



LOVING

LOVING

Peter Stickland

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The front cover is *Night Bird* by Cordelia Blair-Stickland.
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I would like to express my grateful thanks to
Clare Carolan, Joy Flanagan, George Gajek, Marie-Anne Mancio
and Dennis Mariner.

For the Performance Artists

*If we had a keen vision and feeling for all ordinary human life,
it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat,
and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence.
As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.*

From *Middlemarch* by George Elliot

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The Tales of Jack and Adelia

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Pursuit

‘So Wilkinson, my boy, what are you going to do when you leave school?’

‘I should like to be a film star, sir.’

‘A film star, oh, yes, that would be nice. We would all like that wouldn’t we, armfuls of cash and an endless supply of beautiful women, that the sort of thing?’

‘Yes sir.’

This conversation, conducted with my tutor at the beginning of sixth form, has stayed with me. It’s surprising how many odd snippets of conversation rise out of the memory bank, not least because they are so pertinent. I also catch myself inventing future dialogues for myself and these are even more telling. I might imagine how I will be received home having qualified as a star pupil at the Royal College of Music or I might play out an interview with the jazz critic on the radio. I am studying singing with piano as my second subject, but my fantasies of fame, the natural vanity of youth, are overblown.

In my first year I dedicated myself to jazz, cinema, women and beer and in the second year I added theatre and sleeping to my list of essential activities. Not surprisingly I failed the second year and I was given a series of options, one of which was not to return. I had to retake theory and composition in order to continue.

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So far things have gone well and I am enthusiastic about classical subjects for the first time. I am preparing for my examination performance. I have adapted the opera *Apollo and Daphne* by Marie-Anne Bisset and I am making it into a duet for a singer and dancer to perform. My problem now is that I have fallen in love and I am so much at sea that I have lost all concentration. I can't stop thinking about Julia.

This morning Mrs. Pageant, my singing tutor, is taking me through some voice exercises, preparing me for this afternoon's rehearsal. Mrs. Pageant's instruction is intense and her attention to detail is unbelievably rigorous. I engage with the facial exercises she has contrived to warm up my voice, but my mind is trying to determine how I might best apologize to Julia. I tried to reach her on the phone this morning but she was not to be contacted.

Mrs. Pageant and I are now practicing voiced consonants and specifically the 'v' as the word 'love' is a prominent feature of the libretto. She tells me that I must add sufficient vocal tone to give the 'v' a vibrant, buzzing sound. We move onto the pronunciation of 'voice ... vision ... virtue ... valour ...', and then start to sing the first line of the libretto, "Your beauty invades me." The second line is, "I beg you, don't vanish", and the third, "I yearn for your love." Mrs. Pageant tells me that I am singing, "I *yawn* for your love", and she makes me repeat it until she is satisfied with my delivery.

During the final exercise we work on the refrain, "My voice is my devotion to a vision so divine." She asks me to sing 'myvv-oice' and 'devv-otion', and I do as she asks, but my devv-otion is not directed at myvv-oice, it is directed at Julia who retreated from me when I tried to kiss her. Now we are attending to 'avv-ision so di-vvine' and Mrs. Pageant insists that I am singing the 'v' on both pitches when it should only be sung on one. I sing it through, but the di-vvine vision of my beautiful Julia is my real preoccupation.

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'Well, in a way you are getting it right,' Mrs. Pageant tells me, 'but your singing is not beautiful this morning. If this piece is to have any resonance, you must think of the vision of loveliness that dances before you and sing like a nightingale.'

I would sing like a nightingale if Julia were here to forgive me and tell me that she loves me, but this, I fear, will never be. After a short session on, "I love you", which is to be sung like, "I loviev", we move on to the songs.

'I see your vision nearing,
To delight my ravished senses,
To revive my deep devotion,
To want you as beloved ...'

If only Julia would delight in delighting my ravished senses and not insist that my ravished senses remain ravished senses. When I get to "love me, love me, love me," Mrs. Pageant insists that I am singing 'lovah me' and she is a little exasperated with my efforts. She asks me to repeat the phrase endlessly.

'I will verify my love,
Just say you'll never leavvme,
Say you'll not deceivvme,
Say you will believvme,
And lovvme... lovvme... lovvme.'

