

The House Governor

When I first arrived at the school, a regime was in place for which I had in no way been prepared. The Headmaster - or House Governor - Harry Vickers (known as 'The Boss'), was a great believer in an army-style austere existence for the boys. His sometimes immensely long speeches in assembly - particularly at the ends of term - occasionally led to the fainting of one or two of the residents, but he carried on requiring that we all stand listening for as long as he wanted to speak.

He was a great lover of the sort of hymn singing that reminded him of the march of good Christians. 'Onward Christian Soldiers' and 'He Who Would True Valour See' [particularly the latter: No 373 in the BBC Hymn Book - never to be forgotten...] were his favourites. Although he presided over a school that had a reputation for music, he, himself, consistently claimed that he was a philistine musically, although I cannot quite believe that he was not exaggerating.

He was feared, as headmasters tend to be, because he had little one-on-one contact with individual boys, and when we did encounter him, it was usually for severe punishment. In my later years, he took on the role of geography teacher, but I was never in his group, as I had given up geography after O Level.

As the decade progressed, I imagine Harry was very distressed by the social change that overturned much of that in which he believed. He must have felt that he was gradually losing control of his charges. I am sure that there were parallels in almost every school in the land, but it was bound to be more strongly felt in a school where old traditional values and the atmosphere of an ancient public boys school were part of the life-style of many of its staff.

Masons [Anecdote warning: - if not required, skip four paragraphs]

At one point during my early years at Chet's, as I was by then learning Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto 1 in preparation well in advance for the March 1968 performance, something very fortuitous and rather unlikely happened. My father was invited to apply to join the Freemasons by the House Governor, Harry Vickers, who shared membership of the Central Manchester Masonic Hall in Bridge Street with several of the boys' fathers from the school, including some of friends of mine. In an attempt to persuade him, he and I were, I imagine very contrary to Masonic rules, invited to the Hall one evening circa 1967, and I was given the opportunity to play a short piano recital for the assembled company. I obviously knew nothing of Masonic traditions at that time, so I failed to take much in, but this was surely a serious departure from the norm.

I don't think in retrospect that there were any women present, so it was probably not the annual Lady's Night. However, I recall that my father was not allowed in and had to wait in the entrance lobby whilst I played.

I have no memory of what I played to them, or for how long, but I do remember vividly how generous and encouraging they were to me. At the end they began to make requests, which for some reason I do remember - one was for the Warsaw Concerto, and another for the Grieg. I think they thought I was being impertinent when I mentioned that an orchestra was necessary for these pieces. However, I played a truncated version of them both anyway, which I guess was all that was necessary.

I was somewhat stumped when one of the fathers from Chetham's - whose son was at one point leader of the Senior Orchestra - asked me if Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto was the same as the Warsaw Concerto. I later realised that he was checking if I already knew the piece on the recording they were about to give me. At the end I was presented with a book token and an LP of Richter's and Karajan's recording of Tchaikovsky 1 - which I still have, and listened to endlessly at the time of preparation for my debut performance. [Later I learned that Richter and Karajan did not hit it off at all during those sessions in Vienna - something you can sense from the performance. However, it seemed unassailable to me at that time.] The book token went towards a copy of My Life and Loves by Frank Harris, which I also still have - page 34-35 was very popular with the boys of my

year and I coveted by own copy - and one called 'What Lenin really said' (author unknown), both of which I found in the bookstore at Manchester Piccadilly Station, and neither of which I imagine would have met with approval by the assembled Masons.

Matron

Harry Vickers' wife, Audrey, was the school matron. Her contact with the boys was inevitably more with the residents, but she did make a point of getting to know us all.

[Anecdote warning: - if not required, skip to the next paragraph]. The Vickers' lived in an apartment to which the stairs passed a window that looked out over the Baronial Hall, where, after a couple of years at the school, I was in the habit of playing the piano during breaks. I had been trying to play Rachmaninov's Second Concerto since discovering it when I was about eight. The Matron must have heard me hammering away at this piece several times as she passed. One day, she popped her head through the window, and, after talking a little in general about the piece I was playing she told me if there was a Second concerto, there must be a First one. [This absurdly obvious conclusion had until that point not occurred to me. Do many music-lovers do the same? For example, do lovers of Dvorak's Ninth Symphony (From The New World) sometimes fail to draw the conclusion from the number nine that there are likely to be another eight symphonies that they would probably like as well? Is that why they stick with the same one? This moment with the Matron may well have been a watershed one for me - I have always been curious about the overall output of a composer in relation to the work I am studying at the time, and it is usually a revelation.]

After establishing that neither of us knew it, she told me that her favourite Rachmaninov concerto was the Third. I said I had never heard it, and she said that I would love it, and that maybe it would play a big part in my life. It seemed an odd thing to say, but in retrospect an extraordinary prediction. I didn't learn it properly for another ten years, but since then it has played such a big part in my professional life that I have given more performances of it than of any other concerto. That the Matron of my school should have been the one to start off that extraordinary relationship makes me feel very grateful to her, for what must have seemed like a very casual conversation at the time.

Gerald Littlewood

Along with the headmaster (House Governor), Gerry Littlewood was one of the first people I encountered on Day One, and was in so many ways the embodiment of the positive aspects of the school's culture. During the schoolyard assembly upon first arriving I recognised them both from the interview earlier on in the year, except that they both terrified me in a way that they hadn't done in the interview.

Gerry was a remarkable man who had dedicated his whole adult life to Chetham's. He lived, along with senior master Arthur George, in a flat above the gatehouse, and very rarely strayed outside the grounds.

His nickname when I first arrived was 'Lofty' - presumably because he was tall; one day some years later he was giving one of the boys a telling off for some misdemeanour and he suffered the misfortune of a drop of saliva coming out of his mouth into the air, so thereafter he was known by the more unpleasant amongst us as 'Spittle' - which demonstrates the degree to which the character and culture of the school changed during those years, and resentful aggression appeared.

His qualification was, according to what I heard later, a degree in woodwork - something at which he was absolutely brilliant. However, he didn't teach woodwork at the school - a certain Brian Pearson did that, along with metalwork.

Gerry Littlewood taught geography, art and religious education (i.e. Church of England Christianity, as it is the official religion of the country), but primarily music - class music, violin, viola and singing. He played the violin and the viola very well (and was my first teacher on both instruments), had a very powerful bass baritone voice (I had the experience later of accompanying him publicly in several songs - most memorably Vaughan Williams' Songs of a Wayfarer) and conducted the school orchestras.

