

## Quite some Summer

After presiding at the Parish Mass on Sunday 7th August, Marion and I went home to where we had already packed our suitcases and after completing some last minute details, we drove out of the rectory gate at 11am precisely. At 2.30pm, we were sat in College Hall, adjoining Worcester Cathedral watching a performance of Hamlet. This was deep-end holiday-making and it worked. By the time Hamlet had run his 3 hour course, we definitely felt on holiday with immediate effect!

The starter was a foretaste of things to come because the performances in this production were terrific and thrilling in every way. It was a production of the Shakespeare's Globe on Tour. It bore all the usual hall-marks of the Shakespeare's Globe productions, with a subtle blend of minimalism and a rich attention to detail, excellent and realistic props, swiftly moving scene changes, a small cast taking on multiple roles with complete conviction and the extra bonus of the cast all being musicians with excellent instrumental skills as well as singing skills, and not forgetting the dance to celebrate the end of the play. Very satisfying indeed. The Programme Notes included this assessment of Hamlet as "Shakespeare's 'poem unlimited,' a colossus in the story of the English language and the fullest expression of Shakespeare's genius." The quotation 'poem unlimited' is from Harold Bloom, the American literary critic. Couldn't have put it better myself!



Shakespeare's Globe on Tour with Hamlet

One thing struck me as odd. In Act Two, Scene two, where Polonius is helping King Claudius to understand the nature of Hamlet's disposition, the actor, John Bett who is a very fine actor, said "Still on about my daughter" as opposed to what the bard wrote, which is "still harping on my daughter." The error leapt out at me and took me by surprise. Hopefully it was just a simple mistake. The title role was played by Joshua McGuire in a touchingly innocent and fresh-faced youthfulness. He looked like someone struggling to deal with adult emotions and issues.



Well, Worcester 2011 was filled with riches for us. We attended organ recitals by young players from the Royal College of Organists, Choral Evensong almost every day, and that is a free concert in itself, Mahler Symphony No. 3 in the Cathedral and a very fine interpretation by the Philharmonia Orchestra directed by Susanna Mälkki, (pictured) a splendid Finnish conductor. We drove to Great Witley Chapel where we were amazed at a Recorder and Harpsichord recital by Piers Adams and David Wright whose presentation was full of humour and especially with Piers, a virtuoso level of skill on this strangely never updated baroque musical instrument.

We were thrilled at the sounds made by the Three Cathedral Choirs in performances of the well-known Charpentier **Te deum** and then the full majesty of Handel's **Dixit Dominus**.

We decided to make the Wednesday a day off from concerts and visit Malvern in pursuit of Elgar. I really loved the Birthplace Trust House although he spent so little time there. I was able to put my arms around his neck, at long last, something I have always wanted to do, well at least since when I was 16 and first heard his symphonies. As I sat on the bench with Sir Edward, I noted that he was positioned just right for a view of the Malvern hills in the distance. Brilliant!



We also visited his grave and that of his wife Caroline Alice and their daughter Carice. Stood by his grave, I read that when he was buried, not a note of music was played. I almost wept and there and then sang themes from his work in my head. Sorry Edward.

In fact, we couldn't resist a musical event. That afternoon, we came home quickly and heard a "Trumpet Masterclass Showcase" during which 4 young trumpeters were put through their paces by Crispian Steele-Perkins who had performed in the Vivaldi double trumpet concerto on the Tuesday evening. This was a thrilling 60 minutes. Crispian, who told us that he was still suffering from the after effects of a double-hernia operation- rather threatening for a trumpeter I would guess - was so charming and modest, and he treated the young trumpeters with such graceful respect. It was wonderful to be there.

On the Thursday afternoon we went to the Huntingdon Hall to hear William Dazeley, baritone and Iain Burnside on the piano, in a brilliant recital of English and American songs. Both performers were excellent and convincingly put across the wide range of emotions in the songs. In a swiftly moving tongue-twister of a song called **Chicken** with words by Walter de la Mare, and set to music by Richard Peirson, William Dazely fluffed his lines, twice, and had to start again, but he managed the difficulty with such naturalness that the audience were completely sympathetic.



On a second visit to the Huntingdon Hall, we heard music by a Worcester-based group of musicians including Ian King, piano, Wilhelm Theunisson, tenor, Shulah Oliver (pictured) viola and violin, Claire King, violin, Claire Warboys soprano and Elizabeth Keeley-Smith. This ensemble played and sang exceptionally well. They were presenting English music, including Ivor Gurney's wonderful song "Sleep" and at the end, they gave a convincing performance of a world premiere song cycle called **A Worcestershire Song Cycle**. I enjoyed it so much I bought the c.d. The words were written by Chris Jaeger and although uneven, were interesting. They were at their best in a song called **The Bewdley Grenadier** and Ian King's music created a powerful and emotional mood in the hall. Wilhelm Theunissen's rendition of **Faithful City Morris** was delivered in exactly the right vein of humour for a song about Morris Dancing!