Eventually I sing this to her satisfaction and she rewards me with the suggestion that we take a break. The very second that Mrs. Pageant leaves the studio I run to the students' common room, make straight for the phone and dial Julia's number. I have no luck getting through to her and this luck does not improve the more I repeat the dialling of her number. Mrs. Pageant is in the studio when I return.

'Ah good,' she says, 'We will now focus on your movements and the

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musical qualities of this piece you are to perform.’

I will myself to concentrate as she settles herself on the piano stool.

‘The sequences of notes in this work reflect a world that is perpetually on the move. Listen to this ... and this ... Can you hear that? Away it goes, as if the sounds were leaving us and flying out of the window. Even when the music is slow it seems to flow in a direction. You can’t listen to this and not think of movement. Our ballerina dances ahead of the music, but you, you are in pursuit of it. You are in pursuit of her and the music.’

I pursued Julia too rigorously.

‘The libretto is constructed around the chase, so your vocalisation must give expression to it. Your voice must change with the developments in the narrative and so must your posture and your movements.’

Julia had no pleasure in being chased.

‘As the dancer flies around the stage, you must continually twist in her direction and you must succeed in making your voice fly after her. If the work is to be read as a pursuit then the quality of the chase must be the measure of its success.’

I made a fool of myself and now I have lost her.

‘When you arrive on stage you have just killed Python. You are elated and completely full of yourself. You are Apollo, the pride of all the land. Byron calls him, “The sun, in human limbs arrayed ...”. You are full of light and confidence and you must fill the world with your voice. You must arrive onstage with a certain swagger and bounce for it is your swanky self-confidence that is your downfall. When you sing, “I offer Jove my victory”, you must boast about your exploits with a level of garrulous conceit that is beyond anything you would normally practice. You are sickeningly self-confident. “Evil revenged by valour, the villainous serpent slain, his vast vindictive body, vanquished from the plain.” You must swim in over-indulgent vanity when singing this.’

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I cannot do this. I have never been able to do it.

‘When the boy appears on stage with his bow you burst into laughter and start to ridicule him. He is about to shoot his arrow, but he is stopped by your laughter. You have no idea that this is Venus’s boy, Cupid. Full of bravado, you tell the boy that he should leave warlike activity to a hero like yourself. You must have insult in your voice and heartlessness in your laugh. You do not even honour him enough to address him directly. You direct your words at the audience, inviting them to share in your ridicule of the boy. You have no notion that Daphne, the mountain nymph, is close by. She is too fast and silent for you to notice her. You are still enjoying the admiration of the audience when the cheeky Cupid lets loose from his bow the arrow that hits Daphne. She changes then and becomes awkward and self-consciousness. She ceases her carefree dancing through the woods and hides nervously behind a tree. The arrow has made love a repellent thing to her and she is no longer innocent of its dangers.’

I probably made love a repellent thing to Julia.

‘Cupid then fires at you the arrow that causes you to fall hopelessly in love with her. Your jokes and your vanity are at an end. Daphne, realising the danger, tries to escape, but you turn and see her. This move away from the audience is the last time that you will look at them or engage with them. You become totally fixated upon Daphne. You are awestruck and made dumb without any songs to sing. Your move away from the audience and towards Daphne is crucially important. You must know how dramatic this shift in orientation can be.’

I know how swiftly Julia shifted her orientation.

‘Daphne starts the dance of her escape at a highly energetic pace. You, on the other hand, overwhelmed by her beauty, are still and silent. When you first find your voice, it is the voice of a boy; wide-eyed, open and innocent. You long for Daphne and you follow her everywhere

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knowing that you will do this endlessly. She flies from you whenever you manage to get near. You start by expressing the depth of your love, assuring her that you mean no evil intent. When you sing, “It is for love that I pursue you...”, it has to be the most tender, sonorous love song that you have the heart to sing. It is open and fresh, like love in the first bloom of spring.’

When my spring burst forth for Julia she received it with disapproval.

‘In these early songs you must be upright and your singing must be uplifting. With each new sequence your movements and your posture must change. Gradually, as Daphne continues to evade your advances, you begin to bend low and stretch out towards her. You start to plead with her and your songs become more tragic. This transition will only read if the lightness and tonal clarity of the early songs has registered with the audience. If you have ever been in love, remember how you felt in the beginning, take this quality into yourself and use these feelings to become the lover in your performance.’