In his spare time combined his musical talents with his woodworking abilities and made several violins, two Tertis-Model violas (one of which was on loan to me upon switching to viola after a couple of years of studying the violin), a cello, and a harpsichord. [Said harpsichord was the central character in an extraordinary expedition along a railway line in 1971 - see later]. These instruments were crafted on an extremely high level, and are still in circulation and highly valued.

He was also a poet of considerable talent - writing in a very localised Northern style, with a lot of piquant humour, and was an ardent enthusiast for the verse of Edwin Waugh, whose style he emulated and whose verses and prose he would sometimes read out loud in class. He also had a predilection for reading out passages from Winnie the Pooh, which I am beginning to believe should be required reading for all. [If you didn't read it as a child, try it as an adult - it will cheer you up no end!]. These didn't have a lot to do with any of the subjects he was supposed to be teaching, but nevertheless very illuminating and funny. Inevitably the resentful set refused to be entertained by it, particularly by Winnie the Pooh, as they felt themselves to be far too mature for that - they weren't, of course, otherwise they wouldn't have resented it.

He sang with great enthusiasm, and played the part - as mentioned below - of Noye (Noah) in Britten's Noye's Fludde.

As a personality he was rather eccentric and quick-tempered with a very loud voice. As a musician he was wildly enthusiastic and his passion was infectious. His sometimes slightly questionable ear for pitch led to his violin-playing being occasionally out of tune, and his approximate sense of rhythm to a typical music-master's conducting technique. However, his critical faculties when listening to others were of the highest calibre. He had the habit of calling us "horrible little men" when we transgressed.

What Gerry lacked in conducting technical skill he made up for in character, commitment and pure enthusiasm, and, along with everyone else in the orchestra, I learned a huge amount about ensemble playing, and listening to others etc. When I wasn't playing a concerto, I was towards the back of the first violins for the first two years, and then switched to No. 2 viola in my third year - I was asked to do that ostensibly because the orchestra was short of violas, but it may have been partly also a ruse to get me off the violin, at which I was not great because of a serious lack of motivation to practise. Later, I took up the tuba, but, although I enjoyed the instrument very much, I was utterly hopeless, and after attempting the tuba part of Brahms' Second Symphony and Vaughan Williams' London Symphony [incredible to look back on the Senior Orchestra repertoire choices of the time, although God knows what it sounded like] Gerry Littlewood begged me to find another instrument to torture.

Under his guidance, however, I did manage Grade Three A.B.R.S.M. on the violin, and Grade Seven on the viola (I practised the viola a little more enthusiastically - I think because of the challenge of the alto clef, and also because I loved playing inner parts).

His hero was Yehudi Menuhin, whose hairstyle he emulated and whose facial expressions he adopted whilst playing his beloved violin. Menuhin's influence on Chetham's through Gerald Littlewood should not be underestimated, and the example of the Yehudi Menuhin School in Surrey may even have had a direct influence on the decision to become a specialist music school later.

As a conductor, he had developed an intimidating way of combining his apparently involuntary propensity for singing loudly along with the melody line with shouting at the members of the orchestra. It was a remarkable talent - he could continue seamlessly from wordlessly vocalising the first violin part of - for example - The Great Gate of Kiev (arr. in D major by David Stone) and Copland's Letter from Home which we did in Intermediate Orchestra when I was 12) into fitting words to the music such as "For God's sake, Donohoe, it's a C sharp! How many times do I have to tell you? You haven't been practising, have you? [I hadn't, as per] 2nd finger on the A, you horrible little man!" and then returning to his wordless vocalising. Mussorgsky would have been inspired.

[Anecdotes - fourteen paragraphs, with apologies.....]

My first appearance as a pianist with him conducting was in the 1965 annual Free Trade Hall School Concert, in which I played a suite for piano and orchestra based on themes from The Sound of Music. The main thing I can remember about this was that at the end of 'Do Re Mi' the piano had a upward quaver scale in right hand chords, followed by a sforzando in the bass. In the final rehearsal in the hall, I must have thumped the bass note more heavily than any note I have thumped since. The long stick holding up the Steinway piano lid had been put into the hole designed for the short stick. The result was that the stick slipped out towards the audience area, the lid fell down onto it, breaking it in two, the upper half of the stick flew spinning into the stalls with a splintered end that would have been effective as an arrow in a Mediaeval battle, and all the staff in the hall in unison uttered a cry of horror. Thus I learned to always check which hole in which to put it. The serious side of this is that had this happened in the performance, the stick would undoubtedly have injured someone in the audience, or possibly even blinded them.

Gerald Littlewood was also the first conductor with whom I ever played a piano concerto - we did Beethoven's Third at the school's Free Trade Hall concert in 1967. I have a vivid memory that the first rehearsal that involved me playing the piano (he had rehearsed the orchestra for several weeks - rather oddly with me in the first violin section) started with G.L. saying, "Right, everyone, let's play the whole first movement without stopping. If I have to stop because some of you horrible little men don't concentrate I will be very disappointed". He then stopped after eight bars and went on and on about the ensemble, moving on after about ten minutes to the next passage (the opening of this concerto is notoriously difficult to play together, although at the time, as a thirteen-year old oik, I couldn't see the problem as there are very few notes) and stopping again and again throughout the opening tutti.

Towards the end of the rehearsal, I had still not played a note of the piano part. The no. 2 first violinist turned to his partner - the leader - and said, loudly enough for all in the room to hear, "I thought this was a bloody piano concerto." Right on cue, we got to the first piano entry, I played the three C minor scales, the school bell went and the rehearsal was over, and we got to the end of two hours of my life that I will never get back. [He did roughly the same one year later when we did Tchaikovsky's First Concerto - saying that we would play the whole first movement without stopping and then stopping after four bars. Tchaikovsky 1 has three trombones, and the response from a certain trombonist included words that I had rarely heard before, although I have used them myself several times in rehearsal since....]

Rehearsals continued to be rather painful, but when we finally performed the Beethoven, I seem to remember that it went pretty well. Having said that, I will never forget G.L.'s facial expression when I rushed down the C major scale that precedes the first movement cadenza, taking him completely by surprise and arriving a quaver earlier than the orchestra on the beginning of the next bar. The parallel passage in E flat major earlier on had gone well enough, so that was when I first learned that anything can happen out of the blue under stress.

School orchestra rehearsals were on Wednesday evenings and Saturday afternoons, and I used to look forward to them very much. Any such schedule is habit-forming, and I still think of Saturday afternoons as rehearsal time, whilst many men associate them with football, and many women think of it as relief time that their husbands are out of their way. However, another part of the

Saturday habit that I have succeeded in getting out of associating with it is being picked up from the rehearsal by my father and taken to his sister's - my aunt's - where she lived with my paternal grandmother, and my essential weekly viewing of Batman and The Avengers (I wasn't allowed TV during the week until after O' Levels).

