, Cage's anarchy would soon become anarchy in the popular sense of the word: lawlessness and chaos leading inevitably to dictatorship.

02/2022

Music for a New Age?

Some years back (it is now 2021) I decided that Stravinsky was correct in saying that music cannot express anything outside of itself, and accordingly, I set about writing what I thought of as purely "abstract" pieces making no attempt to express anything beyond the notes. This attitude was rather short-lived for reasons outlined below:

Cage said at one stage of his work that the purpose of music is to "Sober the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences".

The visionary artist Cecil Collins said that the purpose of art is to remind us of the "paradise that we have lost".

My first consideration is that, notwithstanding Stravinsky's view of music, without some relationship with extra-musical sources of inspiration, it becomes isolated from human needs whether they be spiritual or emotional. It can become a form of intellectual "play" or worse, a mere *commodity* with a value in cash, as e.g., commercial popular music, and music for film, TV, and advertisements. Indeed, just another item to add to the innumerable other commodities that make up our materialistic *culture* (if that is the right word).

If, in fact, we *are* entering a new age of spiritual enlightenment, the *Age of Aquarius*, then art, including musical art, will need (or must) reflect that. It must leave pure abstraction behind and begin to engage with the spiritual needs of mankind and not with his corporeal or intellectual sides only.

It must begin to address those basic, but mostly supressed, questions so aptly encapsulated by Gaugin as *"Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?*" in the painting with that title (1897-8)– questions that most of us prefer not to ask, until it is too late…

Our present civilization, based on accumulated scientific knowledge*, and which displays the fruits of that knowledge in the enormous number of mass-produced articles churned out non-stop from our factories and workshops and the all-encompassing web of electronic means of communication that nearly all of us rely on nearly every moment of our lives, quite clearly does not bring either happiness or enlightenment to our lives as a glance at any newspaper will confirm. It can just confirm us in our belief that the material universe is *all there is*, and there for our manipulation and exploitation, and that there is no over-arching spiritual dimension that permeates and controls it.

I imagine the Ancient World of the Greeks and, to a lesser extent, the Romans, as being a *much less cluttered* world in which populations were small and thinly spread, manufactured items were more works of craftsmanship and in far less supply and one in which people saw gods and goddesses in every living thing, as well as in the oceans, rivers, forests, and fields of their much less polluted earth. However much we might find their ancient faith outdated or amusing even, at least they had answers that satisfied them until those Pagan beliefs were replaced by the equally satisfying beliefs of the early Christians. Today, few of us have answers that we could deem to be as certain.

The questions that Gaugin asked cannot be answered by science -in fact cannot be answered at all by the thinking mind, but the answer may be glimpsed intuitively and in our spirit, when we allow ourselves to be spiritually aware.

My definition of this "spiritual awareness" is to be in *awe of powers greater than ourselves* that are both outside of us and yet, at the same time, within us: the laws of planetary motion, of the moving earth with its changing day/night and seasonal cycles, of the cycles of birth, decay and death followed by rebirth etc. Of the laws governing our actions -the law of Karma, of cause and effect multiplied to infinity. We can realise a great "plan" that orders everything – and within which chance does not exist.

What we do not want now is more religion because, although religions may unite some of us, they also create social divisions that can persist for centuries. There can be only *one* reality, but there are many paths leading to our awareness of it. The problem is that we so often stick doggedly to our own chosen, or indoctrinated path and are blind to the other paths around us.

Spirituality, I would suggest, is much simpler than religion. It has no dogma, no priests or elders, no paraphernalia of worship, no special attire. Just an acknowledgment of a higher and infinitely knowledgeable power beyond ourselves. We may call this power God, the Tao, the Way, or any other name we can think of, but always remembering that it *cannot be named*, and cannot be grasped by the intellect but only sensed, and even then, only at very occasional moments when we relinquish our

all too active minds. When we follow the dictates of this un-nameable power, all goes well. When our free will (also, mysteriously part of this power) makes us go against it, we pay the penalty – the law of cause and effect *will* operate, although this operation, this working out of karma, may take many years -even centuries- to complete. And it applies to nations as well as individuals. With this spiritual awareness must come a realisation of our ignorance – an ignorance of what the consequences of our every action will bring. There also has to be an acceptance of things as they are, however unpleasant they may seem. Things are *as they are* (natural events excepted) because, in our ignorance, *we have made them so.*

*By this, I refer to our knowledge of the reality of material things that we can measure, classify, and utilise to our advantage by means of our minds and senses. And I do acknowledge the great advance in medical science that has made our present living conditions far more secure than those of any previous generation – but of course this knowledge is just "discovering" hitherto unknown connections in the material world that we inhabit. As to the ultimate *purpose* of the universe and everything in it, science must remain dumb.

02/21

Music, Time & Timelessness

These notes are the result of much reading of the thoughts of other men, and in particular, T S Eliot, the great philosopher-poet and Michael Tippett, whose writings in *Moving into Aquarius* were the direct stimulus for the production of this essay.

I, like the rest of humanity, am conscious of time, but like St Augustine, if I were asked to define time, I would not be able to. All I know is that time is inextricably bound up with movement – the continuous state of change in the universe. Imagine if the earth stopped both rotating and circling the sun. Time (at least on this planet) would stop and with it all life, because one side of the earth would be unbearably hot for life to exist and the other side unbearably cold. There would therefore be no change and hence no time.

So, what I *am* conscious of is the ever-changing "present moment" and that, although present conditions (both external to myself and within myself) are in a permanent state of change, the actual *essence* (the only word I can find) of "present-ness" does not change. My *awareness* of this essence of the present moment is the same as it was yesterday, last week, last year, and when I was much younger, and moreover this awareness is common to all men at all times. I think this is what Eliot, who was notably obsessed by time, was trying to say, especially in *The Waste Land* and parts of the *Four Quartets*. That the present moment is in some sense always the same no matter at what time or in whatever place or under what conditions we experience it.

I am also fleetingly conscious that behind this present moment lies what I can only describe as another essence, that of "timelessness". I believe that all of us have had (or are capable of having) this intuitive awareness of the underlying power, force, law, what the Taoists called "the Way" that cannot be named, that is the ultimate reality behind the material universe. This "way" is outside of time and outside of the material universe itself. It governs the inter-relationship of everything to everything else, every atom, every aspect of light and dark in both the universe and in humanity. Our free-will is part of it and our choices bring inevitable results according to the mysterious working of this ultimate power and law. It is the "reality" spoken of by Christ and maybe the "God" of all major monotheistic religions.

Such moments of awareness are rare. We are so taken over by our minds, emotions, ambitions, our work in order to survive, and our preoccupation with the material things around us that we have to make a very big effort to push all these things away to get to the very root of existence. History teaches us that our earthly strivings come to nothing in the end and that all the products of our hands are destined for the junk yard and ultimately to return to the earth from which they came. They bring only temporary satisfaction: *that is why we always want more of them*.

One such moment of revelation came to me on a very warm summer evening when I was sent up to Boston (in Lincolnshire) for a few days in my role as a music-examiner. Looking from my hotel window on the ancient streets of this town I saw crowds of people enjoying evening drinks and food at an outdoor restaurant. The realisation came to me that all of them, every single one including myself, did not know why they were there nor what their real purpose in life was. The fact of a great mystery was made apparent to me in those few minutes before I "came back" to "reality" and turned my thoughts to the work I had to do on the following day.

With old age comes acceptance. An acceptance of *what is* – which is not necessarily what we would like – of both the light and the dark, and of the need to balance them in ourselves. However much we would like the "dark" not to be, it nevertheless exists [and cannot *not* exist] and Instead of bemoaning the state of the world, I have come to realise [and my studies of history have reinforced this realisation] that everything that is happening or going to happen, is the result of innumerable past and present happenings – or what in simplistic terms we call "cause and effect" multiplied countless times, and that events happen "because they must happen" *

When I look up into a clear blue sky I am looking into eternity. Beyond our atmosphere there is outer space, already tentatively explored by men. Beyond that….but there is no beyond! If space does in fact come to an end, then what else is there beyond it? Thus, I am looking up into an infinity of space and an eternity of time –a frightening thought, and my eyes quickly revert to this commonplace earth and

my familiar surroundings. Nevertheless, as I come to terms with this realisation, I get just a momentary inkling of the Tao that is the ultimate reality behind everything.

TIME in MUSIC

We perceive each of the arts in different dimensions: sculpture is perceived in the three dimensions of height, width, and depth; painting in the two dimensions of height and width of the canvas, paper etc. But music is perceived in time, although there are "sculptural" elements in the sound-producing instruments (if any) that we see in a live performance, and the pages of notation (if used) inhabit two dimensions. But, in music, time is the dimension within which the sounds are transmitted to our ears and brains. So, how do composers fill out this time-dimension? It seems to me that there have been two principal methods: either time can be divided into regular intervals – beats or pulses, usually the same for substantial stretches of music, or the sounds can "flow" through time without very regular or perceptible beats.

Examples of the first method would include nearly all music in the Western classical tradition from Bach to Stravinsky. For the second method we need to turn both back to examples such as plainsong, much medieval and early renaissance music and forward to the "ambient" and (some) electronic music of the present. In the first method, time is measured in regular, quite perceptible durations; in the second method the music seems to flow through time without deliberately measuring it.

And, while on the subject of the time element in music, let me clear up some misunderstandings regarding terminology that even musicians are prone to. Thus, as I understand it:

Rhythm is the actual duration of musical sounds in time as measured in seconds or note-values.

Pulse is the (usually) regularly recurring "beat" which may be strong or weak. It may also speed up or slow down.

Meter is the pattern of strong / weak beats. E.g. and much simplified, in 4/4 time we get strong, weak, moderately strong, weak; in ¾ time we get strong, weak, weak etc. The term can be applied to both music & poetry.

Tempo is the speed of the beat as measured in number of beats per minute (e.g. by using a metronome).

Accent is obviously a louder-sounding beat or fraction of a beat. Accents may either occur where expected, as on the first beat of a bar, or may come where it is more normal not to have an accent. We call this latter process syncopation.

And finally, as a composer, I am aware of the large discrepancy between the duration of a piece and the amount of time it takes to compose it! A few bars can take several hours of thinking, writing, and re-writing, and after all that labour, I may have got just 20 seconds of music. You need a lot of time to compose to the standard that you believe to be your best work.

MJR 09/20

*See C. Humphreys - Teach Yourself Zen; Hodder & Stoughton 1962

Places

As we grow older and less mobile, our memories become more important to us, until, near the end they are about all we have left. I have not yet reached that stage, because I am even now, in my 70s, producing musical works, still teaching, and still (thankfully) active physically. However, the urge to share memories of what seem to me interesting episodes in my earlier life is what has compelled me to write these fragmentary reminiscences.

Diary entries are in *italics.*

Singapore

I am in a taxicab moving at a sedate pace from Singapore's Changi Airport to the city centre. If the driver goes above the speed limit a bell tinkles to remind him to slow down. From the rear side windows I observe, not the expected tropical jungles of my imagination, but closely cropped grass,

and trees planted all exactly the same distance apart. There is not a speck of litter to be seen and the whole scene is obviously man-made in its precision and artificiality.

It was 1988 and this was my first sight of the fabled "mysterious East", which I can say that I have never visited purely as a tourist (with one exception, China in 1997) but either to see relatives by marriage, or on business. This was the first of four visits to this tropical island that seemed to be more built up each time I was there. I do not ever remember seeing much that could, by European standards, be considered old, except a part of China Town on my first visit that may have gone by now. Most of Singapore is relentlessly "new" and consequently anonymous in its 20th and 21st century glass, metal, and concrete architecture, that somehow *does* seem to suit the location – more so than in those older and colder European cities including London. 25 years is regarded as old and out-dated in Singapore, and there are usually no qualms about pulling down and replacing such worn-out structures. However, it is a very green city with ample open spaces. Every view gives one the natural shapes and hues of trees, shrubs, and flowers to offset the linear geometry and predominant white, black, and grey of the buildings.

On my first visit I did manage to see and enter the original Raffles Hotel (opened 1887) for a drink - coffee I think- before it was "modernised" and extended to blend in with its much newer neighbouring buildings.

