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London Cello Society Newsletter

A Cello Journalist's Journey

Tim Janof

In 2001, I found myself sharing a taxi with Dutch cellist, Anner Bylsma, who was perhaps best known and loved for his performances and recordings of the Bach Cello Suites. We were on our way to the Royal Northern College of Music's Cello Festival in Manchester, which was the premier cello celebration in the world at the time. As we discussed what his detractors were saying about his book, *Bach, The Fencing Master*, I couldn't help but note how surreal it was that this was actually happening – that I was spending time with one of my cello idols. It had been 15 years since my cello professor and former Leonard Rose student, Toby Saks, had first played his revelatory 1979 Bach Suite recording for her studio. Having grown up on Pablo Casals' more earthy rendition, Bylsma's velvety, sonorous tones transported me into spine-tingling ecstasy. Anner Bylsma's Bach had changed me, and there he was, right in front of me.

This moment was not just happenstance, however, it was but a moment in time in my own cello journey while documenting some of the greatest cellists and cello pedagogues in the world, including Janos Starker, Mstislav Rostropovich, Lynn Harrell, Zara Nelsova, Steven Isserlis and roughly 80 others. It was the result of countless hours in front of a computer, editing interview after interview, following a strict one-page-per-day regimen and often more, as I became absorbed in the material. It was also the result of standing on the shoulders of giants.

My journey began with David Blum and his 1980 book, *Casals and the Art of Interpretation*. His book demonstrated that one could write and talk about music in a palpable and therefore helpful way. As luck would have it, David Blum lived near Seattle, my hometown, so Toby Saks invited him to give a presentation on Pablo Casals at her studio. It was after his presentation that I privately asked my very first hard-hitting interview question, as an 18-year-old: "If Pablo Casals was so great, why doesn't anybody play like him anymore?" Mr Blum loved my question and wished I had asked it publicly. He responded to the effect that while tastes change, Casals'

greatness transcended time. I would later go on to ask impertinent questions of others, such as asking Janos Starker, 'What's wrong with getting excited?'

My next inspiration was Eva Heinitz, who was my primary cello teacher. She had been classmates with Gregor Piatigorsky and Raya Garbousova in Hugo Becker's class in Berlin, and had played string quartets with physicist, Albert Einstein. She was known for touring with both the cello and viola da gamba and was called 'the Wanda Landowska of the Viola da Gamba'. She raised eyebrows in the then-nascent Early Music community when she sheepishly added an endpin to her viola da gamba, though with her friend Paul Hindemith's blessing. She had grown tired of her instrument slipping through her gowns during performances. Imagine my good fortune to have the opportunity to study with someone of her historic stature.

My lessons with Eva Heinitz began when she was in her late eighties, when, to put it mildly, she had established her own fully formed ideas about how music should and most definitely should *not* be played. She was the perfect person to propel me along my path, because she infused in me a point of view that provided a solid basis for comparison when listening to other musicians. In other words, without her influence, which shines through in many of my questions and comments, I may not have ended up in that taxi with Anner Bylsma.

It was during this time that I became President of the Seattle Violoncello Society. Part of my duties were to put together the Society's newsletter, a task that I poured myself into. Instead of being just a place for local announcements, I wrote articles, polled Seattle Symphony cellists on questions like, 'Is there such as a thing as a wrong interpretation?', and I did my very first interview with David Tonkonogui, a wonderful Russian cellist in the Seattle Symphony. I was trying to generate 'flow' in Seattle's cello community.

Tim Janof

In 1995, as my activities were winding down with the Seattle Violoncello Society, I was called by John Michel, cello professor at Central Washington University, who had just founded the Internet Cello Society. He had been reading my newsletters and thought my work would be a good fit for his fledgling group. At the time, I didn't even know what the internet was – very few people did – but I agreed to give it a try. At first, I would write articles and send them to him on floppy disks through the postal service. Who knew the internet would become so pervasive?