The last time Gerry Littlewood and I played a concerto together was in the 1971 School Concert, again at the Free Trade Hall, when we did Mendelssohn's First Concerto and Beethoven's Choral Fantasy. I had a row with Harry Vickers concerning my resolve to play the Beethoven using the copy, given that in earlier rehearsals so many people in the orchestra and choir were proving unreliable. Harry thought it would look bad not to perform from memory. Once he had dismissed my point as nonsense about other peoples' unreliability possibly making me forget in the performance, I regrettably resolved never in a million years to give way. I would have been prepared to accept it had the others become more on the ball, but once I was told I was talking rubbish by someone who was not a musician, I dug my heels in as only a contrary perverse nuisance such as I would. However I did play the Mendelssohn from memory, so even I can compromise sometimes.

In the meantime, after moving away from the viola, I had tried my hand at the clarinet, the tuba - see above - and the double bass. All of them were non-starters, but, although the viola has been for a while very satisfying, I was determined to transfer my orchestral activities to another instrument. It was Lofty who realised my desire and eventually suggested to me that I become the orchestra's timpanist. One of the last things I played in as a viola-player was a performance - I think in Manchester's Town Hall some time in 1968 - of the Finale of Schumann's Second Symphony (even Chetham's wasn't foolhardy enough to try to include the Scherzo). An unusual choice for a school orchestra, and exceptionally difficult both to play and conduct. I can recall being very envious of the timpanist during his solo at the end of the symphony, and I do believe it was one of those watershed moments - one that planted a seed of desire that resulted in my taking up timpani and percussion very seriously later on.

Finally it was as if I had found a natural role in an orchestra, and it was Gerry Littlewood's instinctive response to my unsuccessful forays into all those other instruments that made it possible. As the one exception had been the viola, at which I was good, I am now quite sorry that I didn't continue on beyond Grade 8, but I had never practised it properly, and Lofty knew it. [When I tried to play a colleague's viola in a Mozart Serenade some decades later, it became plain that viola-playing is not like riding a bike; you do forget how to do it, particularly if you haven't practised properly in the first place. I discovered that it doesn't matter how nifty your left-hand is on the fingerboard; if your bow is on the wrong string all you get is open string sounds. As a by-then Tchaikovsky Competition laureate, I found it embarrassing that, in a piece of Mozart in G major, all I seemed to be able to come up with was a series of C naturals, with occasional D and A thrown in in a desperate attempt to coordinate the two sides of my brain and relate in some way my brilliant left hand fingerboard-work to the bowing activities of the other hand.]

In my new-found role I discovered I had a natural wrist action and took to general percussion technique like a duck to water. Timpani and percussion, jazz and rock drumming were to become, not just my second discipline, but were to be taken so seriously by me that around five years later I was on the verge of committing myself to it as a career.

However - and here is the main point about my depiction of this instrumental tour of mine - there had never been any serious study of percussion at Chetham's before; timpani and percussion in the school orchestra - and, I suspect in most school, youth and amateur orchestras at that time - had hitherto been looked after by players who had failed to qualify in other sections. I had to fight tooth and nail to get the school to agree to financing proper lessons, but finally Lofty agreed to send me to Harry Massey - timpanist of the BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra, whose timpani playing I had admired ever since I had started attending the orchestra's weekly Manchester Town Hall concerts. The decision to let me go once a week to the Northern School of Music, where Harry was professor, was another one of those watershed moments. For timpani and percussion to be taken seriously by a school was also a watershed moment for music education.

As a geography teacher, G.L. was responsible for my continuing fascination for large land masses such as Russia, and particularly South America, and managed to make the study of different types of rainfall, the Gross National Product of individual countries like Uruguay, and the square mileage of the Argentinean Savannah, interesting. We studied South America in detail for a whole year, and, despite it being the last of the continents I got to perform in (my first time didn't take place until 1996), it has always held a special place in my mind. I love going there, I could be happy living there - chaos and all - and it has wonderful cultural awareness. Perhaps my feeling of comfort there is partly a result of those geography lessons, and Gerry Littlewood's infectious enthusiasm.

As stated earlier, Gerry spent most of his working life in the school itself, rather than straying into the world outside. Exceptions to this were when he took parties of boys on field trips, staying in YHAs, or went to school camp. I went once each on these holiday jaunts - one was to the Isle of Man, with thirteen other boys, where Gerry had us walking several miles a day and wearing us all out, and the other to camp in the field the school owned in Deganwy, near Llandudno, North Wales. I enjoyed the I.O.M. trip. However, at school camp I experienced the characteristic bullying by the sixth form members, and as a result, hated my time there.

Later, another couple of excursions outside the school gates by Littlewood were to a summer course for chamber music - in my case, two years running in 1967 and 68. It was held in King Alfred's College Winchester, and directed by James Maddocks - violinist and conductor of the Newcastle Strings - and his oboist wife June Mills - later taken over by James' sister and violist, Joan. Whether or not it was the timing during my adolescence, the place where it was held, the people I met, the quality of the music-making, or the excellence with which the course was run - or all of these things combined - it remains one of the most memorably stimulating events of my early life. I didn't touch the piano for the whole time I was at either course, as I was registered as a violist. However, I did get the opportunity to play in so many wonderful chamber works - e.g. Brahms' Clarinet Quintet, Schubert's Octet, Shostakovich's String Quartet No.1, Beethoven's String Quartet Op.135, and Bach's Third Brandenburg Concerto - absurdly beyond my ability, but such a learning curve.....; the value of such an experience during one's formative years is inestimable.

During the year between the two courses I attended, I counted the days when I could go back, which seems in retrospect very childish, but at the time my thoughts were, as always, obsessive.

Amongst other friends I met there for the first time were the future librarian of the Hallé - Peter Waddington, the then organist and future extremely successful counter-tenor, Timothy Penrose, and the Thomson family from Ripon, all of whom had and still have careers of diverse kinds in the music world. [An interesting adjunct to this is that whenever I have met any of these people since then, they have told me that they cannot get away from identifying me with the viola - interesting insofar as it illustrates how important first impressions in one's early life are. As it happens, I also remember Tim Penrose more as an organist - he was extremely able at that time - and not as a singer. His singing abilities were not really in evidence then, and yet he later became one of the country's finest.]