Well, if words could pierce a heart as Cupid’s arrow pierced Apollo, then Mrs. Pageant’s words have truly succeeded here.

‘As the pursuit continues Daphne is overcome with exhaustion and your confidence increases. The clear expressive poetry of this morning’s lesson characterises this middle section. Your songs must reach out to her in purposeful tones for the beautiful sound of your voice is your only means of winning Daphne. You will never catch her in the chase. You may be, as Byron suggests, “... The Lord of the unerring bow ...”, but you are, first and foremost, the god of music and poetry. It is your voice that makes you shine.’

But this god of music and poetry is too lovesick to sing.

‘In the final phase of the middle section you start to plead with Daphne. It is here that your phrases remain incomplete. She flies from

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you, robbing your songs of meaning, but as her strength fails your words begin to captivate her. You must think of captivating her, not of capturing her. You must never take hold of her. The more your songs search her out the more her dance will read as a desperate need to escape. Remember, both of you are desperate. Fate has delivered the pair of you a destiny that you are desperate to fight against.’

I am indeed desperate. Julia I suspect is not.

‘Do not let the beauty of your partner fool you into thinking that she alone can carry the action. We are delighted and charmed by her movements, but your gestures must match her athletic flights or the partnership will appear unequal. Invite her to join you. Entice her. Reach out and show how keen your passion is.

The moment I reached out for Julia our romance was at an end.

‘This reaching out is not a grasping action. You are not making a rude intrusion upon her. She is within reach. You must hold her without force. This is the place where you are finally together. She must never feel that she has been captured. Fate, not you, has caused this. It is the charm and gentle tenderness in your tone that will win the day.’

Could gentle tenderness win the day?

‘The music increasingly flies from us and the notes begin to fade. The percussion has ceased. Only the strings accompany you. Daphne collapses with exhaustion, but she returns to her feet. She is still as graceful as a bird, but she can only flee from you in short bursts. When you sing, “On the wings of love, my precious bride ...”, we should imagine that you have eventually joined with her.’

Could I find such a voice to charm Julia?

‘The final section begins with a great cacophony from the orchestra. Once again you are shocked into silence. The violins are calling out, they are pleading for help. You are bewildered. Suddenly, you realise that Daphne is calling to her father, Peneus, the river god. She is pleading

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with him to change her form so that she can escape from you.’

I am bewildered.

‘The woodwinds return and Daphne’s subtle limbs are seized with stiffness. You are frozen in amazement. By your gestures alone you must indicate that something horrendous has occurred. You have no words for it. You have no songs to sing. You slump to the ground as the nymphs enter and place branches in her hands. They fix the headdress of leaves on her head and cover her body and legs in a bodice of bark. Daphne has been transformed into a laurel tree. She is immobile and rigid. Her feet, like roots, are stuck fast in the ground.’

I have no words for it, no songs to sing.

‘Daphne has been transformed into a tree and you move towards her and caress her. Your caresses must be gentle or you will throw her off balance.’

I tell Mrs. Pageant that ‘I will be as gentle as a lamb. I will caress the air around her and weep.’ She gives me a studied look that expresses some uncertainty.

‘Wearing Daphne’s leaves is now the closest you will ever get to her. When you sing, “I will have you as my crown ...”, you must make it a cry of remorse. A cry that is as delicate as a flower. It is a lament. Hearts should ache. You are broken and you will never be the same again.’

I will never be the same again.

Mrs. Pageant sings.

‘My love will never waver;

I will vaunt your verdant bough,

I will make you live forever,

Wear you woven on my brow.’

I fall silent in admiration of the beauty of her singing.

‘Can you imagine his pain? These are words of loss. It is a song of death. Is it possible that you know death? Do you have enough love in

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you to sing this?’

Such words, what sorrow, without hesitating I say, ‘Yes’.

‘Excellent, I will see you after lunch.’

‘I will see you after lunch’.