The London Cello Society announces with great pleasure our newest adventure. We have twinned with the Association Française du Violoncelle, joining hands and hearts and minds in our common goal with our French cello brothers and sisters. On the cards are joint projects based on the Popper 40 Studies, Duport, Father of Modern Cello-Playing and the Elgar Cello Concerto.
Stay tuned for what promises to be a fruitful collaboration!

The great thing about the internet is that there are no printing costs, so there were no length restrictions. I could let my subjects tell their story and share their thoughts for as long as they wanted. In my interview with 1966 Tchaikovsky Silver Medallist, Stephen Kates, for example, I knew that he was terminally ill, so I let him talk for as long as he could, and talk he did, resulting in my longest interview (roughly 24 pages). The internet was the perfect venue for long-form conversations.

My interviews started out as essentially a data collection project. In the beginning, I asked the same questions of each subject with the idea that someone would come later to analyse the variety of opinions. I was looking for guiding principles that would help the reader (and myself) reach a higher level. I made discoveries along the way that I found helpful, like the seemingly bizarre notion of time travel, but that is the subject of another article.

I found the Bach Cello Suites to be an endless source of great material, though after a while, it began to feel as if Bach were the third rail of forbidden dinner topics, after religion and politics. Former New York Philharmonic cellist and historian Dimitry Markevitch said of Bylsma: 'I like Bylsma very much, and I think he does a lot of good, but I don't agree with his latest approach.' In the taxi, Bylsma said in response to Markevitch: 'Who is he anyway?' And Arto Noras perhaps spoke for many when he said: 'I prefer not to perform Bach these days. It has become too complicated and too controversial a subject.' Yes, I occasionally played people off each other.

I'll never forget sitting across the table from Mstislav Rostropovich, trying to keep my composure while on the verge of tears. Here was the man who had famously collaborated with Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Britten, to name just a few composers who dedicated over 100 works to him. Here was the man who stood up against the Soviet system to defend author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and the one who played Bach in protest at the Berlin Wall. My challenge was determining which questions to ask someone who had been interviewed thousands of times. With Zuill Bailey's help, I went into the interview well armed. I only had 20 minutes with him, and the interview would be slowed by the use of an interpreter, so I had to make every second count. Though he kept meandering to his standard talking points, there are some gems in that brief exchange, like why he avoided the Elgar Concerto, a piece he considered 'somewhat naïve'. He died the following year.
I found Janos Starker so fascinating I interviewed him twice (Steven Isserlis too). The combination of his hypnotically penetrating eyes, introversion and brief but self-contained answers were irresistible. There seemed to be no question he hadn't already considered for decades, which meant he was able to distil his thoughts into as few words as possible. It was as if he were reciting canons, leaving little room for discussion. 'If you get excited, you lose control.' Next question.

There came a point where my mission changed from mere data collection to documenting history. Not only was I documenting the person I was talking to, but I was documenting their teachers as well, such as Mischa Maisky enthusing about his studies with both Rostropovich and Piatigorsky. I also realised that my bucket-list interview subjects were ageing, so there was an increased urgency to talk to as many as I could before it was too late. I feel so fortunate to have documented cellists such as Laszlo Varga, Aldo Parisot, Orlando Cole, George Neikrug, Gerhard Mantel, Eleonore Schoenfeld, Dimitry Markevitch, Siegfried Palm and Bernard Greenhouse. My biggest regrets are that I missed Leslie Parnas (1962 Tchaikovsky Competition Silver Medallist), Robert LaMarchina (former Feuermann student and Chicago Symphony Principal cellist) and Harvey Shapiro (former NBC Orchestra cellist under Toscanini).

I feel so fortunate to have been able to spend time with my cello heroes. They serve as my inspiration to this day. I am excited that CelloBello agreed to house the Internet Cello Society archives so that the stories of cellists of my generation and before will not be lost. I am also gratified that CelloBello continues to document today's cellists, though in a video or live chat format. Our cellistic youth need to hear the stories of their own idols.

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Tim Janof's interviews can be found at CelloBello.org.