Also in 1968, the same couple ran an orchestral course in Cheltenham, which I attended as principal viola. I remember attempting to play in rehearsal the famous waltz from Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake, conducted by Vernon Elliot - at that time principal bassoon of the New Philharmonia Orchestra, composer of the music to The Clangers, and an ideal orchestral trainer and disciplinarian for this situation. The violas do not play for 7 bars of the theme, and then enter after one quaver rest with a rising scale of A major. My inability to come in at the right time, in rhythm, in tune or with any redeeming quality at all was supreme, and Vernon gave me the hard time of all hard times. His view seemed to be that I should never be let near a musical instrument, let alone a stringed one, and that the notion of me being principal of a section was laughable. I was totally humiliated in front of my fellow violists, with the result the next day my entry was flawless and I set about proving myself to Elliot for the rest of the week; he was so supportive towards me after that that the episode became yet another watershed in my learning process. As with all great teachers - Derrick Wyndham is a very good example - his hard line with me came as the flip-side of a very

generous instinct. And, again, I learned such a lot that I am so glad I did not limit my musical exposure to the piano, and I will always be grateful to those who contributed to my experience.

It was Gerald Littlewood who made all these extracurricular activities possible, for which I will always be grateful.

It is rare that someone enthuses over so many different things, and Gerald Littlewood's enthusiasm would have motivated anyone but the thickest-skinned. I didn't realise it at the time, but I now believe that in early teens he was a subconscious role model, and it was the variety of his enthusiasms and compulsive commitment to them all that registered. Thus, he was responsible for so many aspects of what I did in my adult life and the sort of person I became.

The last time I saw him, he had retired, was recently married for the first time, and came as a guest to the 1990 Barbican concert celebrating the 21st birthday of the new music school. He died eight years later, and I was very sad that our relationship had never recovered from the negative aspects of his having to deal with my exceedingly difficult nature as a schoolboy. We didn't have enough time to talk properly at the concert, and I failed completely to keep in touch, as I did with almost everyone who taught me. *Mea Culpa*.

[<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-gerald-littlewood-1198625.html>]

Donald Clarke

Donald always signed his name D.J. Clarke. I never knew what his middle name was, but I have always assumed that it was James. The initials D.J. formed his nickname when I first encountered him. Inevitably, as time progressed and respect declined generally, the D.J. was extended to Dim Jim. A more absurd epithet for him could never have been created, as he was as much the opposite of dim as it was possible to be.

His extraordinary career had started with a B.Sc. in chemistry, which he told me much later he had never been very interested in, but had found easy. His primary interest had always been music, and as the brilliant chemistry master at Chetham's, he was also a very strict and fastidious piano teacher, devoted to his pupils, and later going on to the post of Director of Studies at the new music school.

Upon my arrival at Chetham's Donald took me on as a piano pupil, and tolerated my transgressions and wilful laziness for three years. I had left my first teacher, Alfred Williams - at his (Alfred's) own recommendation... - upon leaving primary school.

[Said first teacher was terrific for the stage I was at. He had been selected by my parents entirely on the basis that he was the one who lived closest by - one of the happiest accidents of my life. Having successfully taught me the rudiments of music reading and theory, plus the best possible gift of all - that of starting to learn the piano seriously with good hand and body positions - he modestly said that he couldn't cope with me any more and that I needed a teacher on a higher level, and who was strict and not as easily treated with disdain. [I don't want to give the impression that I was a kind of Damien, with 666 tattooed on my scalp, but I was a very uncontrollable child, as mentioned elsewhere in this text.] The one who fulfilled the requirements of being on a high level, strict, and, for a while, able to deal with my wilfulness, was Donald.

D.J.'s teaching reflected his scientific mind and instinct. He introduced me to 'The Virtuoso Pianist' - three volumes of gruelling technical exercises, by C.L. Hanon, which I tried to reject; Donald wasn't having any of that. I now use Hanon regularly - as anyone who has taken lessons or master classes with me will attest, although not quite as long-suffering as my wife, Elaine, who has to tolerate it on a regular basis when I am at home; I returned to it in the early 1980s.

As well as the more usual items such as Debussy's *Deux Arabesques*, Beethoven Sonatas, Schumann's *Papillons*, Bach Three-part Inventions etc., Donald presented me with some very unusual repertoire to learn, such as parts of Hindemith's *Ludos Tonalis*, some smaller works by Albeniz and Casella's *Toccat*a - not the sort of thing you would normally expect to be learning at the age of eleven. I don't think he was indulging in his own preferences - rather that he saw in me someone who would more easily (at least at that time) identify with the music of the Twentieth Century. When he tried me with a Haydn Sonata, which I didn't learn and tried to get away with playing from sight in the lesson, he rumbled me and berated me for most of the rest of the two hours. We did do some standard classical repertoire, plus some Bach, but I did not practise it properly and at that time found later music much more stimulating.

One of the results of my strange leanings was that I failed completely to take seriously the usual path of the A.B.R.S.M. Grades. Donald succeeded in getting me through Grade 5 piano and music theory, and, with my friend from two years above me - Peter Mills (later Head of Music at Cheltenham College) - Grade Four in Piano Duet - something that A.B.R.S.M. has very regrettably stopped. In both cases the mark was 133!; we were so proud... However, between the ages of 14 and 17 no one even suggested that I take another grade, as I was so out on a limb from the usual repertoire route, and would have been a nightmare to prepare for them. The next time I did a serious examination was to enter for an external A.R.C.M. in London when I was seventeen in 1970 - a decision I made myself, and for which I was therefore properly prepared.

D.J. had a special way of giving pupils a hard time. He would appear calm for some time after the thing that had angered him had taken place, given away only by the reddening of his face. A certain amount of false pleasantness amounting to sarcasm would come your way, before the inevitable sudden torrent of invective that made you feel like a worm and ensured that you never transgressed again - at least that was the theory, and did seem to work in many of my colleagues' cases.....

His method was much the same when teaching chemistry. I didn't take chemistry as an A level subject, and up to O level was with Arthur George - D.J. taught advanced chemistry. However, there was a period in which he stood in for Arthur (nicknamed Grimley - no idea why).

A pie for Peter Donohoe

An anecdote I feel compelled to tell: one day during the lead up to O level chemistry a friend and I went out of the school during the lunch hour to a well-known local record store by the name of Gibb's Bookshop (it was indeed a bookstore, but had a large classical music specialist record department that included an excellent secondhand section). I had mistakenly thought that I had a free period immediately after lunch, as I had got the day of the week wrong. Upon realising my mistake - I had a double period of chemistry in the lab with D.J. - as I hadn't eaten anything, I asked my friend, who was free, to get me something quick whilst I rushed back. My intention was to eat whatever he got me after the chemistry period was over. He asked me what I wanted, and I said "Oh, I don't know. A pie or something".

I made it back just in time, and as usual with D.J. we were all required to gather round the front desk of the lab, and watch as he conducted a highly sensitive and possibly dangerous experiment that would have been unsuitable for the boys to do themselves.