One other memorable occasion that first time was meeting a famous Chinese artist, Yang Zhi-Yuang (1930-2016) who happened to be staying in Singapore at the same time as I was. He was distantly related to my wife, hence the introduction.

2010 July

To Singapore by air from London. My third visit and this time to work as an examiner for one of the smaller music examination boards. The city suddenly visible as clusters of shining towers in the early morning haze.

By train with Joyce -one of my wife's friends- to the apartment in suburban Queenstown where I am to stay, with friends of friends so to speak, on and off for the next five weeks. Everything looks so fresh, bright, and newly painted here compared to London.

At the start of this tour, the examinations representative introduced me to, and subsequently required me to use, the Mass Rapid Transit system (MRT) of Singapore. On this and later visits I think I probably travelled the whole length of its 126 miles, and on some parts of it, numerous times. Only started in 1987 and thus an infant compared to the systems in some western cities such as London, Paris and New York, it is mostly overground, but going underground in the more central parts of the city-state where the stations often merge into those "malls" full of brand-name stores in which, notwithstanding the obvious wealth of many Singaporeans, I do not ever recall seeing any customers. The station names on the stretch of the MRT that I used most frequently were incorporated, by transforming letters into notes, into a piece for string quartet, *Urban Music*. Thus, Queenstown, Redhill, Outram Park etc. have become transformed from places to sounds by a process of which I have only hazy memories, but that can be recovered in performance.

July 11th *Examining*

P.m. Heard some wonderful school choirs at the McPherson Secondary School (now, in 2021, listed as "permanently closed"). My guide, who was also a teacher at this school, pointed to the school motto emblazoned over the entrance: "In whatever you do, excel" and quipped that the school had produced

some of Singapore's most successful bank robbers! But I enjoyed some very professional presentations- many of which were quite moving in a sentimental sort of way.

Two of the numerous examination "centres" that I visited in Singapore stand out in retrospect. The centre in Woodlands in the north of the island was run by an ancient Chinese lady named Eunice Tan. She would meet me at Kranji MRT station, almost hidden behind the steering wheel of a somewhat elderly and spacious sedan car and drive, slowly and sedately, to her rambling house and studio where the examinations were to take place. I recall that timetabling was not one of her specialities – candidates would often appear in the wrong order and occasionally not at all.

One other teacher whose candidates I was required to examine lived in a villa, surrounded by tropical plants, somewhere off Connaught Drive, and was in the habit of holding a dinner party for her students, friends and any visiting examiner who happened to be available. I remember conversations at these events beginning with the subject of food, which would continue for several minutes before someone veered off into another topic, but very soon the subject of food would be bound to return. I inquired as to why this should be and was told that there was not much else of interest to converse about in Singapore, a view that was reinforced in my mind by seeing a headline in one of the island's main newspapers: "*Deer escapes from zoo".*

July 12th *Day off, and to Orchard Road, one of the few parts of Singapore to have any character. Shopped & looked around.*

July 13th-19th *Examining, including a return visit to McPherson secondary school for two days of lower grade violins. The piano accompanist who was also the violin tutor at the school, sat unmoved through good, bad, and indifferent performances by, presumably, his own students.*

Singapore has become tedious after three weeks- all too urban for me and the newness of everything makes it too bland to hold the attention. There needs to be some decay and clutter in a city to hold my interest. Only the older parts round Orchard Road have much attraction for me.

Reading "Border Ghost Stories" by the little-known author Howard Pease (not to be confused with the better-known American author of adventure stories, of the same name.)

I have been thinking over something I mentioned in this journal a while back on ***Three Realities****- Earth- Sea- Sky, to which I can add: Life- Consciousness, Desire- and Death. Our entire history is founded on these unchanging elements- which are also profound mysteries. Science and religion have attempted to explain them and even come up with what seem like plausible theories which satisfy us - for a while. But the deep underlying mystery of why these things exist remains, and must, it seems, forever remain unsolved. As the title of one of Gauguin 's best known pictures asks "Where do we come from? What are we? Where do we go to?" There are no answers, only theories, which may not -and probably cannot- be the whole truth.*

July 29th *A glimpse into the future?*

I awoke early thinking about John Lennon, for some obscure reason. Later I read this headline in the Borneo Post:

Yoko Ono opposes parole for John Lennon's killer

August 2nd *Gloomy, wet, and windy weather yesterday- as cool as I have ever known it to be in the tropics.*

Singapore is very pedestrian-friendly compared to Malaysia where pavements are either continually broken up with steps, drains and other obstructions or else non-existent and replaced by stretches of waste ground interspersed with puddles of stagnant water. Indonesia is even worse in this respect.

August 3rd *Reading George Borrow's* Lavengro*, which I have attempted to read before but gave up on. He can be entertaining but is not, I think, a great writer. His work seems dated now - all those* thee-s, thou-s *and* did'st thou-s *etc- when compared to the immediacy and timelessness of the works of such masters as Dickens and Hardy from the same era. At times, though, he can be as sonorously grandiose as Melville, especially when describing places.*

I have been considering how little there is left to be said now- everything seems to have been said before in words, musical notes, and images. Maybe the only fresh, unsaid things left to us are the stories of our lives which are unique to every one of us. But a life must be interesting to others if it is going to hold anyone else's attention but our own.

August 4th *In* Lavengro *(chapter XXXVI) Borrow says a curious thing: "Do I exist? Do these things, which I think I see about me, exist, or do they not? Is not everything a dream?" This would be extraordinary at any time, but more so in the materialistic (or so we have come to believe) 19th century - the beginning of the modern age. And how much of what we think is our own up-to-the minute technology has its origin in that remote period. Well established before 1900 were: electric power, photography, telephones, railways, automobiles, mass-production, anaesthetics, and skyscrapers, and just around the corner were aeroplanes, radio, X-rays, and electronics. In the realm of thought, women's' liberation, sexual liberation, socialism, the anti-vivisection movement, atheism, and agnosticism all had their beginnings in the 19th century or earlier.*

August 8th *Finished* Lavengro l*ast night. I usually contrive to bring books with me on these overseas tours that transport me in imagination to places and periods far distant from where I am now. In the case of Borrow, to England in that early 19th century period which seems in retrospect to have been a violent and lawless time in our history. The author wanders through a much less populated and wilder country inhabited by some curious and memorable characters. I agree, as it says in the brief introduction, that Burrow's account of his experiences is not all factual, but it is so cleverly written that the reader cannot tell where truth ends, and fiction begins. But I suspect that the greater part is fictional- there are too many coincidences in the relationships between the recurring personages for it to be entirely true.*

Borrow comes over as a strange personality, full of doubts and yet prejudiced against Catholics, and not very warm towards Jews, but sympathetic to Gypsies, even though one of them apparently tried to kill him!

During my time in Singapore, I am staying with a Chinese family - mother and three sons (the father is away in Shanghai)- in their apartment in Queenstown. I am on the 3rd floor of a 38-storey block. It is all very urban- too much so for me. Trains rumble by every three minutes from 6.00 a.m. to midnight, and I am oppressed by the immense weight which must be above - those other 35 floors! Such living cannot be beneficial to the human spirit.

With friends to Jurong Bird Park, one of the more verdant spots in the city-state. Very crowded with tourists- the birds seemed dwarfed by so much humanity. Very commercialised, as one would expect here; there were all the usual extras: tour guides, restaurants, shops and even a monorail to alleviate the effort of actually walking any distance in the tropical warmth. But it was better to see birds in this semi-captivity- they are mostly in large, netted areas- than stuffed and behind glass in a museum.

August 18th *The days are racing by now. It is the daily routine which does this- the first 2 to 3 weeks went slowly.*

Reading William Carlos Williams. He seems to be not so much a poet as a painter in words. Moods are evoked but most often by fragmentary descriptions of the external world of appearances. A minor master only- he makes us see, but greater poets make us feel as well. The famous "Red Wheelbarrow" depicts very precisely and in a few words a scene, but it is one dimensional. We can see it, but the poet says nothing of what he or we feel about it. The poem has no emotional significance. There seem to be no coherent philosophical ideas in his work, except maybe in the longer poems, and then rather obscurely argued. Could much of his verse be idiosyncratic prose chopped up into short lines of two or three words and looking like Japanese poetry, in translation?

August 21st *A Day Off*

Took the Kor family with whom I am staying, to lunch (dim sum). Then to see basketball at the ***Youth Olympic Games*** *which are currently running in Singapore. The game, which looks suspiciously like the netball played in girls secondary schools throughout the United Kingdom, was played in two courts, two games at the same time, thus halving the amount of time needed to watch it. The first game I saw was the U.S.A. v. Korea. The tallest Korean was still shorter than the shortest American. The latter team, who won effortlessly, was dominated by two very tall negro girls, one of whom must have been 7 ft in height and who was almost dropping the balls into the net! Not fair, I thought.*

Thoughts on urban madness: The ubiquitous "malls"- another 19th century feature updated -full of expensive goods that few of us can afford and none of us need for our survival!

*Early a.m. Dark thoughts: The human population of the world seems to be divided into two groups, not as extreme in divergence as Wells depicts in "*The Time Machine*" but still with almost irreconcilable differences of material wealth and security of livelihood. There are the affluent consumers who throng the cities, capitalistic, car-owning, over fed and with comfortable homes; and then there is the great mass of those in poverty, living in slums, afflicted by famine, swept away by floods, buffeted by hurricanes, buried by earthquakes, and rebelling against established governments. We see them mostly from a safe distance behind the glass of television and computer screens.*

August 23rd *Reading "*The Mind of God*" by Paul Davies with interest. The author's conclusion is that there can be no conclusion to our understanding of the universe and of "God" because we will always be limited by our senses, and by our minds and scientific instruments- which are only extensions of our senses. I believe that there must be aspects of the universe which our senses cannot perceive- but which other types of senses could. Imagine for example, a "super-sight" which could see not only molecules and atoms but sub-atomic particles- maybe the whole structure of matter and envisage what a different grasp or image of the universe that would provide to any being possessing it.*

Our reasoning powers say that there must be an ultimate "----", beyond, above, and outside of the material universe- not a cause, nor a force, but essentially unknowable- totally beyond our perception and but dimly guessed. It is akin to the Tao of the ancient Chinese philosophers, or the Reality of Christian belief (Christ said "I am the reality"), or eternity….

August 29th *Met my brother-in-law's cousin- I guess she must be my cousin-in-law? - with the delightful name of Ah Choo who accompanied me to the Zoo, one of the finest in the world. It is in a verdant part of the city-state devoid of skyscrapers and where it is possible to own a house and garden, albeit expensive, rather small, and too near to one's neighbours.*

September 1st *A hurried trip over the causeway to Johor Bahru, an object lesson in the futility and obtuseness of international borders. It took two hours to cover the few miles, most of which was spent queuing at passport and customs control. Apparently, there are people here who do this every day!*

Sarawak

Have we not all, at some time in our lives discovered places, sometimes very distant from our homes, that we are immediately attracted to – that, in fact, we fall in love with? And do we not return often in memory to these places, more especially when the act of revisiting them is impossible for financial, or other reasons?

Thus, the principal reason for writing these reminiscences was to assuage an almost painful longing to see, hear and savour the sights, sounds and odours of the East and of Sarawak in particular. I have often, over the last several years, sat in a room downstairs in my house in London and, with eyes closed, imagined that I was sitting in the large downstairs room of an old house hidden in the middle of the city of Kuching in the state of Sarawak, East Malaysia - a house that became almost a second home to me intermittently for two decades.

<u>Kuching 1988</u>

After one year of marriage to my Malaysian Chinese wife, I decided that it was time to go to her hometown and meet her surviving relatives. Although born in the small provincial town of Simunjan, she had lived in Kuching for several decades before coming to London to study – which was where we met each other.

My first impressions of Kuching, after the modernity and urban-ness of Singapore, were of an older, more sprawling, and less tidy place with 19th century colonial architecture near the Sarawak River and newer but rapidly aging structures in the district to which my car was heading.

Odours: petrol fumes, durian, spices, and storm drains in an exotic mingled perfume – the signature of the city.