And so came to our final day, Saturday. We had decided to stay on until the Saturday morning for a 10am concert of Junior Choirs hoping to be inspired. The Juniors were not from the Cathedral school or the product of a special private sector, but children gathered by the County Music Service from ordinary families. There was a lack of polish in evidence, but the singing was good and we left feeling very inspired indeed. The children sang songs in Hebrew and English, with a range as wide as from Bob Chilcott and John Rutter to The Beatles and Abba. Good stuff. The local authority has now withdrawn funding for the choir, but, with great vision, the Cathedral and Cathedral School have stepped in to save the choir and are now funding it. That was good to hear.

It was whilst sitting in our B&B in Worcester that we heard the news of riots in several major cities, including close to home at West Way Cross and in Ealing. We managed to watch bits of the news but it all looked so horrendous. I feel that in some way, we missed it all, and to some extent, I am grateful. (See Enquire Within for my thoughts on the riots)

Our next week was to be quite a contrast. We were down the Wye Valley on the farm! Two rather elderly caravans and a milking shed converted to a cottage provided us with accommodation for all 11 of our immediate family, children, spouses, grandchildren and dogs. The most exciting aspect was a heated swimming pool which in effect was for our sole use. The grandchildren loved it and although it rained enough, we managed to enjoy our few days together. John the farmer was a wizard host. He even volunteered to give the children and 7 year-old Tom an opportunity to drive the tractor! We went to Chepstow Castle and Raglan Castle and everywhere we went, it was fun and pleasure, exactly what a holiday needs to be!



Grandchildren playing in the pool with threatening clouds just above!



One of the many great features of the Wye valley is Tintern! The ruins of the Abbey make such a deep impression, set against the lush vesture of the surrounding hills and valley. William Wordsworth wrote a long poem, one of the Lyrical Ballads, and here is a short section:

If this  
Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft,  
In darkness, and amid the many shapes  
Of joyless day-light; when the fretful stir  
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,  
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart,  
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee  
O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the wood  
How often has my spirit turned to thee!

Now a major tourist attraction, the abbey ruins fill me with a sense of regret at the loss of what these amazing stones stood for in years past. Not that it was all sweetness and light, of course! Behind the monastic worship and all the various skills by the monks, power was being wielded, and often cruelty and harsh punishments. That world is now so far away, but these stones, still standing up despite their age and the battering of the weather, are deeply impressive and invite investigation into what it was that inspired those who built them into such a magnificent edifice.



We were pleased to take the opportunity to visit James and Stevie Coutts at their house near Monmouth. James preached at our 70th anniversary Festal Mass. Their garden is amazingly good and it was enjoyable for us to talk at leisure for a time.



Back home in London, I was still on holiday, having taken three weeks off duty although only two Sundays off. So off we went to the Proms. We had booked Thursday 1st September long ago in July, and without really noting that it was to be given by the Israel Philharmonic under the baton of Zubin Mehta. (pictured) As we arrived, we realised something was going to happen. There were pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian demonstrations outside the Royal Albert Hall and as we went in I wondered if there would be disruptions during the concert. Yes, there would be! What happened seemed to me to be a very well-planned and co-ordinated series of protests, giving maximum disruption, presumably chiefly in order to draw the attention of the radio audience to the political situation between these opposing peoples. Apparently, the radio broadcast was interrupted every time a disruption happened.

The first piece of music was **Passacaglia**, the Opus 1 of Anton Webern, the piece he wrote as part of his graduation in 1908. Nothing in this piece alerts the listener to what Webern's name would be eventually associated with musically. It is calm, ethereal and other worldly. But about half way through it, a group of about 15 women stood up behind the orchestra in what are known as the Choir seats, and started to sing the Hymn to Joy which forms the finale of Beethoven's 9th Symphony. And as they sang, they waved Palestinian flags. They were eventually removed. But they had all thought this through carefully. About 50 or so people were eventually ejected as shouting, fist-fighting a waving flags flared up throughout the rest of the concert until the last piece.

I found the whole evening disturbing. In the end, the situation with Israel and Palestine is complex and will require international support for any agreement. It could also usher in a world-wide war. There are so many things involved. It is not an open-and-shut issue, such as the end of apartheid in South Africa was. I came away worried and full of fear at the power of extremists on any and all sides of such conflicts.

So Summer has come and gone and as we publish this October Magna, we look forward with pleasure to the next season's gifts and promises.

**Neil Richardson**