At a particularly sensitive moment, as D.J. was handling sodium, hydrochloric acid and some other substance, with toxic fumes of chlorine rising into the fume cupboard, there was a knock at the door. Donald's irritation at the interruption should have been obvious from the way he shouted "Come in!" My companion during my visit to Gibb's, who would have done better to leg it, came in with a paper package and said, "Please, Sir. I've got a pie for Peter Donohoe."

D.J.'s reaction was complete silence for a moment. Then the reddening of the face cheeks started, and I knew I was in for it. He then started on his traditional preliminary sarcasm. "Oh, Mr. Donohoe, don't let us keep you from your lunch. Please - let me get you a chair and a napkin. Would you like

some tomato ketchup, perhaps? Should I could get one of the other chemistry pupils to forego his interest in the subject, and go and get you some chips and peas to go with your pie?" And on and on like this for far longer than was amusing.

We all knew what was coming, and I prayed that it wouldn't take too long, or be too severe. We also knew that there was no point in trying to mitigate against the forthcoming onslaught. Any protestations from me that it had not been my intention to have my lunch delivered by room-service during Practical Chemistry would have fallen on deaf ears. Meanwhile, the others in the group were developing a kind of communal widening grin, anticipating with great glee the savagery with which I was going to be chewed up.

When it came it was a masterpiece of fluent invective. My naive friend's ejection from the lab with a flea in his ear was the sum total of his punishment for having misunderstood me, but I received a berating like never before, nor since - at least outside the family. It undoubtedly did me good, but for a while I wished I hadn't been born. I imagine it was something of an act on his part; if not, he might have had a heart attack as a result of his rage. It is quite likely that he went to the staff room later and related it to the rest of the staff with huge amusement, with which it would no doubt have also been greeted by the others.

Tragically, the pie was confiscated, and I had to go hungry until 4.00 p.m., when, for a price, one could partake in the Jammy Dodgers and tea - already with milk in it, which is why the urn used to heave - provided free for residents in ugly large purple Bakelite mugs.

Eventually, when I was fourteen, Donald decided, like Alfred Williams had done three years earlier, that I needed an even firmer hand than even he had - and that was saying something.

He somehow arranged for me to have an audition with Frederick Cox - then Principal of the Royal Manchester College of Music - with a view to sending me as a part-time junior on a weekly basis. In the event, Mr. Cox was ill, and he asked one of the R.M.C.M.'s most respected piano teachers - Derek Wyndham - to listen to my - what could only have been an appalling - performance of Beethoven Sonata Opus 10 No. 2, in his place. Another happy accident - Derek Wyndham asked to teach me himself [despite his open dismay at the way I played the Beethoven; he seemed to turn religious in my company - sharp intakes of breath, followed by such observations as: "God help us", "oh, God", "oh no, my God have mercy" - each remark prefaced by either a scornful snort, or "pffff", or some other somewhat distressing condemnation] and did so for eight years after that; it became my most productive musical relationship of all. However, D.J.'s influence remains to this day, and I have so much to thank him for that it is difficult to put into words.

The last I saw of him was when he attended a late 1980s recital I gave in the North Wales Theatre in Llandudno after he had retired to the area. The program included Liszt's B Minor Sonata. After that he wrote me a long letter analysing my performance and hit the nail absolutely on the head regarding its positive and negative qualities. His comments definitely contributed a lot towards my subsequent dozens (if not hundreds) of performances, and to the 1990 EMI recording, but he had died of a sudden stroke before I managed to get back to him - another terrible regret.

Penry Williams

Penry was the ultimate life tutor. His job was to teach history, which I took as far as A level. However, he was in so many ways more than that. He was always involved in guiding us boys through traumatic situations, and I am very sorry now that I did not think of telling Penry about the bullying I experienced during my first two years, rather than being afraid to tell anyone at all for fear of the retribution that telling the staff usually brought upon the victim - Penry would have known how to deal with that.

His teaching of history was excellent, in that he was insistent that we all put ourselves in the positions of the various historical characters and tried to understand what they did and why, and

what would have happened if they had done something differently. Our set period for A level was the Tudor Period 1485-1601, which I have to say I was rather bored by, and wished we could have done the Twentieth Century instead. But Penry not only got me through it, but made me understand it properly to the degree that I still know most of the key facts and events, and the reasons for them. And he did teach the history of the Twentieth Century for a short while as a diversion from the syllabus, but with an eye to the way society never stops making the same mistakes.

Penry also did a great job of putting the music that I was working on in historical context. But he was also involved in sex education, careers advice, university choices and many other things that were outside his job description. He encouraged out-of-hours political debate in the form of what was known as The Renaissance Society, which undoubtedly went some way to the early development of my present political interests.

And he was the first person in my life to seriously address the issue of intolerance of homosexuality - remembering that, despite there being many gay people at Chetham's, including some staff members, homosexuals were still being referred to as 'queers' and 'poofs', and to be accused of being one was humiliating; i.e. it was used as a term of abuse, as it still is sometimes.

Finally, long after I had left the school, and indeed after Penry had retired, he wrote a history of the school for which he interviewed me and many others; it was an honest appraisal of the earlier Chetham's, rather than the usual rose-tinted saturnalia of positives, and painted a realistic picture of the great things and not so great things about its recent history, as well as delving into the ancient past. The book is called 'Chetham's: old and new in harmony', and is available from Manchester University Press (ISBN 0-7190-1973-7). [<http://www.abebooks.com/book-search/isbn/0719019737/page-1/>]

The last time I saw him was when I brought my own orchestra to perform in the R.N.C.M. Concert Hall and he came to the concert with his old friend Donald Clarke - see above - both retirees, and both wonderfully involved in the music and enthusiastic for the event. Penry wrote to me a few days later, as he had done several times during my student years, and it was a joy to find that he was still the same concerned grandfather figure that he always had been.

It was entirely characteristic of him to ask for a 'celebration of his life', rather than a funeral, after his death in the 1990s. He was a highly principled atheist, with a very positive view of life.

Brian Peters

French remains my only other language so far. I had started it at primary school, and really enjoyed it. The remarkable Brian Peters (nickname 'Ernie' - don't ask) took me through to A level, and his teaching remains with me to this day.

In 1977-78 I studied in Paris with Yvonne Loriod and Olivier Messiaen - neither of whom spoke a word of English - and I have used my French in my professional life quite enough for me to be very grateful for Brian Peters for his insistence and determination, against all the odds. I did well at O level. I barely scraped through at A level, because I was unsuited to proper advanced study until several years into adulthood, but that did not prevent Brian's very detailed and uncompromising teaching having a life-long effect.