Rubber Road - Jalan Rubber: a straight, tree-lined road, storm drains on either side, and about halfway along, a narrow driveway leading to the old house- Auntie's house- dating from c1950 when Sarawak was still a British Crown Colony. One big rectangular structure of wooden beams and plaster-board panels – inside full of oriental clutter (I never ventured upstairs which was out of bounds to all but auntie and her nearest relatives) The kitchen equally cluttered with utensils, food in bags and jars, bottles of freshly boiled water. All food must be kept in sealed containers to avoid ants getting to it.

Little lizards on the walls - so quick they could never be caught. They found their way into our bedroom – but I soon become accustomed to their presence.

A spacious garden full of tropical trees, and plants of many shades of green in earthenware pots hanging from wooden frames. A large pond full of fish. Around the house much clutter of pots, pans,

piles of old newspapers etc. On my first two visits I used to enjoy a late-evening cigar in this garden, but I was encouraged to quit smoking in 1996.

Next door to the house is an infants' school: *The Morning Bell*, so I am usually awakened by very youthful voices intoning the times tables.

A typical day in Kuching starts with breakfast at one of the nearby restaurants, open to the street and cooled by one or two ceiling fans. Clusters of tables and chairs, ovens, coffee machines, and numerous waiters and waitresses, Chinese, Malay, and Native, hurrying about in temperatures of 80F or more even well before noon. I have *laksa*- basically rice noodles in a spicy sauce with a few bits of chicken, prawn, or fish.

After breakfast, shopping in one of Kuching's *wismas* or retail malls of which there are more to choose from on each of my visits.

Then lunch, usually at an indoor restaurant and usually of Chinese food.

Afternoons are made up of periods of inertia - i.e., reading, resting, or sleeping, punctuated by visits (usually unexpected) by my one or more of my wife's numerous friends and relatives, and sometimes, if it is not too hot, sightseeing more distant areas of the city such as the attractively landscaped Reservoir Park or the old town, some of which dates to the late 19th century, near the Sarawak River.

February 8th 1997

Back again in Kuching. I love all that is old and much that is new in this city- the colonial district around the Padang with its old streets of shop-houses dating back a century or more, the old Malay districts with their wooden houses on stilts, even the many newer buildings, in an anonymous modern style, which soon become adorned with signs in Malay, English and Chinese and get surrounded by that peculiarly Oriental clutter that develops rapidly when enterprises flourish.

On previous visits I had contemplated moving to Kuching and setting up a music school with my wife and family. However, I knew now, when the aircraft was making its gentle descent to Kuching, that I did not want to work there. Work in a place, and it becomes just another place associated with all the stress and anxiety of earning a living, and this city is too precious to me for it to become that. I believe that we all need a refuge in which we can put life's mundane worries aside and regard as a haven of rest. This is what I want Kuching to remain for me in the future.

Feb. 10th *Our first full day here was spent visiting my wife's friends and relations. The usual hospitality was shown everywhere.*

The custom in this part of the world is not to announce one's visit in advance, but just go, hoping that whoever you are visiting will be in. When visitors *do* arrive unexpectedly, hosts are required to stop everything they are engaged in and make the guests comfortable, ask how they are getting on, how their offspring - if they have them- are doing, offer tea, snacks, etc., and pretend to give their undivided attention for 20-30 minutes or so. Visits by appointment have something of the civil service or bank about them and are unusual in domestic situations.

Feb. 12th *This topical air clarifies my thoughts. There is so much "thoughtless" music around today that the only way a composer can communicate in a meaningful way is by making us listen. That is, by not giving in to the fashion of the moment, not being too easily accessible, but by offering something*

that will be rewarding to those who have the patience really to listen, and not merely passively let the sounds go through them.

I think I was rather influenced by Harrison Birtwistle and other composers of the "modernist school" in my attitude to music at this time. Since then, I have modified my views to arrive at a position almost exactly opposite, namely that music needs to communicate to as many as possible but without the composer making too many concessions to audience intelligibility and avoiding a "private language" that few can share.

July 23rd 2003

In Kuching again after 3 ½ years. If I do not still feel the same exhilaration, maybe it is because K. is now more of a second home than before. It is all much more familiar now. My fifth visit to Kuching, so in all I must have spent about six months of my life here. It is now no longer love at first or second sight, but now love of the familiar tree lined avenues, shabby anonymous-modern blocks of shops and offices, all decorated with signs and clutter, and the eternal tropical warmth day and night.

I look forward each day to being driven around Kuching. Whether in sun or rain the city always holds my attention. It is also enjoyable to step out into the humid warmth from the air-conditioned car (the opposite of London at most times of the year!) The city is now less exotic (to me) and more familiar. The new developments lack visual interest and architectural quality. But there are still many pleasing sights: colourful clusters of chairs, tables, stalls, and signs marking a restaurant, a new villa with yellow or orange walls surrounded by palms and great urns full of fiery blossomed plants, or, half buried in dense foliage, an old wooden house dating back to colonial times.

August 4th *Quiet morning.*

Shopped at Sarawak Plaza in the most modern, busiest part of the city. My thoughts wandered over a range of emotions about this place: We are surrounded in our day-to-day existence by an almost infinite number of mass-produced articles ranging from the adequate to the shoddy and from ultra-stylish designer- ware to cheap and worthless plastic junk, the manufacture of which probably keeps half the population of China from starvation. How different it was in the Ancient World and up to quite recent times, when most household items were handmade by craftsmen who produced what are now considered to be almost works of art in wood, metal, and pottery. I feel that being surrounded by cheap junk has a depressing and adverse effect on the spirit and on the soul of man- I pity the hordes of shop girls seen in the Far East (and nearer home) who live out their working lives in these deadening places!

Spectacular sunset! At dusk (6.30) the whole western sky over Mount Matang was aglow- clouds had taken on red, orange, and purple hues. The mountain changes colour, and seems to change size, according to the weather and time of day, sometimes appearing grey and distant and at other times dark and massive. This time it was an indescribable translucent mixture of grey, blue, and violet. In a break in the clouds just over the peak of Matang the sun appeared for a moment like an ingot of molten gold. It was worth coming again just for this sight.

August 5th *Quiet morning. P.m. We headed to the Sarawak Museum to see the same old familiar collection of stuffed birds, animals and snakes, tribal artefacts. and displays of the history of the local oil industry.*

August 7th *A quiet morning. P.m. Still very warm. (Also, very warm in London with record temperatures of 36 centigrade! it reached 38 a few days later!) Stepping from the air-conditioned*

restaurant into the full heat of midday I realised that there is something magnificent about the heat here- it is like some palpable living presence, almost always there day and night.

August 8th *P.m. Off on our long-awaited holiday within a holiday. One hour's drive to Damai, a small coastal resort in the NW corner of Sarawak at the foot of a small but impressive group of mountains dominated by Mt Santubong a twisted cone shaped peak of about 2,000 feet. Later to the little seaside village of Buntal with its locally famous fish restaurants perched on jetties over the South China sea.*

August 9th *A quiet day. I sat by the pool after a brief dip in the warm sea. A cloudy day today and thus not too warm. Collected some pebbles and shells to remind me of this place. The rest of the family enjoyed splashing about, but I prefer to sit and read- or just sit. Wrote a few haiku.*

Dinner at Palm Garden with a group of S's "school friends". How people keep in touch with each other here, a surprising number still around!

Later finished first section of To the Lighthouse- *the last few pages of* Window *reach the highest level of an intensely lyrical writing which is both precise and poetic.*

August 10th *Similar day but warmer- storms late a.m. Continued to read TTL. P.m. to Damai lagoon to look around.*

August 11th *Our 3rd day at Damai. Spent morning by the pool.*

P.m. Checked out. Then a short visit to Santubong- not much there- just a few wooden houses on stilts. Then the resort, quite nicely situated.

August 12th *P.m. Finished* To The Lighthouse- *a relief in a way as the intensity of Woolf's vision of reality was haunting my mind. But I rank this as one of my great recent artistic experiences and it has left me eager to read more of her work (I read Orlando, also in Kuching 3 years ago!), and her biography.*

August 13th *Quite an active day! A.m. 2nd lecture at AG Academy on arranging for strings. One extra student this time and the most knowledgeable* one I have met so far in Kuching.

P.m. To passport office to extend my permit to stay in Sarawak, an irritating but essential duty. Then to Sonia's cousin for drinks and then (unexpectedly) to Mrs Lau- Sonia's former art teacher- (whose house is an oasis of culture in the otherwise artistic desert of this city. We discussed the possibility of sending our two children here next year for schooling. (This was not followed up.) On the way back I considered how divided my life has become between East & West, how one part of me has become so involved with things oriental and especially Chinese/Malaysian- food, scenery, climate, and of how these have become so familiar to me over the past 15 years of my married life. But there is of course another part which is essentially English. How can one escape the cultural roots of one's formative years? - it cannot be done. I cannot not love English literature and music, and the landscapes of Britain, so varied compared to Sarawak! This duality of mind must find expression in my work- music inspired by the East alongside works depicting English landscapes and influenced by English literature.

August 14th *A.m. Visited two international schools: The Lodge and the one in Nanas Road to have a look round. The first was more learning orientated than the second which was holistic in outlook, and which I preferred.*

We then took the lift to the top of North District Civic Centre and admired the panoramic (but rather hazy) views over the city. I saw how Kuching, although surrounded by mountains in groups in most

directions, is mainly flat and low lying and that there is still not much high-rise development here as compared to some other SE Asian cities.

August 15th *A quiet morning. Then to Jong's (no relation) Crocodile Farm about 13 miles on the Serian road. A good afternoon for a trip (our longest yet apart from Damai) i.e., cloudy and wet and therefore, not too warm. This was my 2nd visit to this farm where one can see scores of crocodiles in all stages of development from eggs to 20ft adults, as well as bears, monkeys, a hornbill, eagles, peacocks, snakes, and fish. It has been extended since my first visit which was, I think, back in '95.*

August 16th *A.m. to International School to see their open day. Witnessed the tail end of a music performance by the primaries- not very impressive- words were mostly inaudible in the 1st sketch (native Americans in harmony with nature.) The finale- singing by a native-costumed choir had more life but the whole effect was still rather amateurish compared to the sort of thing that Zoe's school does so well.*

P.m. to our friend Khim's place for a vegetarian meal of rice, onions, beans, nuts, and tiny dried and salted fish. Later to the Hockey Stadium to see marching bands performing. There was little musical interest in this as only the drums could be heard at all distinctly in the vast arena. A smaller venue and a quieter audience would have helped. Malaysians have not yet learned to listen to musical performances without talking and giggling, as I noticed also at this morning's school concert. Western culture as opposed to technology still has a precarious existence out here. But then some aspects of local culture are strongly evident and better organised.

Later visits to Kuching were in 2005, 2007 and 2012 when I came in my function of examiner but managed to stay in the old house instead of a hotel.

<u>Bau</u>

Bau is a small, untidy town about 22 km from Kuching. The town has an unhappy19th century history of massacre and rebellion. The only reason for my visits there was because it was the hometown of my wife's father who, sadly, I never met as he died before I got to know her. On my first visit back in '88, one of the few interesting features of this town was a lake surrounded by gardens with little oriental pagodas, temples and bridges. When I came again in 1995 this lake had gone. In its place was a vast, muddy pit out of which gold was being extracted. By way of compensation for this loss, the visitor could explore some nearby caves which had been made easily accessible by means of wooden walkways. On these, one could penetrate quite deeply into the dark and humid interiors.

I have vivid memories of these caves. Here are all the eternal elements of the physical world perceived more strongly in the tropical setting: the hot sun, cool rock, soil, water, and vegetation. Here also are darkness and mystery. I can, if I close my eyes, feel again that apprehension as I leave the light and inch my way into a deeper and deeper darkness. Sudden sprays of water falling from above are like needle pricks to the skin. Far below the platform along which I grope my way are rushing torrents. Then come a few moments of utter blackness. Then the relief of a glimpse of daylight ahead and increasing light and warmth as the cave entrance is regained. That disconcerting sensation of walking on nothingness vanishes and soon I am out into the heat and brilliance of the tropical day.