With these words Mrs. Pageant leaves the studio and the morning has ended. I run to the phone dial Julia’s number and Julia answers. I have a choking pain in my throat, but my delight in her voice echoes through me and I explode with extravagant laughter. Then I apologize for my behaviour last night and promise to be gentle and considerate to her in future. Julia laughs. She says that she accepts my apology and asks if this is the only reason for my call. I can’t believe that it can be this simple. I am forgiven. I tell her that I love her and ask if we can meet later. Julia says that she has already made other plans for this evening.

It is now some forty years later and I have just fallen for another woman called Julia. As soon as I heard her name, the image of my first Julia came back to me with startling clarity. I could remember her laugh, her walk and her way of conversing. I remembered how electric it was to kiss her and how wonderful it was to embrace her. I recall that I had to apologise more than once for being over aroused by her. I was consumed with passion for her and yet, extraordinary as it may sound, I have absolutely no idea how our love ended.

How is it that memory works like this? It cannot be possible that after dedicating my days to loving her, to pursuing her, that she could simply slip away from me unnoticed. I have no idea when or where the break occurred and I cannot remember if we discussed our relationship in any serious way. We did not end it dramatically. There were no more rows. I didn’t continue to pursue her after college. I didn’t write passionate letters to her and I have no memory of having to live with a

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dramatic sense of loss or remorse because we were no longer together.

I have no idea how I knew that our romance was at an end. It just ceased to exist. What was I doing? Did she just disappear? When we are young we can so easily move our attention to different things, we move so effortlessly to different places. I wonder what became of Julia. I would dearly like to tell her how I felt about her. Dear Julia, I wish you were with me still. I can't stop thinking about Julia.

Consequences

My grandmother, Nonna Antonietta, lived her whole life in Venice, in a house on the Fondamenta Nuove. When she was a child, her father ran the bar on the ground floor and she lived with her family on the upper floors. My grandfather, Nonno Vincenzo, was not from Venice. He was a country boy, from Puglia in the south. Before he was a man he ran away to Brindisi and worked on the boats. That's where he learned to cook. He worked on a ship that travelled the Adriatic and after a few trips to Venice he decided to stay here. He never returned to Puglia.

Initially, Grandpa cooked in a trattoria on the island of Sant'Erasmus. He cooked for the labourers who worked in the vegetable fields. One day the owner of a restaurant in the Campo Santa Maria Nova tasted my grandpa's wonderful cooking and he asked my grandpa to work for him. This is when Grandpa moved to Venice. He rented a room in my grandma's house and it was love at first sight. After they were married, they took over my great-grandpa's bar and converted it into a trattoria. Grandpa did the shopping and the cooking while Grandma served the meals and attended to the money. They were very successful. My father was their oldest son and by the time he was old enough to work, my grandparents owned a restaurant on the Calle Stella. That's where I live. My parents run the restaurant there now.

My grandma is buried next to my grandpa on the island of San

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Michele. My grandpa loved vegetables and my grandma loved books. He told me stories about people in the olden days and she told me stories about the people she knew. Grandpa took me to buy vegetables on Sant'Erasmus and Grandma read me stories and played consequences with me. I was the favourite granddaughter and on the day we buried my grandma I sat looking out from their house across to the island of San Michele and resolved to find someone who could make me feel precious.

After working at this for a while I realised that finding even one suitable substitute for my grandparents was not an easy task. I had no siblings and my parents were too busy running the restaurant. I didn't have a special friend and after testing my various cousins I determined that they had no talent for such a role. I was beginning to feel what it might be like to fail at my first serious endeavour when I discovered Stefano.

Stefano, a year younger than me, lived next to the Trattoria on the Fondamenta Nuove. He showed intense concentration when I talked about the journeys we would make together and when I tested his ability to play consequences, a light shined out of him. Later I learned that this light was called inspiration. I was delighted when Stefano agreed to be my best friend and to ensure his commitment, I wrote out the aims of our shared adventure for us both to sign. We were to travel to the island of Sant'Erasmus when it was fine, read stories when it was wet and play consequences every day that we spent together. I also wanted to study people so that I could talk about what they did, but I did not tell Stefano about this. I couldn't find the words then to tell him that we were to be pioneers of understanding whose knowledge would someday be useful to others.