The tricky years of transition anticipated

Brian Peters was one of the teachers who saw the writing on the wall for his subject when the announcement was made that Chetham's would become a specialist music school in 1969. He regrettably left for a post at Manchester University two years later (when the last generation of kids

from the old school, including myself, left Chetham's) and, as far as I know, remained in that post until his recent retirement.

The new music school's intake of staff members between 1967 and 1969 was to some extent to replace those who had left at that time. The latter did not wish to work in an environment in which it was unlikely that there would be any pupils who excelled in their subject, because the reason they came to Chetham's would be entirely to study music. It is regrettable that this happened; there was indeed a temporary downturn in the level of academic achievement amongst some of the new intake. This may in part have been because of the sudden departure of key members of staff. However, after I left, the school authorities became very conscious of the importance of and all-round education to all children, and of not excluding highly-motivated specialists. Since then, academic attainment has been high, and the school can be proud of its achievements, having put the teething troubles of the early 1970s behind it.

Robert McFarlane

Two important members of the music staff arrived at the school upon its transformation. One who remained until very recently - i.e. for almost his whole career - and virtually the whole of the existence of Chetham's School of Music to date, was Robert McFarlane (nickname 'Penguin' - based on the way he walked rather than on the fact that he enjoyed wearing his dinner jacket).

Almost a figure of fun at first, owing to eccentric ways and old-fashioned galant personality, it gradually dawned on us all that he was a musical genius, a very genuine, guileless, devoted teacher, and an extremely nice man. His musical knowledge was encyclopaedic, and his obvious enthusiasm for everyone and everything to do with music was infectious.

His old-fashioned ways included the use of quasi-Biblical and Mediaeval language in writing - his school report entries were legendary. A trombonist friend of mine in the year above me received the following in his final report before leaving the school: "He speaketh through his trombone and is fluent in all positions". His apparent unawareness was part of his charm.

Unfortunately, in my case official lessons with him were limited to when he deputised for the other A Level teachers (see below), as he was charged with dealing with different groups of terrorists to the one I was in [actually we were well-behaved compared with some of the others, many of whom were as controllable as ferrets]. But I did have casual contact on many occasions, and exchanged many interesting views with him on a very adult basis. He had a way of treating one as an equal, rather than as an inexperienced pupil, possibly enhanced by his old-fashioned insistence in referring to us as Mister or Miss. I was thus 'Donohoe' to most of the staff - and 'Mister Donohoe' to Robert McFarlane.

I think someone must have had a word with Mr. McFarlane about his addressing us as Mister and Miss, because he suddenly dropped it towards the end of my time. Upon my returning to the school to give several concerts long after I had left, he was still in his latter habit of calling me 'Donohoe', which always felt slightly strange. He retired some years ago, and returned to his native Scotland. Finally, in 2006, I met him backstage in Perth between rehearsal and concert with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and he called me 'Peter'. I felt like I had finally grown up.

The only drawback to Robert McFarlane's teaching style was the downside of one of his most positive qualities - his naïveté and unawareness of the realities of the way teenagers instinctively behave when unchecked, as they surely were by that time. Had he been working in another era, he would never have had to face the atrocious disrespectful carry-on that was the culture of the early 1970s, and the issue would not have arisen.

On one occasion I, for some reason I cannot remember, was charged with the duty of entering into one of his classes, and the chaos I witnessed was beyond description. One feature of it was that

whilst he was trying to interest the class in the joys of Monteverdi, two girls were hanging out of the window smoking - admittedly they were giving some token effort towards hiding the fags by holding them below the level of the window ledge outside, but they were openly ignoring what was being said and talking about something completely irrelevant. The defiant crust of it made my jaw drop. The reason Robert said nothing was mainly to do with the general level of inattention and noise going on elsewhere.

On another occasion I witnessed him trying to interest the much smaller A level group that was a year ahead of mine in similarly early music. He said something like "and now we are going to listen to part of Thomas Tallis' wonderful Forty Part Motet, 'Spem in Alium', to give you some idea of the richness and grandeur of the choral music of the time". One member of the group - a brilliant and precocious trombonist (who was a member of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain and went on to be spectacularly successful as a London-based freelancer) said openly and loudly, "Oh, f_____ h____, what a bloody boring pain in the a____!" [This was the same trombonist who was 'fluent in all positions', and whose language had featured prominently in the above-mentioned Tchaikovsky One rehearsal - and, coincidentally, had used approximately the same words.]

Robert McFarlane's response, above the open giggling of the rest of the group, was "Mr. _____! How dreadfully inappropriate!" - obviously deeply upset, with no element of sarcasm, and no clue as to how to deal with it. There was no apology, no punishment, and - I have no doubt - no change next time round. Even though I myself was hardly an example of good speech, I felt very sorry for Robert McFarlane at that moment, as we all (including the trombonist) knew that he was particularly upset by swearing, and was - I believe - a committed Scottish Presbyterian. [Not that that comprises a reason to avoid swearing in class; it is just that it made him feel worse than it would have in the case of most of the others]. The situation was a perfect example of respect in decline, and symptomatic of the world around us.

The only thing I ever had cause to disagree with Robert McFarlane over was his description of London as "That Babylon of The South". I know exactly what he meant, and I also know many people who would agree, but I always loved London and could never really explain why to such a staunch anti-towney as he was. He would not go anywhere near London if he could help it.

He had a great love of train travel - not specifically a steam railway buff, but a general enthusiast, with a good deal of awareness of the environment years before it became fashionable. I remember him bemoaning the new Inter-City express trains that were introduced by British Railways in the late 60s, because they were so fast, and 'reduced one's sense of having travelled anywhere'. I now realise that this was based on a misguided notion that trains during an earlier time were slower - it seems that even now there are very few trains that can cover the miles as quickly as The Royal Scot and similar great examples of the 'Golden Age of Steam' did. The fact that most fast trains went to and from London was presumably to Mr. McFarlane a happy coincidence.

He tried to persuade me that a boiled 'Lion' egg every morning, and an apple at lunchtime was the way to perfect health. He convinced me of the egg, as long as it was accompanied by bacon, sausage and fried bread, but I didn't manage the apple philosophy until many years later. [Just to be clear, he convinced me of the wisdom - that is not to say I acted upon it.]

Jonathan Bielby

On the same lines as the episode with the Matron, in around 1968 concerning the Rachmaninov 3rd Concerto, something similar happened with one of the later-appointed music masters, Jonathan Bielby. He sometimes deputised for Margaret Williams (see below) teaching my A level music group. He was responsible for my introduction to Brahms' Symphonies, Britten's War Requiem, and most significantly, Liszt's Sonata in B minor.

That we should have been listening and analysing works like this during the lead up to A Level Music is significant in itself - Mr. Bielby was introducing to the group a musical awareness way beyond the requirements of the examination, and we all benefited hugely from that experience.