I am happy to say that the lake has been restored and, I believe, gold mining has ceased for the present

<u>Sibu, Sarikei and Kapit</u>

These three places are situated outside the areas that tourists normally get to, and hence I do not recall, on any of my visits, seeing another European in any of them. My time spent in these places was officially "on business" hence I only have fleeting impressions of them, recalled below:

On each of my visits, Sibu was my base. A sprawling city on the great Rejang River that flows out from the heart of Borneo to the South China Sea. A relaxed, but rather untidy place and with a predominantly Chinese population. My guide (and examinations representative) took me to a factory of a type unknown in the west: one devoted to the production of that Oriental delicacy, birds' nests. These are the edible nests of certain swiftlets common throughout parts of SE Asia including Borneo. I must admit that my attention was not fully engaged by the factory-owners enthusiastic description of the complicated processes involved in turning a bird's bed into food – and on one of my earlier visits to the East, when trying this expensive delicacy in a Chinese restaurant, I found the nests, when served in a kind of soup, almost completely tasteless!

What did fascinate me, however, were the curious "bird houses" occasionally seen in towns and along main roads. These are large and rather mysterious-looking concrete structures with no windows, but with walls perforated high up by holes to enable the birds to enter and exit. Some of these structures can be seen along the Sibu to Sarikei road, just before the latter town is reached. For some inexplicable reason, this road haunts my mind, to the extent of dreaming about it. How do we explain obsessions?

The most prominent architectural feature that the visitor will see in Sarikei is a huge statue of a pineapple! The pineapple is not only the emblem of the town, but an important source of revenue, along with other tropical fruits and black pepper. I wrote:

August 30th, 2005

By car to Sarikei, a 1 ½ hour journey including a ferry crossing over the Rajang (near where my driver was stopped by the police for not wearing a seat belt- she managed to charm them into letting her go on). Then through a big country of dense forest, plantations, and occasional villages of wooden, tin-roofed houses on stilts each with its church. Sarikei is a small but busy town…

The standard of candidates' playing was high here- some good ones!

Kapit, on both of my two visits, could only be reached by boat along the Rejang River – a three-hour trip. There *were r*oads in the town, but they petered out in the dense forests that surround it. I wrote:

August 23rd, 2007

To Kapit by express boat. 1st class for 30 RM- on board, and presumably to make the rather monotonous journey pass more quickly, was a video device on which was played a rather too noisy film with subtitles in what seemed like Pidgin English, obviously added by someone with defective hearing. Kapit is small but strangely busy for a place so cut off from the outside world. It nestles cosily in hilly terrain. I was given a guided tour to see new housing, the market with its many natives and Chinese. There were distant mountains, but, as always, unattainable.

As I write now (2021) it seems that there is a new road from Sibu to Kapit, thus making the boats redundant, for passenger traffic at least. I seem to remember that the standard of performance was high in Kapit, and of being bemused by hearing Western classical music played on a superb grand piano that must have found its way by boat from, probably, Sibu, to this town remotely situated, and surrounded by tropical forest, in the centre of Borneo.

West Malaysia

Most of my visits to West, or Peninsular Malaysia were as an examiner. The city I got to know best was Kuala Lumpur, and of that, only certain areas in the centre and at the University of Malaya. Central KL (as it is known by locals and visitors alike) is filled with those huge, anonymous concrete and glass structures that one can now see proliferating throughout the world – London not excepted.

A few random memories:

In KL, a monorail system that snakes its way through the city – a drab grey reinforced concrete structure of beams and pylons, that is either a great feat of modern transportation or an unmitigated eyesore depending on your opinion. Personally, I find large expanses of concrete depressing. And I can foresee that the concrete will sooner or later begin to crumble leaving the rusting metal skeleton uncovered and eventually the whole thing will have to be demolished.

A rather aging supermarket: the Sungei Wang Plaza in Jalan Bukit Bintang consisting of a maze of narrow alleyways lined by stacks of just about any commodity you may or may not need and mostly underground. I always got lost in it and often despaired of finding my way out, but always did so after much aimless wandering around its tortuous ways.

The bleakest examination centre I have known: a small bare room reached by one or two flights of concrete steps; bathroom acoustics; in the waiting room, equally bare of furnishings, tanks of morose looking fish who stare at the waiting candidates in a most discouraging way.

In the city of Ipoh, memories of my guide's impatient driving, trying to get every other road user out of his way, and his command of the milder English four- letter words as he endeavoured to do so. He had a very wealthy aunt who would accompany us, usually nightly, to one of Ipoh's more expensive fish restaurants – the sort of place where one can see live fish in tanks, take one's pick and then wait for the finished, cooked, end-product. My host would point to this elderly relative and murmur "she'll pay", which she always did. Ipoh seemed to me to consist of suburbs – I never saw a centre and never found out if, indeed, one exists.

Taiping Beautiful surroundings of lakes and mountains that, in more temperate regions, would be snow covered in winter, but here are probably not much cooler than the lower-lying lands beneath them.

Kuantan on the East coast. My first visit was in December – it rained all the time.

On my 2nd visit here I was booked into a luxury hotel with extensive gardens and indoor facilities that I did not have time to use.

Penang

Touring the island in continuous rain! Toothache followed by extraction of decayed tooth. Caught cold -in the tropics! Incredible new buildings half on *terra firma* and half on pillars driven deep into the ground and overhanging precipitous mountains – scary!

Genting Highlands

In the clouds, a huge hotel of 7000 rooms but not big enough for the Malaysians, crowds of whom I had to dodge as they eagerly hurried to the casino.

Indonesia

Bandung

July 30th, 2006

My first visit to Indonesia. The airport was in the centre of the city and probably a tricky place to land- but we managed it! After passing through customs and paying for my visa in US dollars, I see ahead of me an approaching human tide of porters all homing in on the wealthy European who is, however, fortunately rescued and moved quickly to a waiting vehicle outside by the examination board representative, the porters having been waved away. The airport is relatively modern and clean, but the street into which I was led outdid all my expectations of "third world-ness" in its apparently chaotic and decrepit state.

The feelings of "culture-shock" that assailed me as I readjusted from the cleanliness and orderliness of Singapore to this scene of obvious poverty and over-population was, however, not long-lasting. I soon became aware of a kind of order amid the apparent chaos: I do not recall seeing any real beggars; it seemed that everyone had something on offer, even if it were only a few vegetables for sale or just finding parking spaces for motorists in the crowded and narrow back streets. I quickly began to like Indonesia and never once felt ill at ease there. My Singaporean friends warned me about the dangers, real and probably imagined, of this country, of which I took due note and remained alert to, but had as it turned out, no need to worry too much about during my visits. The guides/representatives were all most helpful and friendly and the standard of performance of the candidates generally of a high order [more so than in any other country that I have examined in]. I figured that, in wealthy Singapore, music lessons can be just another out-of-school activity that parents foist on their offspring, who do not always take them seriously. But in poorer Indonesia, parents must work harder to find that extra cash for lessons, with the result that their children really work hard and strive to succeed. Or so it seemed to me at that time.

Because of the nature of my work in the Far East, most of the music I heard was Western in style. It is now a commonplace observation that Western music seems to dominate throughout the world. Most cities in Asia now have (and have had for some decades) flourishing orchestras for performing Western Classical Music, as well as jazz ensembles, choirs, and multitudes of popular music groups. I need to point out two things that occur to me in this respect: that this western influence is by no means new but has been going on for centuries *via* the Dutch and Portuguese colonialists from the 17th century and later, and I do not regard the popularity of western music as resulting from imperialism as some would see it but that, much as some regret this popularity of western music in the East (and elsewhere), is not the reason for this that it somehow provides non-western audiences with stylistic elements that their more traditional ethnic music does not give, e.g. functional harmony and rhythmic drive?

With one exception, to be mentioned below, all the music I heard [including Malay popular songs] was heavily indebted to either the classical or popular styles of the occident. There is of course, a small and enthusiastic audience for the classical music of eastern nations, e.g. the Gagaku music of Japan still attracts a discriminating audience.

In history, do we not see that spiritual awareness comes from the East but culture and technology from the West?

My guide in Bandung was an Indonesian Chinese named Johan, a member of a Christian church that I was, at that time, associated with, and still maintain occasional contact with at the present time

(2021). He was responsible for not only giving me a place to stay in his house in one of Bandung's innumerable untidy backstreets but also driving me through the frighteningly unorganised traffic in the city centre.

July 30th, 2006

1st impressions: an unexpectedly big city (3 million population)-teeming with humanity many in an almost destitute state – an over populated land-new and old (mostly old) buildings mixed together-roads potholed and lined with crumbling pavements- shacks, stalls & shelters everywhere you look-many bicycles & motor scooters- few road signs and dense traffic on most roads but everyone proceeding in an orderly manner- groups and individuals sitting by the roadside (for what purpose?)-

P.m. with brother Johan to a restaurant in the mountains (chilly!)- spectacular views over the city which looks picturesque from a distance.

July 31st *Rest day. A.m. to the volcanic peaks to the north of Bandung- sulphur & souvenir sellers.*

Tea

The climate is more temperate at these altitudes and the vegetation correspondingly different from that lower down.

P.m. To a display of traditional dance and music (angklung & gamelan). This was the only oriental music I encountered in all my visits to the East!

Angklung is the music of bamboo pipes set in frames and shaken. The sound is rather like a stronger version of wood chimes and the instruments are usually played tremolando. Each frame is tuned to one note of a seven-note scale. The technique of playing a melody is like that for hand bells- one or two notes per person.

After a demonstration of angklung, children came into the audience and gave each one of us an instrument. We then had fun trying them for ourselves and managed to play some well-known tunes. The session ended by the children dancing with the audience which was delightful if rather contrived. But at least it showed a great willingness to encourage visitors.

Aug 1st –2nd *Examining. A high standard here with playing of accuracy and expressiveness, with attention given to details of tempo & dynamics. The local rep, Mr Daniel, 63 years old, studied in Germany 30 years ago.*

I am, somewhat incongruously, reading Lorna Doone. Blackmore, like Hardy, is a master at evoking a bygone rustic world long since vanished, in this case the wilds of Exmoor.

I cannot think much about writing music here- it seems pointless to be planning anything so self-indulgent as a composition amid the raw physical realities of a city like this.

I left Bandung early on the morning of the 3rd and in the half-light of dawn got into a waiting taxicab that would hopefully get me to Jakarta airport in time for my flight to Medan, the next city on my agenda.

All went well, until after about ¾ hours into my journey, the car began to stall and was pulled over to the side of the road. With a puzzled expression the driver tried to re-start the engine. No luck! On examination, it seemed that the engine had overheated for lack of cooling water. Seizing a bucket, the driver wandered over to some rice fields nearby, filled the bucket, returned to the car, and poured the cold water into the radiator. We got going again – but, after stopping at every tollgate - and there

were a quite a number of these - the car refused to start again unless pushed into action by the amused toll employees.

I did reach Jakarta, of which I had fleeting views, in time for my flight. At the airport, the driver despondently remarked: “Mister, my car no good”, with which sentiment I had to agree – silently.

I am aware that I need to conclude these reminiscences, so just a few random jottings on other places visited in Indonesia in my role of music examiner:

Medan

Another big, sprawling city but again, merely a dot on most maps! I stayed with another member of the church mentioned earlier, in a comfortable villa situated in one of Medan’s backstreets.

On both of my visits here I was required to travel to the town of Siantar which is about 50 miles from Medan.

On the first occasion my young Chinese girl driver got herself thoroughly lost in the maze of back streets, only finding the highway and the exit from Medan after asking some of the locals for directions. Along this main road the slums stretched on either side for miles, broken occasionally by straight alleyways and a few railway lines. Siantar is not far from fabled Lake Toba, which I was never able to see on either of my visits.

Jakarta

A monster-city. Hot! Extremes of poverty and wealth literally side by side: barefoot children begging at the closed windows of luxury automobiles! Roads (even motorways) in need of repair. Stagnant, rubbish filled canals. Impression was of a city, already over-full of humanity, but doomed to have to take in more. The urban sprawl seemed boundless – two hours to drive across it. Impenetrable traffic jams: On one occasion my car, driven by the examination representative, took 20 mins to cover a distance I could have walked in 5!

Palembang

The capital city of South Sumatra, population about 1.6 million. My memories are of a rather nondescript kind of place, not visibly either poor or wealthy. Palembang is a city that tourists seldom visit.