Of Special Interest

Can We Reinspire the Link Between Playing and Composing?

Playing by ear, improvising and composing may be easier than you think, says composer and cellist Joanna Borrett

It's exhilarating, although a bit weird, to start a new career in your sixties. The good thing is that you feel you have nothing to lose, and your life experience gives you perspective. The less good thing, if you love what you're doing, is the time you realise you have already lost.

I started composing recently and, for me, it has felt intoxicatingly liberating, but it took me almost a lifetime to believe composing was a possibility.

The process began eleven years ago when I formed a professional duo with a violinist colleague. We quickly realised there was hardly any repertoire for violin and cello duet and started writing our own arrangements. I loved doing this and routinely made up new introductions, middle sections and endings. Even so, it was only in 2018 that it occurred to me that perhaps I could write an original tune of my own.

Until then, in my head, composing had been almost mythical: I truly believed that, unless you were a genius who wrote symphonies at the age of five, it was impossible. Luckily, my frustration with many aspects of classical music, and a longing for more freedom on the cello, motivated me to teach myself to play by ear and improvise. Then I had a lesson on piano improvisation with the outstanding teacher Lucinda Mackworth-Young and suddenly everything made sense: I understood simple chord structure, and composing seemed easy.

Folk and Beyond and Clan

The first piece I wrote was *Morning Prelude*, which is in my *Folk and Beyond* collection. My inspiration was wanting to reassure my twin baby grandsons that the world was a good place because they seemed so vulnerable in the first few weeks after they were born. I wrote an introduction of harmonics to make the music sound tentative and uncertain and followed this with a calm, flowing tune. Other pieces in *Folk and Beyond* have different moods: in *Avanti*, I wanted to express a feeling aligned to Kate Bush's *Running Up That Hill*; in *Sleazy*, I imagined what being in a nightclub might feel like; in *Summer Memory*, I aimed to create the timelessness and passion of a summer's day, whereas *Panache*, with its fun foot-stamping, is all about flamenco.

When cellists play the pieces, I would love them to use their own ideas and experiences to decide what they feel the music is about – even if their ideas are quite different from mine. And I'm happy for players to add their own special effects or dynamics – as they probably would have done in Baroque times. For me, this is what breathes lifeblood into performance and helps spark a sense of connection.

This is especially true of *Clan* – my second cello and piano book. ***Clan*** is a narrative piece that tells the tale of an ancient Scottish clan in ten short movements. As you journey through the book, the story is outlined through the titles of the pieces and there's plenty of opportunity to really make the music your own.

Connecting Folk to Classical

Looking back now on my experience of the classical music world, I do wonder if the link between playing, improvising and composing could be made simpler … as it is, for example, in folk music. I feel that the folk world has much that the classical world can learn from. Folk musicians tend to be more relaxed and at one with their instruments. While this is partly because classical music is more technically demanding, the basic principles of playing are the same, making the differences in approach all the more striking.

Then there's playing by ear, which is standard in folk music. It seems a pity that this isn't taught in the first lesson – alongside learning to read music. And wouldn't pupils be more enthusiastic about scales, theory and aural tests – those dreaded pillars of classical training – if they were also seen as useful tools to help you play by ear and improvise?

The World Where Nothing is Wrong

I think it's worth cellists spending a few minutes of their practice experimenting with playing by ear and improvising. You could begin by choosing a key and working out how to play a series of simple tunes by ear. Then perhaps work out the easiest

chords to accompany your tune – usually I, IV and V. Or you could experiment with special effects on the cello. Try expressing your current mood … choose a key and time signature to give structure … and see what happens. There are lots of videos about improvising on YouTube, and the lovely thing is that improvising is your own … you can do exactly what you want.

Who knows what we might become if we have the possibility opened up to us? Playing by ear, improvising and composing – at some level – are things anyone can do. I don't think it helps if classical music seems legendary or distant. Art may be wonderful but, ultimately, it's a passionate expression of strong feelings – and that's something all of us can understand.