Stefano and I travelled everyday. We spent all our pocket money on tickets for the vaporetto and for lunch we ate pastries and cakes

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that I smuggled from the restaurant. We often went to San Michele to lay fresh flowers on my grandparent's graves, but most of our time was spent exploring Sant'Erasmus. We knew every inch of this quiet, peaceful island and the gardeners taught us everything there is to know about growing vegetables. The last thing we did before leaving the island was play consequences and we played it just as Grandma and I had done. We would sit on the pier with our feet in the water, looking across the lagoon to Burano, and alternately made little additions to a story that we developed together.

The colourful houses on Burano seemed to be calling to us and one day Stefano and I decided that we must go there. It was crowded and noisy and not what we had imagined, but when we were exploring the marshes to the west of the town we saw in the distance the campanile of Santa Maria Assunta on Torcello. We both wanted to go there immediately, but it was too late so we went the following day. Before long Torcello became the site of our daily pilgrimages and we adopted it as our home. It is as old as can be and has very few houses. The piazza is so under used it is covered in weeds. Apart from the great basilica and a lovely old church there is little else, but it was our very own lost world and it was the perfect place for our story telling.

The path from the lagoon to the dusty piazza follows a canal. Four large houses sit next to the path and there are three restaurants, one of them with many expensive boats moored nearby. On the opposite bank there is nothing, only marshland. Many ghosts inhabit this landscape and Stefano and I talked to them about the times when the basilica was built. The basilica is a magical place. We were once allowed to climb its campanile and from there we could see the entire lagoon. We played in the basilica for hours. There was always a particular place in its intricate landscape that we hadn't inhabited before. Every square metre of the floor and walls told a different story and the mosaics fed our appetite for

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extraordinary thoughts. *The Last Judgement* was my favourite. If people upset me I secretly sent them into this world where the serpents were free to crawl in and out of their skulls.

Stefano and I never paid a visit to the basilica without talking to the blue Madonna. She is surrounded in gold and she takes up the entire wall behind the altar. We told her everything about those things that concerned us and on many occasions she interceded on our behalf. These were heavenly days and before they ended we would sit on the ponte del Diavolo with our feet dangling over the canal and play consequences. When it was my turn to start I would begin with a girl and when it was Stefano's turn to start he would begin with a boy.

One day a little girl told her mother that she had seen an angel. The mother thought that she had seen the picture of an angel, but the little girl told her that she had seen a real one and she invited her to see him.

The mother went with the little girl into the garden, but the mother had a leg that didn't work very well, so she had to walk very slowly. The little girl, leaping and running, soon reached the angel's beautiful coach.

When the angel saw her he told his coachman to drive off and the coach vanished before the mother arrived. The little girl cried and her mother wiped her eyes. Then the little girl said that it probably wasn't an angel.

The mother said that she would meet a real angel one day and they walked back to the house. For some reason the mother was now walking very smoothly and forever afterwards no-one could ever guess that she had a funny leg.

Then they noticed how quiet everything had become and suddenly they heard a strange cry, high up in the air. They looked up and saw an eagle, but it was bigger than any they had ever seen or read about.

The eagle sat on a tree and stared at them. It was so big it could easily eat them up. They looked at its big scary eyes, praying that it had already eaten supper. Then the eagle laughed and flew back to the mountain where it lived.

When the mother and the little girl arrived back at the house they

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discovered that the banquet they had made had vanished. They didn't know what to do and they didn't want to go and tell the giants that the banquet had disappeared.

The little girl ran to find the magician. When she told him of their trouble he said that he was just about to come to the party, as it was his job to entertain the giants. He took his big kettle off the stove and took it to their kitchen.

He filled it with water and special herbs and when it started to boil the banquet reappeared. This time the table was a mile long. Then a horrid looking ogre appeared. He was very cross, because he had made the food vanish.

He said that the girl must now go and live with him as a forfeit for getting the banquet back. The magician couldn't help her this time, but as she was leaving he gave her a special potion from his kettle to keep her from feeling sad.

When the little girl arrived at the ogre's castle she saw a young boy sitting on a throne. The ogre took off his mask, he wasn't really an ogre, and he bowed to the boy. He said that the boy was an emperor who had been sent here for telling lies.

The ogre told the girl to kiss the emperor and when she had done this he told her that if she agreed to marry him he could return to his own palace. The emperor said that he lived on the other side of the world and the girl agreed to marry him.