On arriving at the airport, I was asked to pay for my visa (it was my first stop in Indonesia on that occasion) in US dollars, which I did not have, carrying only sterling and rupiah. Wondering if I would ever get out of the airport, but a fellow traveller was able to exchange some of his dollars for my cash. We worked out a rough rate of exchange on the spot.

Floods in the city – and my guide was in two minds about getting to the examination centre along flooded roads, but we made it, to a smallish music school in a back street about 18 inches under water.

This aforesaid guide, a Chinese Indonesian, had a refreshingly positive view of his country: He would not hear anything negative about it. Contrast this attitude with us British constantly moaning about just about everything from the weather, public transport, the National Health Service up to the government!

A Lost Paradise

If, as the artist Cecil Collins said, “we are all … haunted by the memory of a lost paradise” then my own particular “lost paradise” – albeit an earthly one- must be South Ruislip, an insignificant suburb on the western fringe of London, but the place where I spent my earliest years, those very early childhood years when everything seems fresh and newly minted and not one disagreeable memory comes to mind. I suppose that I am one of those fortunate ones whose infancy seems, in retrospect, to have been one of unalloyed happiness, before being clouded over by the experiences of school and adolescence. The unfortunate ones, those whose childhood has been one of fleeing civil war, poverty or domestic strife must search for their lost paradise somewhere else, if they do indeed ever find it…

Looking at recent (2019) images of some of the locations in South Ruislip that were familiar to me in my early years, I can observe that very little has changed over the 70 years that have elapsed since I walked the suburban byways with the comforting figure of my mother. And this seems to be a typically English trait, this preserving of the past and reluctance to rebuild, demolish, change the environment in the name of some always-elusive progress. Our "main" road, named after a long-dead queen, crosses what to my childish eyes was a river, but is in fact the Yeading Brook, a mere trickle of water running for about 16 miles between scraps of open green space until it joins the river Crane at Cranford.

We used to walk, my mother and I, right, from the front door of our semi-detached house in Exmouth Road, right into Bideford Road, left into Torcross Road, right into Victoria Road, across the bridge over the brook and then left into Dartford Road to visit an elderly lady, a Mrs Reilly, one of my mother's friends. The attraction of all this for me was that Mrs Reilly had a large supply of books, left over by a departed son (departed by being grown up and living somewhere else). It was from this house that I acquired as a gift an incomplete set of Children's' Encyclopaedias from c. 1925 that I read repeatedly and gained valuable knowledge of, among other items, the "modern" motorcar (c.1925!), European history, the British Empire, and world geography (which induced in my childish mind a strong desire to visit Outer Mongolia).

I said "unalloyed happiness" earlier on, but now I recall a shadow – *getting my hair cut*. This ritual occurred about once every six weeks or so and meant going the other way along Victoria Road towards Harrow, to the crossroads at Long Drive and to a small and decrepit looking house, next to the railway and in the pretentiously named Great Central Avenue, that was at that time converted into a barbers' shop run by two middle-aged men who conversed in somewhat colourful language to each other while snipping, shearing and shaving their all-male customers to the accompaniment of passing trains. The house is, I think, still there to this day and is now a pizza shop but looking the worse for its probable 90 or more years of existence.

Holidays

October 2021

And the season of holidays has passed for most of us, leaving only memories.

Holidays -*holy days*- should be days during which to recover *wholeness.* Casting off the fragmented life of work and daily routine, we do something different. We try to achieve that wholeness of purpose that in ordinary circumstances we find almost impossible to accomplish, divided as we are between so many conflicting chores and duties of varying degrees of urgency.

My own singular purpose on holiday is to focus entirely on spending time with the family (not forgetting the dog). I do not write music or bother about students for the one week in the year when I can be free from all that.

My holiday routine is to wake early, usually before 6.00 am and stumble my unfamiliar way to the kitchen to make a much-needed cup of coffee. Then, return to bed and allow my brain to thaw out from the chill of early dawn, helped by the coffee, of course.

I idly plan the day ahead – or at least imagine what it could be like…

Then, breakfast of egg and bacon, more coffee, and a glass of red wine (it's never too early, and the next one will not be until evening). Then wait for the other members of the family to emerge gradually from their respective rooms, while I check the weather, map, places to see etc. and maybe catch up on my reading.

Finally, and only after some considerable fussing about, we all head off to wherever we might have decided on.

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Choosing a warm day, and on a spread towel, weighted down with pebbles at each corner to stop it blowing away in the wind, I lie with one ear to the beach.

Passers-by seem to move vertically, the crunching sound of their footsteps magnified by the expanse of pebbles. The sea, a long way off and separated from the pebble beach by 100 or more yards of damp sand, murmurs lazily. Occasional voices, children, dogs, seagulls, break the calm. An incessant wind cools the air but is less noticeable at ground level. Brightly coloured kites soar above, straining to break away from their tautly stretched cords.

Each year that this long-awaited one-week event happens, we focus our attention on a town. Last year (2020) it was Westward-Ho in Devon. This year it was Rye in East Sussex, one of England's best-preserved medieval towns and justly popular with visitors. I think we all fell in love with this much-lauded ancient *Cinque Port* that still has a vestige of its original harbour and is a maze of narrow streets and narrower pavements, almost every street inclined. Architecture from several centuries - medieval to modern. Cobblestones in the backstreets and alleyways. A hill town overlooking the flat land of the great Romney Marsh. But- it has too much traffic, being on the main road to Hastings. Needs a bypass!

We also spent one rather damp and cloudy day at Dungeness, one of Britain's oddest landscapes and often described as "our only desert". Flat as the proverbial pancake. A flat-earther's vindication perhaps. This vast expanse of shingle, much of it covered with a scrub of maritime flora, appears on the map as a blank space, but once there you see a scattering of wooden huts and more substantial structures including a disused power station, two lighthouses, odds and ends of industry, stranded boats in various stages of seaworthiness, and the Pilot Inn, described by Derek Jarman (one of the area's more famous inhabitants) as providing the best fish and chips in Kent!
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Some Notes on My Birthplace

My only qualification for writing these notes is that I was born in Ruislip and spent my first 52 years in the Ruislip-Northwood area. I now live in Surrey and work full-time as composer, teacher and examiner.

Here are some reminiscences of places I knew well in my earlier years.

I have always felt slightly special in being born in a town the exact location of which is a mystery to most people (except those who actually live there). Even many Londoners have only a vague knowledge that Ruislip is a suburb somewhere out on the remote Western fringe of the metropolis. Such always seems to have been the case, for a 1940s guidebook, written with a view to attracting

those from the inner city into the recently built rows of semi-detached and terraced houses that were by then springing up all around London, was entitled *Ruislip- Where is it?*

Well, if one looks at a map of the suburbs that stretch to the west and slightly to the north of Wembley one will see several "Ruislips". The first to be encountered, if you are travelling on the Western Avenue, out of Central London, is South Ruislip, where I was born. A little to the north-west of that is Ruislip Gardens immortalised by Betjeman in *Middlesex*

Gaily into Ruislip Gardens
Runs the red electric train,
With a thousand Ta's and Pardon's
Daintily alights Elaine;
Hurries down the concrete station
With a frown of concentration,
Out into the outskirt's edges
Where a few surviving hedges
Keep alive our lost Elysium - rural Middlesex again.

Directly north is the somewhat inappropriately named Ruislip Manor, consisting of one main road with shops and a station on the Metropolitan and Piccadilly lines, and numerous quiet residential side roads. The actual site of the manor- now called Manor Farm lies somewhat to the NW in the original old village of Ruislip itself. It is here that we find some of the oldest buildings in the area- the Church, great and little barns, an inn, and a few ancient houses, now almost totally engulfed by 20th century houses and shops.

To the S W and rather remote from the other "Ruislips" is West Ruislip, more properly just the name of a station on the Central Line, built up mainly after 1930 and merging into neighbouring Ickenham along the Ickenham Road.

Yet another Ruislip has been added to this list by the local estate agents, and that is North Ruislip, lying, as the name would suggest, north of Ruislip proper and adjacent to Northwood, the latter once a forest-enclosed hamlet, but now just another built up area of suburban development on the very fringe of London but partly in the county of Hertfordshire. Those surviving hedges and that lost Elysium are more in evidence here, mainly in the form of several substantial areas of primeval woodland, of which more later, miraculously surviving just a dozen or so miles from Charing Cross.

Probably all that the reader would want to know concerning the early history of Ruislip is summarised by James Thorne in his monumental *Handbook to the Environs of London* published in 1876. He writes:

"In the time of the Confessor, Ruislip Manor belonged to Wlward Wit, the King's thane; under the conqueror it was held by Ernulfus de Hesdin, who gave it to the convent of Bec Harlewin, in Normandy. It was transferred in the 13th century to the Priory of Okeburn, and was seized as an alien priory by Henry IV, who granted it for life to his 3rd son, John Duke of Bedford. Reverting to the Crown on Bedford's death in 1436, it was given by Henry VI for his life to John Somerset, and on his death, 1442, was granted to King's College, Cambridge, in whose possession it remains."

By the time of my arrival there, Ruislip had become an urban district, and my earliest memories are of numerous rows of what were at that time, quite recently constructed terraced and semi-detached

houses, neatly arranged in tree lined avenues and all with front and rear gardens. For some reason best known to the planners who oversaw the development in the 1930s- but most likely to add a fresh-air allure, a number of streets in South Ruislip were named after towns in the West of England: Hartland Drive, Appledore Avenue, Barnstaple Road etc. including my street: Exmouth Road, where I lived the first 13 years of my life at no. 69, an end- of -terrace 3 bedroom, two reception, kitchen, bathroom, built c1935. One feature of the area where I grew up was (and still is) an extensive network of back alleys running between the rear gardens of houses on adjacent roads and much used by pedestrians wishing to take short cuts from house to house or house to shops. These humble footpaths and a strip of parkland through which trickled the diminutive River Pinn were my first experiences of the "great outdoors" and formed the substance of my earliest awareness of the outside world- even to the extent of coming into my dreams.

After a few years at the Sacred Heart Primary School in Ruislip Gardens (still there, but much modernised since my time there in the 1950s), I went further afield for my secondary education, to Gunnersbury Catholic Grammar School – using the Piccadilly line from Ruislip Manor to Acton Town daily during term times. It was during my years at that school that my family decided to move to North Ruislip and into a newly built bungalow. That was in 1960 and it will give some idea of the scale of inflation over the last 50 years to relate that this property cost £6,000 when new. Today it would probably be on the market for more like £600,000. In 1935 the Exmouth road house was on sale for a mere £600!

The new bungalow was in Bury Street, north of the old village, and it backed directly on to one of Ruislip's three areas of woodland- remnants of the ancient Great Forest of Middlesex- Park Wood.

This could be entered from our rear garden, and hardly a week passed (and often much less than that) when I would not take an hour or so to stroll through one or more areas of woodland. The trees were mostly oak and hornbeam with some chestnut and holly and I got to know the woods in all seasons from the hottest midsummer days of full and radiant foliage, deep black shadows and the blinding light of clearings in full sunshine in which the dust from the paths danced in the sunbeams, to those foggy late Autumn afternoons when dusk comes on early and the trees become dark poles against a grey background; from freezing but fine winter mornings of gold and pale blue, to the first, fresh verdure of early Spring with its drumming of woodpeckers echoing through a revitalised landscape.

I now believe that I felt, unconsciously at the time, what the late Edmund Vale in his *Local Colour* (J. M. Dent & Sons, London, 1934) says of nature, namely that "when you go alone into the presence of Nature…do you not feel that the vital and essential thing about the great lady… is an implication of a sense of kinship in everything with everything, a sense that is felt like the importance of a secret imparted in a moment of magic intimacy- impossible to divulge, or frame into your own words."

And when comparing man-made things, that inevitably age and decay, with the natural he says: "In Nature, our muse is concerned with the present. Something *is*!"