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Joanna's cello and piano books *Folk and Beyond* and *Clan* are published by Kevin Mayhew: www.kevinmayhew.com. Recordings of the pieces are on YouTube. The string orchestra version of *Clan* will be published later this year.
Inspiration Cello! – Joanna's three volumes of cello duets – are published by United Music Publishers: ump.co.uk
Joanna also runs cello workshops on playing by ear and improvisation. For more information on this, or on any of her music, please email Joanna at: jbcontact@btinternet.com

About Jean-Baptiste Masse:
When Hobby Meets Work, or the Story of the Battle Between the Bass Viol and the Cello

• Ellen Moerman

In daily life, I am a translator specialising in legal texts and spare time has to be fairly shared between the piano and the cello. The boundary is usually quite clear, but once in a while, texts about music cross my path. And I can't resist them. There are programme notes for concerts, leaflets for music courses and then there was that handbook on how to play the trumpet. I didn't know the first thing about trumpets. You can't really write about trumpets if you don't know how they work, so that was a bit of a teaser. But nothing could have prepared me for the translation of the about-to-be-published introduction to Volume IV of Jean-Baptiste Masse's Sonatas for two cellos.

The score had been hiding quietly in the rare books department of the Bibliothèque Inguimbertine in Carpentras, France, where it was discovered by local cello teacher and performer Catherine Marchand. Together with Ludovic Fina, Italian expert and keen amateur player of the cello piccolo, Catherine had produced a printed edition of this volume. Would it be an idea to add an English translation of the introduction and notes? she asked me. I thought it might be and rashly offered to help out.

It turned out to be one of the more challenging jobs but also one of the most satisfying. I discovered a world of cello rivalry at the beginning of the long eighteenth century, a century in which Italy and France battled for hegemony on the stage; when Jacques-Martin Hotteterre and Johann Joachim Quantz vied for the flute players' attention; when Quantz's excellent but still anonymous French translator delicately suggested that the German musical *a*, *b*, *c* might perhaps be slightly better than the unsubtle *do*, *re*, *mi* (but firmly replaced Quantz's German terminology with the more established Italian one); and when Johannes Enschedé in Haarlem fought Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf in Leipzig for the top position in the European music publishing market by showing off his new mobile type in a beautiful, Dutch-language edition of Leopold Mozart's *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule*.

Still, the battle between the bass viol and the cello, and the cello's steady rise in the music world and the hierarchy of instruments, were new territory for me. The short text threw many classic translation problems at me: some were factual, such as the correct terminology for the instruments, 'cello piccolo', 'basse de viole' or the 'violoncello' and required a fair amount of reading up on all these instruments – a visit to Rare Books and Music at the British Library was called for. Other queries were more stylistic: do I follow Fielding or Swift to reflect Hubert Le Blanc's irony in the quote from his *Défense de la basse-viole contre les entreprises du violon et les prétentions du violoncelle (Defence of the Bass Viol Against the Ploys of the Violin and the Claims of the Violoncello)*?

A very typical and utterly satisfying challenge was perhaps the translation of 'les 24 violons du Roi'. This was the French king's band of musicians (of whom J.B. Masse was one) – an idea poached from England in the sixteenth century. Charles Burney refers to the French band as 'the King's fiddlers', but that was over two centuries ago. Today's academic works tend to retain the French name. The translator always asks: 'Who is my reader?' I suspect my readers will be familiar with Burney and his words add a historical flavour that cannot possibly confuse anyone. Anyway, I liked Burney's description. So much for objective translation!

Marchand and Fina argue that J.B. Masse should be added to the list of early advocates of the cello such as Martin Berteau, Jean-Baptiste Barrière and Jean-Baptiste Canavas. The five other Masse volumes of works for two cellos can be found on the *Gallica* site of the Bibliothèque nationale de France and on the International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP). Jean-Baptiste Masse, *Sonates à deux violoncelles (ou deux bassons)* (1741) (Musicordes, 2022) now complete the set, see Musicordes.fr.