However, the Bielby watershed moment was when he asked me specifically, as I was a pianist, if I knew the Liszt Sonata in B minor. When I said no (I only knew of Liszt as the composer of Liebestraum and the famous Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 - i.e. popular, therefore to be avoided), he said that he was surprised. He said that it was one of the most important piano works of all, that it would suit me, and that later it might play a very big part in my life. He then played part of the fugato section - the sequential passages where the subject goes into octaves in the left hand - and hooked me. After obsessing with the piece for the next year (I was sixteen at the time), I was finally able to claim that I had learned it. However my first public performance did not take place until I was a fourth-year student in 1976, although since then it has been the solo work that I have played most frequently of all - and Liszt is now one of the composers whom I admire most of all.

I suspect that Jonathan was particularly struck by this work because he was primarily an organist - after leaving Chetham's, he went on to be Head of Music, Organist and Choirmaster at Wakefield Cathedral, from which he has only recently retired - and Liszt was one of the greatest composers of organ music. The links between the Sonata in B minor and such works as the Fantasia and Fugue on B.A.C.H. must have struck a chord (!) with him.

Margaret Williams

Margaret Carter, divorced from the well-known York-based composer and arranger of church music, Andrew Carter, had arrived in 1967, engaged to be re-married to Peter Williams - a brilliant organist and harpsichordist whom she had met whilst he was assistant organist at York Minster. She thus taught me 'O' Level music for two years, and then, after the big change of 1969, became the teacher of the five-strong music 'A' level group.

However, she took it upon herself to extend her job into extracurricular activities, creating a social circle involving her fiancé, and all the A level students of both lower and upper sixth forms - some of whom were more enthusiastic than others.

As a result of their encouragement and from being included in many of their out-of-school activities I did all manner of things that I would never have thought of otherwise.

I bought a student season ticket to both the Thursday and Sunday series at the Hallé orchestra, giving me the opportunity to go to two of their concerts per week for approximately two seasons (at a cost of about 40p a concert, incidentally).

I attended almost every mid-day concert in the BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra's weekly Town Hall series.

I went to almost all the chamber music series at Manchester University given by the Ad Solem String Quartet and Friends.

I joined the Manchester Cathedral Cantata Choir as a baritone, and got to sing in Bach Mass in B minor, Britten's Cantata Misericordium, Beethoven's Mass in C and Mozart's Requiem amongst many other things, and I did a lot of accompanying during rehearsals as well - great experience.

We sang madrigals, and at Christmas 1970, we toured the South Manchester suburbs, carrying a home-made street lantern singing highly sophisticated carols in four part harmony, gathering money for charity.

I was inspired to write a not very good piece for prepared piano (after a visit to the school, arranged by Mrs. Carter by Robert Sherlaw Johnson - a major proponent of music for prepared piano, and lecturer at York University), a better oboe sonatina, a completely ridiculous and

supposedly funny piece for chamber orchestra called Facsimile, and a decent although 80% unintentionally plagiarised clarinet sonata [I was besotted with Walton's First Symphony at the time, and it shows], all of which were performed at a composer's concert created by the then Margaret Carter. Mind you, I had also produced a recorder quartet which was not accepted into the composer's concert; I don't think it was the ineptitude of the composer that was the problem - even though my ability to steal from Mahler's Fourth Symphony was only inhibited by my faulty technique - as much as that of the bass recorder player - me.

The Williams' were the protagonists of all these things, and were present at all of them.

Monty Python and roof relief

My fifth form year and onwards were during the Monty Python's Flying Circus cult at its height; thus it was essential for the residents to somehow get access to seeing it every week. In those days there was no television available to the resident boys, except under special circumstances. However, there was a TV in the staff room, which was locked at night, and out of bounds without permission at any time.

Because by that stage I enjoyed being part of the late-night set, I was part of this group. [I regularly went home on the last train out of Piccadilly, arriving home at around midnight, because I secretly still wanted to be part of the community of residents. Many times we went up to Rowntree's Bar on Hanging Ditch (a strangely named short street with a long history about 200 yards from the school) - known as 'Tree's' - which seemed to be quite happy to serve beer to boys as long as they were out of short trousers. This was then often followed by a party atmosphere back at the school, which I was always reluctant to leave.]

Somebody managed to work out that if we climbed out of a window in the recently acquired building that had been the Manchester Teacher Training College, on to the roof of the staff room block, we could force open the window into the staff room, and thus get to watch whatever we wanted until the house staff patrolled the studies to make sure everyone was in bed. In retrospect, the idea of dozens of boys filtering through two windows and across a flat roof illegally into a prohibited room on a weekly basis, and getting away with it does rather indicate the degree to which discipline had been allowed to decline. On the other hand, the girls could never be part of this adventure, as they were kept strictly apart in another area of the school, so not everything was lax.

This discovery was inevitably expanded into a daily excursion, with several boys watching endless post-watershed TV programs.

There was also delight to be found in the fact that access to the roof also gave one a view downwards straight into Long Millgate, from where on more than one occasion a beer-filled condom was dropped onto passers-by - that was my idea, I confess. The same technique was used later (this time with the beer replaced by cold tea) on the other side of the school from the 3rd floor library window onto Victoria Street. We obviously had far more money than sense to spend so much on condoms for such nefarious purposes.

Eventually and inevitably, the staff room became a late-night party venue, with smoking and drinking going on widely.

The group that used to go to the Hallé subscription series usually amounted to at least seven people, if not more. We used to come back to the school down Long Millgate to deliver the residents before the day boys such as myself went off home - in my case, to Piccadilly Station to travel on the last train (23.15, i.e. full of drunks), to Bredbury. We occasionally remembered to watch out for flying condoms. However, we were spared that particular delight. But....

On one such occasion, Margaret and Peter Williams were bringing back the usual party from a Hallé event, walking in a huddled group down Long Millgate, when it became apparent that several streams of hot steaming liquid were pouring down upon us. It didn't take long to deduce that the delightful boys who had been disinterested in attending the Hallé, and who were somewhat contemptuous of those who did go, had been ingesting several cans of beer, as was normal in the staff room, and had gone up on the roof to relieve themselves. Imagine their delight when they realised that they could piss en masse on the despised musos. There were about ten of them and ten of us; thus each one of us was treated to a separate stream of hot pee - what seemed to be endless amounts of it, soaking our clothes (that in my case I had to keep on until I got home about two hours later) and remarkably steaming, considering the fact that it had already travelled about 100 feet before splashdown.