I think it was my experience of and empathy with these woods that replaced religious belief in my teens. I began to doubt the existence of God and the teachings of Christianity, and my readings and love of the Greek myths had, by then, turned me slightly pagan. All I knew was that these woods were ALIVE with a life not human, and which long predated my own life, and that this life was utterly mysterious and somehow eternal. Even in the darkest and most stormy days of winter the life persisted just under the surface, waiting to reassert itself with the coming of Spring. Sometimes this feeling of another living presence was so strong that I imagined I was being watched- but by something not human and not entirely animal or vegetable either. It may not be just coincidence that one of the old inns near these woods- on lonely Batchworth Heath- is named *Ye Olde Greene Manne*- this being none other than the *Wodewose* or "wild man of the forest", who may well be not an actual "man" but rather the folk-personification of all the combined animal and vegetable life of woods and wild places.

Ruislip Woods are noted for their variety of wildlife, and frequent visitors to our garden were jays, magpies, robins, grey squirrels, and hedgehogs. I once found a two-foot-long grass snake curled up on the lawn, fast asleep. Using a stick, I lifted it and replaced it inside the wood from whence it had obviously strayed.

A short stroll through Park Wood would bring me to the edge of Ruislip Reservoir, known since 1933 as the "Lido". Originally constructed in 1811 as a reservoir for the Grand Union Canal, it is a rare example of man's improving on nature. What was once just a wooded valley through which trickled an insignificant brook is now one of the largest areas of water in Greater London and a popular, picturesque spot for a day out in all seasons. By taking a path over to the north-eastern edge of the wood I would be out on a high ridge overlooking Northwood with its iron bridge upon which the Metropolitan Line crosses the Rickmansworth Road on the way to that *Metroland* of Moor Park, Chorleywood and Amersham lauded by Betjeman. Near here was the old St Vincent's Hospital- where one could sometimes see patients lying in their beds outdoors in quite cold weather presumably to do them good- now demolished and replaced by a new establishment with a new name: St Vincent's Nursing Home.

My visits to the other areas of woodland were less frequent, but I occasionally took the continuation of Bury Street: i.e., Ducks Hill Road, past another old inn, *The Six Bells*, and towards Copse Wood on the right and the curiously named Mad Bess Wood on the left. Who *Mad Bess* was, I never found out, but probably some deranged Hardy-esque tramp-woman of earlier times lived in these woods and bestowed her name on them. At any rate, I found them rather eerie and always very quiet. I do not remember hearing birdsong even in the springtime. An air of ghostly stillness and mournfulness seemed to hang about them. I remember that there was, some way into them, a curious rectangle of grass surrounded by a high hedge,

with a gate always securely locked, and looking like a memorial to someone or something from ancient times.

Yet a further area of woodland, sometimes included in the designation of Ruislip woods but more properly belonging to Harefield, is Bayhurst Wood and to the south of this is one of the last remaining areas of that truly rural Middlesex of former times- New Year's Green, through which a twisting single track road passes rather furtively between hedges and fields that look for all the world as if they were 100 miles from central London instead of a mere 17.

But we are digressing and need to return to the area of my earliest memories. Our main road, named after a 19th century monarch, and which runs through South Ruislip and up to the Manor, was less built up when I first got to know it. The almost inevitable accumulation of houses, shops, a new church and those ubiquitous "super stores" that have sprung up over the last 20 years has meant that nearly all of what used to be fields at the southern end of Victoria Road is now urbanised. I remember that on one of these open spaces was discovered the body of a young woman. The murderer was, I believe, never caught. There were rumours that he was an American airman- for, as some younger inhabitants of the area might not know, there was from about 1958 to 1972 a USAAF base at the very southernmost tip of Ruislip, where Victoria Road takes a turn eastwards towards South Harrow. And mentioning that place, I still have vivid memories of looking out of my bedroom window towards Harrow-on-the- Hill, rising conspicuously above the otherwise level Middlesex plain, its verdant slopes crowned by the ancient church of St Mary, and of being fascinated by an enormous shining metal cylinder- none other than the South Harrow gasholder, demolished- some might say mercifully - in 1987.

As far as I can remember the Americans did not mix much with us locals, but both the men and their vehicles could occasionally be seen in the main roads and shopping areas. Which brings me to another big difference between now and then: before about 1970 immigrants were not common in our part of West London- one hardly ever saw a Negro or Indian, although West Indians had been settling in some inner-city areas like Notting Hill since the 1950s. We had one German and one Spanish friend (they were, in fact, a married couple) and some of my schoolmates were Irish and Polish, and that was about all the contact with non-Britons that we experienced at the time.

Cars (at least in Exmouth Road) do not figure much in my earliest memories, although there must have been some around. But I do recall the almost daily visits, during the warmer months, of the ice-cream van with its tinny jingle, which would be a signal for the rapid finding of a few coins and the purchase of an ice lolly. My favourite flavour was spearmint in the form of a pale green chunk of ice on a stick! Another visitor

was the coal man (nearly everyone burnt coal for heating in those days). At intervals a lorry would pull up outside our house and a very black and sooty individual would empty one or two sacks of coal into our bunker at the side of the house. I well remember his curious headgear- a round cap like a fez down the back of which hung a long flap upon which rested the sacks, thus enabling him to carry them on his shoulders without getting the back of his shirt too dirty. The milk man would be seen daily at the front of his electrically powered cart, not actually pulling it but guiding it from house to house along what were much quieter roads then than now. The rag and bone man had a horse and cart- I think one of the very few tradesmen left at that time who still used this form of transport. His "cry" was a most extraordinary, nasal and abbreviated version of "any old rags and bones" that sounded more like "*nyolragbooone*!" to my youthful and alert ears.

In about 1980, for financial reasons, we left Ruislip and moved into a semi-detached house in Eastcote. Then in 1983, after the death of my father, I moved again with my elderly mother to another bungalow, in Northwood. This was very near another area of woodland- the unattractively named "Hog's Back Open Space". a kind of poor relation to Ruislip woods, but worth an afternoon's stroll and affording a panoramic view of suburban Middlesex from its summit. My visits to this oasis of nature surrounded by what has been termed "bungaloid growth" were not frequent, but when I found myself in the centre of this quite dense little patch of forest, I could at least imagine, just for a few moments that I was back in those ancient woods of my boyhood and youth.

MJR 11/12

Musings

The Quest for Meaning

The first and most essential thing is to ask questions, questions that have been asked since mankind appeared on this planet. Why are we here? How should we live? What is the universe and why are there those seemingly perpetual opposites of hot / cold, light / dark, good / bad etc.? In the man who

has never asked these and other questions about the reality around him, who just lives to eat, drink and sleep, the spirit is dormant.

All the ancient religions and philosophies taught the same basic lesson: that we need to balance the demands of this world "that is passing away" with those of the creator who is eternal. Thus, for Taoists there is a "way of heaven" that we must follow and if we do not, disaster ensues for ourselves and others. For Buddhists the material world, as a permanent fixed entity, is unreal (and Christ said the same thing) and all our problems come from desiring this unreality. For Christians, the reality is in our spirit joined to the Holy Spirit.

I think one can see the truth in all these teachings when we observe what actually happens when a certain course of action is taken by individuals, groups or nations. The Buddhists call this karma – in simple terms the law of cause and effect, or how one thing leads inevitably to another.

My own spiritual journey began at my primary school which was Roman Catholic and at which I experienced the usual Catholic teachings: the Catechism, the Trinity, the Stations of the Cross, the Infallibility of the Pope, etc., inculcated into me with the added insistence that any deviation from belief in these things was "wrong" and that only Catholics had the absolute truth in these matters.

Of course, by my teens I had given up on Catholicism and become rather pagan in outlook, regarding God, if there is such an entity, as being in everything that exists, and especially in the natural world of trees, stones, and animals. At that time, I was unaware of my spirit. That awareness was not to come until many years later, and it came through re-joining the Christian community in 1989 at the instigation of my wife, who had been a believer in Christ for years before we met and who introduced me to the Church in London, a group of believers who were trying to regain what they thought had been lost since the early church became "politicized" in the 4th century and had as a result become worldly and divided into many sects and branches. Thus, I owe my awareness of spirituality to a Christian church, but I have recently become more attracted to those ancient philosophies of Taoism and Zen than to any religion. Religions, although they may unite many, also divide many and with sometimes disastrous results. I do not think philosophers persecute and kill each other – although they may not always agree. I also have to say that I believe that no one who has ever lived has known for certain the answers to those eternal question that I stated earlier. Of course, there can be faith in a certain religious teaching – but does not every belief attempt to eradicate a hidden doubt?

In old age, I may not be any nearer to knowing the ultimate "reality" but I have come to an acceptance of the way things are, which so often conflicts with the way we would like them to be, but seems to be all part of some inscrutable "plan" of which we are each a miniscule portion, each with our own destiny, whether that is in our hands or in the hands of the creator…

The "Religions of the Book" (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) are obsessed with the conflict between light and dark, but the ancient philosophers who based their teachings on observation concluded that these apparent opposites were complementary parts of a unity, a universal oneness, and that they are eternal and not explicable by reasoning.

It says in the *Tao Te Ching* that the wise man does not contend. Contention, that universal human characteristic of arguing, competing, and contesting leads to conflict and ultimately to disaster. If we all followed this precept of non-contention, how different the world would be.

My only firm belief is that we must somehow steer a course through this labyrinthine universe with all its contrasts of light and dark, and that just sometimes we make the right choices at the right times, producing satisfactory results, and it is this that gives us hope.

London's Last Tram

This summer (2022) will mark 70 years since the last tram ran in London, on July 6th 1952 to be precise. They were certainly not beautiful. But they were imposing. Imagine 17 tons of metal, wood, fabric, and glass perched on sets of metal wheels unglamorously termed "bogies", gliding along metal tracks inset into the roads. And you had to risk life and limb to get on and off because for the most part they stopped in the middle of the road. I think I remember them… I would have been 5 years old when the last tram ran in South London. And, even if I never actually rode in one, our existences overlapped by

a few years. That *Last Tram to New Cross Depot* could stand as a symbol of all that has disappeared, altered, and degenerated over the past 70 years and has transformed London from a cosy, tightly knit city of, predominantly, *Londoners* (i.e., those born and raised in the city and its environs) to the city we now seem to have, largely made up of transients and recent immigrants who probably cannot have that long-standing affection for the place that the locals have.

London *then* was grimy, smoky, prone to dense late autumn and winter fogs; much was decayed, crumbling away; the predominant hues were grey, brown, black and that singular shade of beige of London brick. Most of it was no more than three or four storeys high. The tower blocks, often shoddily built and now too often today's slums, were not to come until the '60s.

In what was surely one of the most mistaken decisions ever made by the overseers of public transport in Britain, the trams were gradually replaced by motorbuses and electrically powered *Trolleybuses* – and I well remember riding on the latter on holidays in Bournemouth (they were a lovely warm yellow with brown trimmings). From my secondary school on Gunnersbury Avenue, I used to see London Transport trolleybuses running along the Great West Road at about the time when the Chiswick Flyover was under construction (c. 1960) and a couple of years before all London trolleybuses were withdrawn. Alas!

My earliest memories coincide with what were termed the "austerity years" (c. 1945-60) when, after a most expensive and debilitating war, the cost of reconstruction meant that goods, and especially luxury goods, were in short supply. The motor car was available to middle- and upper-class earners only, and our first one was an old Austin (or maybe a Morris) built about 1930 or so. Colours of cars during my childhood years were various shades of black, brighter hues being seen only on buses, trams, and delivery vehicles. Our earliest cars had the unfortunate habit of breaking down, usually in the most awkward places, and often necessitating being pushed manually out of the way of other traffic. Once, when my father was driving me the short journey to my primary school, a front wheel came loose and shot off down the road ahead of us, to the amazement of passers-by.

Austerity clothing for men was suits, jackets, and trousers in various shades of grey, brown, or black. Some sort of outdoor headgear was expected of all males of the lower middle class and upwards. My dad wore a flat cap, although he was lower-middle- rather than working-class.

Bright colours were worn only by madmen or poets, until the "swinging '60s" arrived in their multicoloured splendour and sudden fashionable casualness of attire. But that is another story.

Some Thoughts on Direct Perception

Which is to see things as if for the first time and with wonderment.

The British artist Cecil Collins said, in a film about his work made in 1983, that direct perception is the view of the world of the child and the fool (or more correctly the "holy" fool) and that it is almost totally missing in the modern world which has become dominated by science, technology and materialism.