Having learned a bit about my cello's prehistory and completed the translation, I shall now try my hand (and bow) at playing these rather enjoyable sonatas. It will make a nice change from translating judgements.

Cello Talk

An Audience Always Responds to Warmth • Mats Lidström

Graeme Humphrey, for thirty years a piano professor at the Royal Academy of Music and the first teacher of my youngest son, summed up our role as musicians in the most fundamental terms while examining a certain piano passage during one of the lessons. He said: 'Remember, an audience always responds to warmth'.

What makes us detect warmth in a person, in a musician? Warmth is about reaching out and giving unreservedly. Warmth is true and honest, and is – without exception – always detected by the audience. It is detected for the simple reason that the audience looks for it in the performer. Warmth breaks barriers. For the listener, it creates a bridge they want to cross, since warmth is the one way to the listener's heart. I believe that the performer who attracts an audience the most is one who shows a genuine interest in *them*. If he or she has the courage to display warmth and vulnerability, the audience can easily identify with that. It speaks to them because it has become personal. Ultimately, it all comes down to priorities, of course. For the performer and for the listener alike.

Warmth is the essential ingredient in music-making, but there are other alternative routes to attracting an audience. One may choose to dazzle, to impress with dexterity and volume, to find the way of grabbing them by the collar. So, one has to decide for oneself, what invites dialogue? And whether that bridge to ones' audience was the priority in the first place? When I speak to artists and colleagues about our profession, I develop an immediate trust for the artistry of those who relate and refer to their audience. During the pandemic, I received an internet radio as a birthday present, which enabled me to listen to *Just a Minute* whenever I wanted. *Just a Minute*, one of the longest-running BBC radio shows, is performed in front of a 'live' audience. The host, Nicholas Parsons, would constantly refer to the audience. He drew them in, made them feel present, gave them a role, and was always sensitive to their reactions, on which he would also comment. We, the musicians, bow to the audience and we thank them. But then, usually, we return to our space, the stage, thereby creating a situation of us and them. But with the privilege of facing an audience comes a wonderful opportunity. The hall vibrates from positivism and support by an excited crowd who has bought tickets for something they have decided was worth spending their money on. They wish only the very best of the performer, and they are curious and eager to find out what he or she is about and capable of. It is a special moment. So, instead of appearing untouchable to them, we can share that stage with them, share everything that goes on up there, talk to them through music rather than in between pieces.

Can a teacher teach warmth? We live in times which

may not exactly favour romanticism; the ever-evolving trends on various social media platforms dictate everyday life, especially for the young. If one is spending a substantial amount of time every day on these platforms, interacting with the world at a distance, it would take great personal strength to trust that your own beliefs and aspirations are good enough for you. For example, a student may have come to the conclusion that sensuality, beauty and charm are components that match his or her artistic vision. Where is support for such a vision to be found today, especially among their peers who are equally bombarded by social media platforms? A teacher could be that support.

I believe warmth requires a wide range of knowledge: in broader terms, historical knowledge about people and nations; and, closer to home, knowledge relating to cello-playing such as composers, repertoire and performers. Who were the cellists before me? Whose banner have I picked up? The teacher can display the beautiful world of music and music history, showing the unique link which runs between different epochs, and how it is all connected throughout the ages. And the art of teaching is to help the student see that this link also runs to them. To realise that we fit in creates motivation and joy, two factors which may lead to hard work. As violinist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg writes: 'Freedom of the instrument is based on work.'