Musical intellectualism

The three of us - Margaret and Peter Williams and myself - became friends way beyond the confines of the usual teacher/pupil relationship. This went on for some time after leaving school, and although we then lost touch for years, I asked Peter Williams out of the blue in 2006 if he would give me a consultation lesson on the Bach Preludes and Fugues, which I had taken on as my most major project of the noughties. He had inspired me in the direction of the Baroque when I first knew him through Margaret, and I even took several organ lessons with him in around 1971. He seemed the ideal person to set me straight on this music, after years of playing almost every piece of repertoire from Beethoven onwards that I could lay my hands on, and to some degree being regarded as a Twentieth Century and Russian Romantic specialist. His enthusiasm and passion for the music was, as it had always been, extremely infectious, and I learned a huge amount.

There were things on which we disagreed throughout our relationship. Both the Williams' were musical intellectuals, with little time for repertoire outside Bach and the general Baroque era, Renaissance and Elizabethan music (which were necessary for A level, so their enthusiasm proved very useful), and a few select, mainly Germanic composers from later: Beethoven and Schubert were regarded as mixed, Russian music other than Stravinsky was dismissed as formless and sentimental, the mid-Romantics, Liszt, Chopin, Schumann, Mendelssohn etc hardly mentioned. The same applied to Mahler, Bruckner, Strauss and Wagner. However, Debussy, Ravel, Bartók, Schönberg and his followers, and particularly Mozart and Brahms, were hailed as geniuses (no argument from me there), as were Britten, Tippett and the composers of the Manchester School (Maxwell Davies, Birtwistle and Goehr).

Whilst this influence was a constant, I secretly tended to like almost everything, but the Williams' intellectualism definitely rubbed off on me. I even went through a short-lived phase of enthusiasm for electronic music - the music of such composers as Cage, Maderna, Pousseur, Stockhausen, and in particular, Cornelius Cardew, crossed my path, although, in reality, my enthusiasm was more for the shock value, and its political implications than the content. My youthful love for Sibelius, Mahler, Bruckner and Strauss was anathema to the Williams'. The same went for Prokofiev and Shostakovich. And as for Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov.... We used to have constant friendly arguments about all of the above.

Messiaen

Of all the composers with whom the Williams' were obsessed, there is one I haven't mentioned - Olivier Messiaen. He deserves a special section of his own in my case, as his music is responsible for turning my life around, helping me determine that I wanted to be a performer above all else, and ultimately, along with his wife, Yvonne Loriod, becoming my teacher for a short time in 1977-78.

It was Messiaen's most popular work, the Turangalîla Symphony, that the Williams' talked about most - I think it had personal associations for them too. I borrowed their LP recording (Seiji Ozawa

and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, with the two Loriods as soloists, coupled with November Steps by Takemitsu), which grabbed me immediately. I rushed to buy my own copy, and played it endlessly for years. However, exciting though I found the recording, what really cemented its position in my life was a live performance - not just the work, but the circumstances surrounding the event.

The two Williams', several of the A level music group, and my recently found friend Chris Thompson - with whom I have maintained a firm link to the present day - went on a day trip to London to see a Prom performance of this work in the Summer of 1969.

It was one of the most profoundly life-changing events in my early musical life. We took in a visit to St. Paul's Cathedral and a row on the Serpentine earlier in the day, and it was then that I fell in love with London, with the Proms, and with the Turangalila Symphony.

It was not my first visit to London, as my father had taken me there a few times when I was much younger, in one of his attempts to educate me in the reality of the world outside Manchester. It was, however, my first visit for several years, and my first Prom. The performance of the Messiaen was given by the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Charles Groves, with John Ogdon and Jeanne Loriod as soloists. It was preceded by a group called Musica Reservata who specialised in music from the Renaissance, playing mostly works by Dufay. Looking back, it was a superb piece of program-planning, and very characteristic of Sir William Glock, the then Controller of Music for The Proms.

The poster announcing the concert outside had the word 'LOVE' plastered across it. This attracted the attention of a large contingent of hippies who were that summer enjoying the peace and love of Kensington Gardens, to which they had brought their diverse modifications to the air they wished to breathe. They came into the promenade area and carried on as if they were at a rock concert, particularly during the fifth movement of Turangalila, waving peace signs in the air as if they were listening to Jimi Hendrix, and there several on the front row crying during the sixth movement.

The atmosphere of that concert remains one of the most extraordinary I have ever experienced. It went a long way towards persuading me to take on some of the superficial attributes of hippiedom myself a little later, but it also went a long way towards making me what I am now - Turangalila having played a pivot role in my performing life at every stage.

I was so taken by the concert that I dared to promise to myself that one day I would play in that work myself. I managed to take part in several performances as a percussionist during the late 70s - a dream in itself. However, it took until 1981 to get to play the solo piano part, when Simon Rattle gave his first performances of the piece with the CBSO, and invited not only me to play the piano part that Yvonne had played in 1969, but also my wife Elaine to play the jeu de timbres. The most emotionally fulfilling occasion was when everything came full circle, and Rattle and CBSO, with both my wife and me playing those keyboard parts brought Turangalila to the 1983 Proms. We later recorded it for EMI in 1986.

That my promise to myself of twelve years earlier had been fulfilled to such a degree was such a wonderful feeling that I don't think even the Tchaikovsky competition surpassed it. My 1981 Turangalila debut in Cheltenham Town Hall was the first of over sixty performances to date, with a huge variety of conductors in many different countries.

Messiaen and his music, and this piece in particular, has dominated my professional life, and went some way towards showing me what it was about classical music performance that was missing. Until that point in 1969, I put off committing myself to a performing career. It was Margaret and Peter Williams who opened that portal for me, and they have my life-long thanks for having done so.

As a postlude to the above, one other exposure to the music of Messiaen for which the Williams' were responsible was when Derrick Cantrell, the Organist and Choirmaster of Manchester Cathedral, was unavailable for the Feast of Christmas Music in December 1970; Peter Williams - officially an outsider - was invited to take his place. One of those watershed moments took place at the end of the service when Peter decided to use Messiaen's wonderfully joyful Dieu Parmi Nous as the walking out music. It's dissonance went down the proverbial bucket with the school authorities and parents, but to me it was the perfect uplifting ending to what was my favourite Cathedral event of the year.

When we got married in 1980, Elaine and I wanted the local organist to play this wonderful piece at the end of the ceremony. We were told that the organ couldn't take modern music, - as if it was going to down tools and adamantly turn itself off at the slightest suggestion of a dissonance. In the event, the organist's performance of Jerusalem was infinitely more discordant than anything Messiaen ever thought of. [I have just been made aware via Slipped Disc of this You Tube link, conjuring up something similar to the food of love contributed to our wedding by said organist: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=uC2br24hDCE]. Enjoy.]