At the beginning of Axel Munthe's autobiographical book, "The Story of San Michele" the author, just arrived on the island of Capri, asks the young girl who is leading him up the steps to Anacapri, the name of a certain flower. She replies: "*fiore",* and asked to name a different flower, she says again *"fiore".* To her all flowers are "*fiore, bella, bella".*

This is an example of the direct perception of the child who does not categorise things in the way that adults do.

Now, in some ways categorisation is useful, even essential. We *do* need distinguish between the harmless and the harmful, of course. But taken to extremes, as it has been in the modern (i.e. from the 18th century) world it has destroyed our view of the world of the child, the primitive and the artist, who can still be in awe of their natural surroundings. To return for a moment to flowers, they have been scientifically catalogued for centuries: to the botanist they can be no more than different species. Their *intrinsic beauty* and the *marvel of their existence* is forgotten in this urge to list them according to number of petals, size, shape and so on. I do not imply that the scientific view is wrong, but that, to be fully conscious and spiritually attuned to our world, the scientific view is not sufficient. We need the direct vision spoken of by Collins and Munthe previously. And we must not forget that we so often categorise things to utilise them for our own ends.

For too long have we seen ourselves as somehow outside of nature and free to exploit it for our own purposes, with disastrous results that are becoming more apparent, and worse every century. The balance is upset – but it is always restored, and we must surely suffer in this process of restoration.

The natural world, including the "living" planet and man, are parts of, to quote Alexander Pope, "One stupendous whole…" Everything is related and interconnected to everything else. So called "opposites" need each other and cannot exist without one another. Our problem is that we see only the parts but do not see the whole.

One very early memory comes back to me: I used to be taken to a park when about 3 or 4 years of age, and I remember my feelings of rapture at the sight of very green grass and very tall and stately trees (as they seemed then). I did not know their names, but I could sense the wonder and mystery of their existence, a feeling that recurred later in life as a youth wandering through woodland, and that still comes in old age when I stop thinking about work, money, and what I need to get done in the near future, and just contemplate the *present moment* which is in a sense always miraculous – I am *here* now, alive and aware of the deep mystery of the universe…

We all have had this experience, but we lose it, except for the poet, composer and visionary who retain this ability to perceive the world "directly" and without any purpose other than to marvel at its very existence.

MJR 09/20

The Artist as Alchemist?

Parallels exist between the artistic creator and the alchemist. Just as the medieval alchemists attempted to transform base metals into gold, the artist attempts to transform the "base" realities of life into the "gold" of works of art. However, where, as far as we know, the alchemists always failed, the artist may succeed. Examples from literature, music, drama and the plastic arts abound in which the commonplace, the fleeting, the anguished and even death itself are taken by the artist as themes

for works which transform those banal and temporal realities into things of permanent value and beauty, which can be contemplated with satisfaction and pleasure.

I have mentioned elsewhere the observation that we each have within us a "world" which will be irretrievably lost when we die, and that it is one of the purposes of art, even possibly its main purpose, to preserve some part of those worlds in permanent form. I know from my own experience that I am compelled to put my thoughts, feelings, enthusiasms and awareness of the world of sensation into some form which can be stored and returned to by myself and by others over an indefinite period.

If all art can attempt this alchemical process, only great art, that which comes out of deep feeling allied to perfection of technique, can give profound expression to the, often harsh, realities of life, and can do it permanently. The mediocre artist can try to capture the essence of a landscape, and we may want to spend a few minutes looking at it, but Constable, with his deep insight and love of the subjects he depicted, together with a mastery of technique, gave us the landscape for all time, or at least for as long as his works survive. The rejected lover may try to put his feelings into poetry or song, with no expert command of style or form, but Schubert gives us the perfection of *Die Winterreise.*

How does this alchemy work? The processes are by their nature, almost impossible to put into words, and yet we can try in a faltering way to trace the path from the realities of existence to the artistic end-product. At the outset the artist is drawn, compelled as it were, towards some aspect of reality that he wants to give expression to, in a form that can not only be preserved but will give satisfaction and enlightenment to those coming to it. Some emotion, situation, sight, sound, even a mere dream without concrete substance can be the first stimulus to creation. The artist then "translates" this into meaningful words, sounds, images or forms using whatever degree of technical expertise he is in command of. It needs to be said that for the alchemy spoken of above to be successful there must be collaboration between the artist and the recipients of the work. In the performing arts this collaboration is usually three-way: artist- performer- audience, and the common thread linking them together to share in the experience is the "language" used to communicate the emotional or evocative subject matter of the work in question.

Effective art works do not just express moods or states of being but transcend them. "Sad" music does not make us sad- in fact, as we all know from experience, it can be pleasurable. In the opera "Pagliacci" by Leoncavallo, the clown sings of his great anguish and sorrow over the unfaithfulness of his wife in one of the most expressive arias ever written. Although we may sympathise with the clown's emotions, we still derive great satisfaction from this most tragic aria.[1] Why this should be is one of the mysteries of art, and a result of the alchemical process outlined above. In any work of art, the emotion evoked is not meant to be felt by the recipient, although it needs to be recognised. The alchemical process transmutes the woes and joys of this world into something which rises above them and furthermore, gives lasting testament to our fleeting sensations.

[1] Vesti la Giubba, (On with the Motley) from Act 1.

06/10

Explorations

One of the prime impulses in man is the urge to explore, but we must admit, on observing most of humanity, that this urge to explore, this curiosity for new experiences, is rather selective. For most of us it is confined to the spheres of places- trying out a new holiday destination, food- perhaps a foreign restaurant or exotic recipe, and fashion- the latest designer-made outfits for the coming season. In other words, we are willing to subject our physical senses to new sights, tastes, and sensations, but when it comes to our minds and emotions, we are far less willing to venture into new territory. It may

not be unfair to say that the great majority of mankind live in a self-created fog of mental inactivity, an unwillingness to explore the enormous range of thoughts, ideas, and artistic achievements now more freely available than at any former time, by means of modern methods of dissemination. In literature or music for example, few will explore further than perusing the magazines on display at the local newsagents or catching up with the latest popular songs that have found their way into the "charts". Our mental laziness, prejudices and pre-conceptions so often hinder any searching out of new experiences in our reading, listening, or viewing. Whole realms of the imagination and of man's irrepressible creativity will pass us by, if we do not deliberately search for them.

Antoine de St-Exupery wrote, in "Wind, Sand and Stars":

"When a man dies, an unknown world passes away".

Thus, we each have within us a "world" –our experiences, dreams, imaginings, hopes, fears, and desires- that will disappear for ever when we die. But something of that world can be communicated to our fellow men in words, sounds, images or in plastic form- and given permanence before it is lost forever in death. This striving to preserve the fleeting sensations of life, to give them some sort of material form, is, I believe, the root of art. To explore art is to explore other people's worlds.

Early enthusiasms

My own explorations began at an early age with reading- which seemed to come almost instinctively to me, probably because my father was a printer, and there were always proofs lying about waiting to be read and journals of the various typographical associations on hand, together with an inherited supply of old books, of which I recall "Pilgrims Progress" and "The Last of the Mohicans" (neither of which have I ever read all through, incidentally). Later we acquired several children's books from a friend whose own offspring were grown up. Amongst these was an incomplete set of Children's Encyclopaedias (which I still have) dating from around 1923, which I read through several times. It was from these that my early interest in places arose- the more inaccessible and distant the better. I remember I had fantasies centred on Outer Mongolia for a few years and would pore over faded photographs of nomads posed outside yurts, and of arid desert wastes populated by bearded, Chinese looking tribesmen with camels –Bactrian of course!

One of the delights of these encyclopaedias was the chapter on the Greek myths, illustrated with photographs of classical statues and pre-Raphaelite depictions of famous scenes such as Atalanta's race, Circe and her magic potions, the labours of Hercules and the adventures of Perseus. What attracted me then, and now, to these myths is their inventiveness, and imaginative depth, the product of a much younger, uncluttered world, and one in which elemental powers held sway. The ancients saw divinity more clearly than we do. They saw it in the woods, rivers, seas, and heavens of an unpolluted and virtually unpopulated world. What we now call myths were, to them, explanations of otherwise impenetrable mysteries. These mysteries have not yet been solved, but where we see mere atoms, molecules, and the laws of physics, they saw Gods, divinities, giants, and monsters. They made poetry out of the world which we just reduce to material substance and exploit for gain.

My interest in mythology led to the discovery of archaeology, culminating in a visit to Sicily to see at first hand the remains of that ancient world that fascinated me as a youth. And I was not disappointed- Agrigento, Selinunte, Syracuse and Erice cast their spell on me as on all who see them. A later visit to Peru opened my eyes to the fact that civilisations occurred at an early date across the Atlantic. It was in the spectacularly positioned ruins of Machu Pichu and looking across a deep valley to the great peaks of the Andes that I felt, for maybe the first time, the reality of some unseen but omnipotent

divinity, God if you like, only I do not think of God as a person- more as the power that permeates and keeps in existence, everything in the created universe.

Books

By my late teens I was deeply into the exploration of literature: My earliest reading was distinctly European in its scope: Mann, Hesse, Gide, Cocteau, and Camus were early favourites. I remember reading the whole of the "Magic Mountain" at the age of twenty or so. I had plenty of time then, but I have always found time to read- much to the annoyance of some other members of the family who think excessive reading an unnecessary luxury.

A visit to Capri in about 1962, had put Axel Munthe's unforgettable book of memoirs "The Story of San Michele" into my possession, and it has remained one of my favourite books- although I must admit that it is not a literary masterpiece. I was so impressed by it that I even planned to compose an opera based on scenes from it- mercifully never started! I still re-read it with undimmed pleasure every few years or so.

Of British writers, the two who most caught my attention early were H. G. Wells, rather out of fashion these days, but with an extraordinary imaginative gift. Some of his science fiction short stories, "The Time Machine" for example, are still very readable today. And M. R. James whose cleverly written and extremely eerie ghost stories are now regarded as classics but were less well-known when I first read them 40 years ago. James writes in what could be termed a minimalist style, with little preliminary information, or much specific detail on the horrors he hints at. His tales are the literary equivalents of those pictures made from dots which you must join up to see a clear image, only in this case the dots are snippets of information which the reader must link together to get to whatever facts can be ascertained.

Later I came across Melville, Hawthorne and Hemingway and began to realise that there were whole areas of English literature, outside that written by native British authors, waiting to be discovered. In my youthful naivety I was astonished to find that Americans, condemned by my English teacher at school as being unable to spell correctly, had produced superb literature well before my time!

A Literary Duo

Later enthusiasms have developed in some odd ways. A chance hearing of the end of a radio broadcast of "The Dreaming of the Bones" so caught my attention that I immediately sought out everything by Yeats that I could find, poems, plays and prose, and read them with excitement and astonishment. Part of Yeats' fascination lies, I suspect, in the contradictions in his life and work: English in origins (the name is Yorkshire for "Gates"), and with a superb mastery of the English language, and yet obsessed with Ireland's past and present, and hopelessly in love with an unattainable English woman also totally committed to solving Ireland's perennial problem: that of freeing itself from British domination. He was passionate in his denunciation of British rule in Ireland, and yet drew inspiration form Shelley and Shakespeare, and equally scathing about middle- and lower-class Irish whom he saw as being too often ignorant and worldly. I do not subscribe to the idea of "the greatest" this or that- but if I did, then Yeats would rank near the top of the list of "greatest writers" of all time.

My love for the work of Thomas Hardy came more slowly. When I first tried to read him, about 25 years ago, I did not get very far, finding his pace to be slow. When I finally decided to try him again in the late 90s, I was very much moved by his depictions of a lost world: that of 19th century rural England and by his loving observations of ordinary men and women for whom we can feel sympathy, and can

identify with, even in 21st century, urbanised Britain. He transmutes the ordinary things and activities of everyday rural life, made the more poignant for being irretrievably lost now, into a radiant and beautifully crafted prose that will always find admirers.

Art

Some of my early interest in the visual arts has waned with advancing age, but in my youth, I was as full of curiosity about painting as I am now about music and literature. Early discoveries were the work of Klee, Matisse, Miro, and Arp. As you can see, at that time I tended to favour the more abstract painters, in the erroneous belief that realism in art was dead and of little use after the discovery of photography. Now I believe that realism can be more than just an accurate reproduction of reality: in the work of the early Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich for example, which I much admire, there is a haunting and mysterious quality of melancholy and foreboding which I have not found in that of any other artist.