With our musical intelligence, we create order, structure, shape and form, and when this is established, it allows for time to expand on musical expression and imagination. Imagination leads to strong artistic integrity because to the listener we appear uninhibited, unlimited, and, to me personally and most importantly, non-predictable. Imagination promises musical expression, but a solid technique delivers it. Therefore, it would not be fair to demand outright from a student that they change the colour on certain notes (an often-used phrase) or to produce a swift *crescendo* or *diminuendo*, if they haven't been taught to do so. It is not enough to just 'feel' a colour change within. It may be that that is where it starts, as a feeling and vision within, but mainly it is about possessing the different techniques in order to execute. A *diminuendo* or a *crescendo* requires the control of bow speed and weight-input. To play a short note in *pp* without losing control of the sound requires the concept of and the ability to offload weight of the right arm. To play a beautiful *glissando* requires the control of the weight of the arm and the rapid change of weight-input, at the same time, having the ability to choose the speed of the *glissando* and sound for the finishing note, in order to show that a shift is not about transportation but interpretation. A teacher also needs to make the student aware of what works in a concert hall, such as the articulation or type of vibrato required to make an idea carry to the very last row? What is the difference for the listener sitting in row 30 compared to that in row 5? Our beautiful ideas must not remain in our heads. Therefore, the student must be *taught* the actual techniques for bringing the ideas across.

The teacher observes, assesses and applies a method, by which a platform of all technical aspects of cello-playing needs to be addressed. Equipped with the ability to swiftly move between different techniques, such as moving from *legato* to *spiccato* or from *pp* to *ff*, employing minimised string crossings or a varied vibrato, will give the player not only the ability but also the confidence to try different ideas – to experiment for the sake of variation. Warmth, charm and sensuality are, of course, choices to be made ultimately by the student. They may have other priorities, but a teacher can put them on the map, and return to them in their teaching regularly. To achieve the above platform, I mainly use:

• Sevcik, *School of Bowing Technique*, Op. 2 and *Changes of Position and Preparatory Scale Studie*s, Op. 8 (I would not be in a hurry for Op. 3; they are attractive little pieces but miles away from Op. 2)
• Bernhard Cossmann, *Studies for Developing Agility, Strength of Fingers and Purity of Intonation*
• Pierre van de Vyvère, *64 Études et exercices pour violoncelle* (Alphonse Leduc)

as well as my own books:
• *The Essential Warm-up Routine for Cellists*
• *The Beauty of Scales*
• *Heritage: Cello Etudes of Past Masters*

In addition, I am accompanied by the words of da Vinci, 'Poor is the student who does not surpass their teacher', or my own version, *Poor is the teacher who does not empower the student to surpass them.*

As William Pleeth so eloquently states in his book *Cello*: 'Our heart has the most wonderful partner in our hands. Their gestures are the outward expression of what we feel inside.' This means that Beauty should not be discarded as old-fashioned – something belonging to the players of yesteryear. There is beauty not only in pretty things, Beauty in a pure form, spiritual, profound, witty or even perfumed, and there are many ways to display it. In his cello method, published in 1840, Bernhard Romberg writes about *Leichtigkeit, Grazie und Schönheit des Violoncellospiels* – lightness, grace and a wish for beauty subscribes to charm – which may serve as a path, even as a shortcut, to love.

From our Members

• From Noel Moffat

'And So – Six Years of Cello – Where are We Now and Where are We Heading Music-Wise?' Or – 'The Rise of the Middle-Feeder Cellists'

We've passed a few exams maybe, practised mightily in our evening college classes, possibly been invited to perform a couple of bars of solo cello, if we have been lucky. Again, if we are fortunate enough to have a private teacher, we would have studied some theory and practised hard. We can now stay in tune most of the time, maintain a pulse (mostly), look occasionally at the dynamics, and respect the composer's intentions, hopefully. Hallelujah! We've done pretty well. We sound like we are playing a recognisable piece of music; our end of term mini-concerts draw applause from friends and relatives.

Have we become cellists? Can we call ourselves cellists, if we are asked? A definite resounding and thunderous 'YES', in my opinion. 'Why?', some might ask. The answer lies in us, the students, and in the music. Even when performed by the galactico artists, top ensembles and the mighty orchestras, the aim of playing music is surely to bring joy, exhilaration and blissful pleasure – call it what you will – to both artists and audience. Absolute perfection is not a prerequisite for this to occur, although what icing on the cake when it happens!

I have taken the liberty of christening our band of brothers and sisters, our huge group of enthusiastic amateur musicians, doing our best to play our music, as the 'middle feeders'. We live musically in that big goldfish bowl inhabited by all of us from beginner right up to galactico; I've placed us somewhere around the middle but above the absolute bowl bottom!

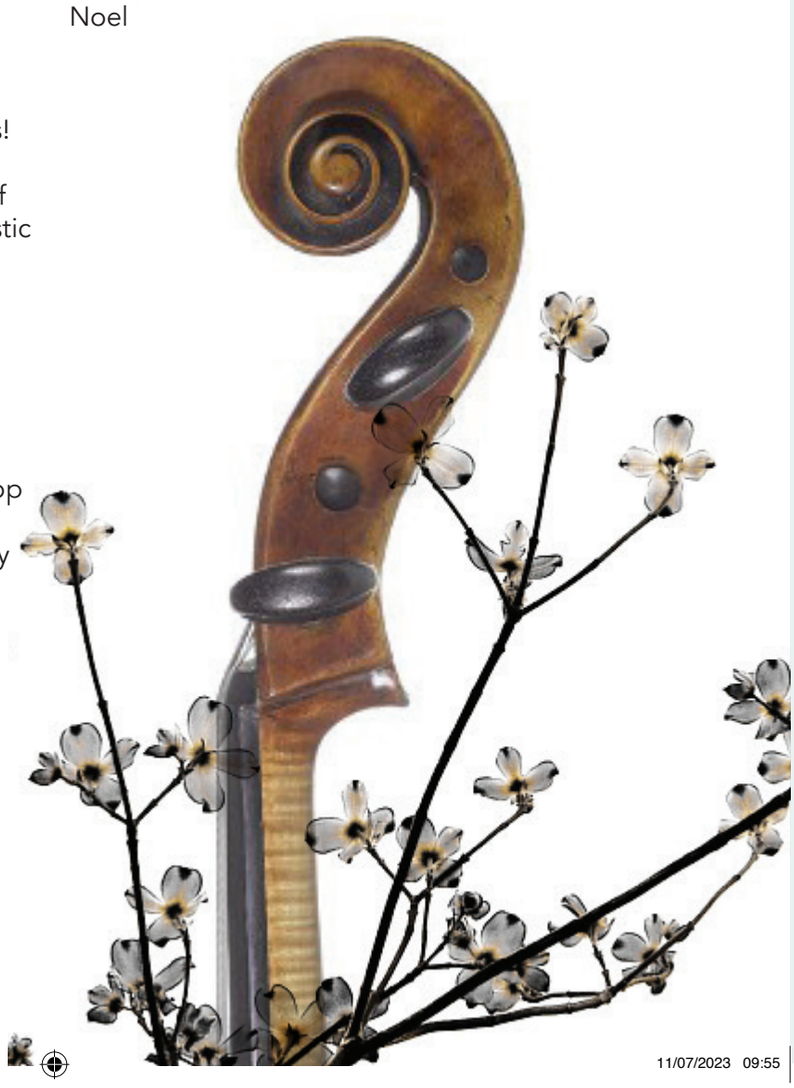
Galacticos and professionals inhabit the very top region of the bowl as is right and proper; the college kids live just under this region, naturally awaiting their rightful place in the professional milieu as time goes by, followed by us the 'middle feeders'.

The point I am attempting to make is this: numerically, I suspect we middle feeders far outnumber all the other bowl inhabitants combined by a huge margin. Why are we not invited, or given formal regular access to the facilities, teaching staff and so on of the prestigious music colleges? Surely it is not beyond the wit of man to sort something out here. Much of the infrastructure of these palaces has been heftily taxpayer funded over many years, not discounting huge student contributions of course.

Surely the colleges have significant downtime and under-utilisation of facilities for long periods of the academic year. Could the middle feeders not have the thrill of experiencing a little of the music graduate/undergraduate experience which many of us crave?

A bit of a moan, I know, from your musically reconstructed, more thoughtful(?) correspondent. See what the cello has done to me! My teachers have much to answer for, LOL.

Love you all,
Noel



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