Music

From about my 12th year two sources of musical experiences were available to me. My first piano teacher, an "elderly" lady (she may have been about 50 or so, but to me she seemed ancient)- occasionally took me, with one or two of her other pupils to the Wigmore Hall in central London, to hear pianists performing in the Sunday afternoon concerts. I only recall one name, that of the Swiss pianist Albert Ferber, but I can remember that I heard music by the standard great masters as well as by Liszt, Reger, Roussel and Debussy at these events, and of being impressed by the aura of their being special occasions of an almost religious solemnity. The sudden dimming of lights, the hush in the audience, the great black Steinway and its empty music stool awaiting an occupant, the arrival on stage of the performer in evening dress and the eager anticipation of the first notes all remain some of my cherished early memories of the impact that organised music-making can have on a young mind. To me it seemed, as the music progressed, as if some other worldly and mysterious power was being brought into life, as if the sounds had some tactile and material existence and were not just vibrations transmitted to my ears. Each work had its own textures, shapes, and colours, and presented its own resonances of moods and emotions which I could hardly put into words, but of which I was keenly aware.

I was never conscious of anything "old" in the music that I responded to so positively as a youth. To me it was certainly not "intellectual music by dead composers" as some young people regard it. On the contrary the music seemed as if freshly conceived and created just for my pleasure. It was popular music of the "commercial" variety which sounded (and still does sound) old fashioned and worn-out with its reliance on the re-cycling of stock chords and melodic formulae. It has always been a mystery to me that so many people, who keenly desire the latest cars, telephones, fashions, and furnishings, are satisfied with the same, boring old clichés in their music. I guess the root of the matter is that popular music is not really listened to in depth- it would be intolerable if it was! Overall, it is a background, and the actual sounds are not important compared to the aura surrounding the personalities who "perform" it, together with all the sometimes lurid, details of their private lives, ambitions, successes, and failures.

The other source of music was the radio. At the time I began to listen, classical music was broadcast on two channels: standard and light classics were sometimes broadcast on the Home Service, and less familiar works were put out by what was then called "The Third Programme" and which later became Radio 3. I used to look forward to reading through my weekly copy of *Radio Times*, and circling in red ink all the broadcasts of music which seemed to be of some interest, usually modern and unfamiliar.

Through this I got to know a large body of work by many composers active during the first half of the 20th century including Scriabin, Szymanowski, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Berg, Messiaen, Britten, and Tippett. The list could be extended almost indefinitely to include composers and works that I came to through recordings, which I have always collected, first on "long play" and now on compact disc.

My earliest enthusiasms were for those composers that, as a young and inexperienced composer myself, I most wanted to sound like: Debussy and Britten were a big influence in my late teens and early 20s. When I got stuck on a piece, I would think "now what would Britten do"- go to the piano to play through parts of *Peter Grimes* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* and usually be able to continue with my own work, problems solved, for the time being at least.

Later interests have included the work of Brahms, Liszt, Stravinsky, Mahler, Berg and Henze as being of special significance to me for longer or shorter periods. Most recently I have turned increasingly to "early" music- that of the Renaissance and Baroque periods- as an antidote to what I am finding is more and more becoming a very over-complex and confusing world, with too many divergent musical styles all going along together. Right now, we have neo-romanticism, minimalism, the "new complexity school", jazz-classical crossovers, and diehard avant-gardism all co-existing with an enormous quantity of popular music, much of it mass-produced, and all oppressive in its overwhelming bulk. I know and respect the attitude that welcomes the present diversity of musical idioms- but I am not sure I am fully happy with it. I suspect that "diversity" may, all too often, be a cover for "mediocrity". We undoubtedly *do* have many talents among composers, but where are those who can speak in a universally comprehensible language, and fill entire concert halls with performances of their works as was a feature of musical life in the 18th and 19th centuries?

Travel

Travel and books have always been intertwined in my life. Any visit of more than a day or two to a place that I have not been to before, or not for some time, usually includes a bookshop and the purchase of some item of interest relevant to the locality. Thus, I have shelves full of guidebooks and topographical literature on just about every corner of the realm, with special emphasis on the West Country, Wales, Scotland, and the county in which I now reside: Surrey. I nearly always visit first and read later, which means that some interesting things are all too often missed through lack of preliminary investigation. But the reading is a way of prolonging the pleasure of the visit and can occasionally be superior to it if the roads have been blocked or the weather unseasonable.

Overseas travel came early in my life with family holidays in Belgium, Denmark, Holland, Italy, Turkey, and Switzerland. Over the last 20 years my family connections –my wife is from Malaysia- and my work as an examiner have sent me often to the Far East, usually Malaysia, but also for shorter periods to Singapore, Brunei, and Indonesia. The total time that I have spent over there must by now be about a year or so, so that my first impressions of exotic tropical warmth and unfamiliar surroundings have now faded. I sometimes feel divided between two worlds- when in England, especially in the Winter, I long for the feel of warm and humid tropical air, but when in the Far East I miss the changeable British climate, the long summer days, and the general "oldness" of the British environment, where the history of hundreds of years is evident in cities, towns, and villages throughout the land. Outside of a few preserved areas there is not much in Malaysia more than 50 years old.

A Surrey village

In London of course, it is the other way round. Certainly, in the southwest of the city where I live now, many buildings are well over a century old, and are zealously guarded from demolition or unsightly alteration by laws strictly enforced. Since moving to Surrey ten years ago from over the river, I have

become keenly interested in that county, which is so often passed through but seldom explored. If you take the main road from Guildford to Dorking, you will notice that it rises steeply after Clandon and comes out on a high plateau with fine views across the Weald and its hills, including Leith Hill, the highest point in southeast England. Then if you proceed a little further and turn right on to a side road you will come to the village of Shere. If any place could be said to represent all that is most admired in an English village, then Shere would be it. Founded in Saxon times, it is a mere cluster of ancient houses around a church and inn, with a clear, shallow stream, the Tillingbourne, running through its centre. There is an old stone bridge over this stream upon which you can while away the minutes watching the ducks and swans and admiring the views of overhanging willows and grassy banks. Cottage gardens are colourful all year round because winters are short and generally mild in Shere, nestling in its valley. Although well known to tourists out for a day from London, no matter how many visitors are there, its charm never seems to fade or be obliterated. When I am far away in some great oriental city this is the one seemingly insignificant spot to which my thoughts most often gravitate.

Now into my seventh decade, I am aware that my explorations into the arts have hardly begun, and that there are still vast tracts of territory, both physical and artistic that I have not visited. I am also conscious of my ignorance of philosophy and the sciences, of which I keep meaning to gain more knowledge but never seem to get round to. But, alas, one cannot get to know everything in one lifetime- and let us not forget that the desire for knowledge was the downfall of humanity and caused us to be expelled from the Garden of Eden. Is it not true that ultimately, when we take account of how are lives are going to be remembered by those who outlive us, it is what we are and what we do that matter and not what we know?

But, despite this, the old urge to explore is hard to overcome and I hope to continue my explorations of art, thought and places for as long as possible. After all, I still have not visited Outer Mongolia.

06/10

Poems

Santubong[10]

Beautiful the turquoise bay,

Beautiful the emerald mountains,

But how indifferent to our fate!

Serenely stand the emerald mountains

As if they know the answer

To man's eternal question.

[10] A resort on the coast of Sarawak near the city of Kuching.

We always seek for higher meanings

But these myriads of palms, these mountains and this sea

Are just content to be.

Silent flashes

Illuminate the Western horizon

Somewhere they're enjoying the downpour.

Now it's our turn

As a thousand drummers

Beat on the roof of our bungalow.

Like a glowing golden pillar

The setting sun

Hovers over the bay.

How cool the mountains look

But we step from the air-conditioned car

Into the draught from a furnace.

Homage to Virginia Woolf

A hundred-thousand blossoms

Stare at the sea, gaze at the sky

But they see nothing[11]

Winter haiku

Frost glitters on the road

An arc of hills ablaze with lights

How long these icy winter nights

[11] This refers to a sentence in *To the Lighthouse* in which flowers are said to be "terrible" because they see nothing.

Like a sudden oasis

In the grey, cold street

The greengrocer's stall

A filigree of green and gold

The twigs and branches of this bare tree

Lit by the winter sun

Pale January sunshine

Brings relief

To the shivering palms

In a distant desert the din of war

But here the cheerful woodpecker

Drums Spring's arrival

(2003)

Occasional Haiku

In the early mist

Distant hills & clouds

One cannot tell them apart

(Kent Dec. 2nd, 2004)

A poor summer

But this radiant October dawn

Promises warmth

As if a child again

I beheld with wonder

A rainbow in the Eastern sky

In the early light of dawn

My sleep -full of

Confused dreams

Early summer morn-
Only the ticking clock
Breaks the silence

Lying in bed, I observe
The open wardrobe
Full of old clothes

(31st July 2016)

From the tree-top, darting
In flashes of black and white:
Three magpies
(5th August 2018)

Three Suffolk Poems

Aldeburgh

Where earth, sea and sky conjoin
and hedged about with banks of shingle
shaped by a relentless sea-a town.

Fish, music and a famous poet,
and for me, here, now,
words come more readily.

Along its one main street:
multi-coloured, many- shaped
dwellings [no two the same]
cling closely together
as if for protection against the
battering storms of winter.

Lord's Day morning -
and at the Parish Church
of St. Peter and St. Paul
they're ringing the changes
(but only a touch)

Later we take the road to Snape,
hopefully to arrive
in time for lunch.

The North Sea

In calm-
shimmering,
leaden grey,
old gold and the
pale translucent green
of certain kinds of jade.

In storm-
its immeasurable

force pounds, smooths
and heaves into
ridges the living
rock it shatters into
countless fragments.

In the dark months
it conveys that wind
from the East that
withers the land
and brings numb misery
to every living thing.

Dunwich

Man *versus* nature,

and here nature
(so far) has won.

And that is not
entirely displeasing
because we need
reminders of our place in the
scheme of things.

Not sudden painful reminders
(earthquake, storm, flood)
but rather to see
the slow retreat

of humanity

in this fragment-
all that is left
as witness
to centuries of,
no doubt
necessary, toil.

[August 2018]

Possibilities

Is there a heaven?
Is there a hell?
Or….
do we pass from
knowing to unknowing,
light to dark,
sound to silence,
feeling to not-feeling?

Does it all end in a
blank, a nothingness, as it
was before we came?

Memory

Why is it that
certain memories
of idle moments,
apparently trivial,
never depart-
while most seem to
disappear for ever?

Lake Garda-

Fifty years ago.

Mist-

no horizon.

Water and sky were

one white haze,

the sun a dazzle

of light so intense as to

hurt the eyes.

I gazed into this infinity

of whiteness, blank

and featureless as my

undiscerned future.

Eternity

Do not believe the men of science.

There never was a bang,

big or otherwise.

The universe (and the power behind it)

never did begin, nor will it end.

Its state is an eternal present-ness

but ever moving, ever changing.

Rubber Road (Kuching, Sarawak)

Jalan Rubber…

Perhaps a mile of straight road

laid out by the Victorian British,
or their descendants. . .
At one end, the white
solidity of commerce
dominates-
at the other it dwindles
to a kampong and a
footbridge over the
Sarawak River.
darkly and relentlessly
flowing
to the South China Sea.

The old house - auntie's house-
approached by a narrow lane-
always the barking of dogs…

I stand outside,
and smoke a late cigar,
savouring the
accumulated warmth
of aeons of tropical
days and nights.

Morning, and the bright
voices of children sound
from the school next door:
the times- tables
inculcated at what
a tender age
to prepare the next

generation of accountants
and bankers, no doubt….

Here where I linger
by the porch,
lizards dart, as
quick as thought
along the aging walls-
one can never
catch them.

Odours of the city:
petrol fumes,
ripening durian,
open drains
waft about the
secluded garden with its
oriental clutter of
pots, pans,
stacked newspapers,
earthenware containers
full of exotic plants,
whose leaves, shiny and
darkly verdant,
mirror the light of a
cloud-obscured but
dazzling sun.