The giant eagle returned to take them to the emperor's land, but the winds kept pushing them out to sea. They had to hold fast to the eagle's wings and after many hours they landed on a sandy beach surrounded by cliffs.

On top of the cliff was a castle, but they could not climb up to it, so they had to travel for miles over sand dunes to get there. As they were approaching the castle the soldiers in the castle saw them and fired their guns.

This was to warn them of a deep ravine, but the children didn't know

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this so they hid. The next morning they heard a cricket singing a very sad song. He was sad because he couldn't see and he missed the flowers and the leaves on the trees.

The cricket was also hungry and wet and cold. Then an ant came along and when he heard the cricket's sad song he showed him a hut where he could live. Inside there was something for him to eat and a cricket's coat and shoes.

The cricket sang the ant a beautiful song and then suddenly he could see again. He then saw a leaf floating to the ground, but the leaf was crying because the wind had blown it off the tree and now it was going to die.

So the cricket told a twig about his unhappiness and the twig told the branch and the branch told the tree and the tree shook itself. And it shook so hard that it stirred up all the leaves and soon they were all back on the tree.

When the tree saw all the beautiful colours of the leaves that had been on the ground he was very happy and he asked the wind not to blow too hard. The wind blew very gently, just strong enough to whistle a song with the leaves.

When the Emperor and the little girl woke up they discovered that the ravine had disappeared so they could now go to the castle. They arrived at the walls and tried to climb a rope that hung from a tower, but they could not climb up.

They both started to cry, but the giant eagle, hearing them, came flying down from the mountain. He sprinkled some powder over them to make them grow and they were so tall that their heads were as high as the windows.

They looked in and saw the people having breakfast and then they heard the voice of the castle. It told them that the door was open and they could come in, so they became their real size and went into the castle.

When the people recognised their emperor they danced for joy and made a big procession to take him and the little girl to the city. They crossed over rocks and cliffs, through a valley and over a fast flowing river.

Then they saw the blue towers of the city, but a cloud came down and

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covered them in silver spray. It filled their eyes and they could not see. The emperor was about to fall over the edge of a precipice when something held on to him.

It was the tail of a magic monkey. The monkey rescued the Emperor and then said that he had to be off in a hurry as he was in danger. He took a handful of magic stones from his pocket, threw them on the ground and then disappeared.

Then a big bad rat came rushing through the woods and swore by his tail that he would catch the monkey, even if he had to hunt him forever. He started to spin round and round, chasing his tail, and then he disappeared.

Suddenly a witch appeared and asked where her rat was. She was very cross that he had disappeared and she was just about to cast a spell on them when she fell asleep because she had cast too many spells already that day.

Everyone fell asleep and the next morning they found themselves in a beautiful garden. Two boys were standing looking at the apples on an apple tree and the younger one told the little girl that she looked like a princess.

He said that he wanted to marry her because she was so beautiful and the little girl blushed. The older brother said that she wasn't a princess because she was too poor, so the emperor took out his jewels and showed them to him.

Then, at this very moment the witch woke up and snatched the jewels. She was still very angry and now she was strong enough to cast a spell on them. She gathered up her bag of spells and started to utter her magic words.

Suddenly the giant Madonna from the basilica appeared and sent the witch swirling down into the ravine. The Madonna lifted them all up in her arms and took them to the city where they lived happily ever after.

We often introduced the big, beautiful, blue Madonna from the basilica into our stories. She finished them for us when we were too tired to carry on, or when we got into difficulties. Sometimes, when I was frightened at night, I would speak to her and she always answered me. Stefano often spoke to God when he was in trouble. For him, God was

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a very important man who had to be obeyed. He was always trying to find out what God wanted of him so that he could do it. I didn't speak to God and when I did his answers came too late. I thought that he was probably too busy fighting the devil. I was never interested in the devil, so I ignored both of them.

I never told anyone about this other than Stefano. He didn't think that I would be punished for saying such things, but it is certain that the grown-ups would have done. I loved him for that. These thoughts were my precious secrets and it was very important to me that nothing bad ever happened to me on account of them. I was never punished, even when I promised the Madonna that I would do something in return for a favour and broke my promise. I took it for granted that I was different, that I should not be held by the restrictions that constrained others.

During the second summer of our being together Stefano suddenly declared that he wanted more time to play football with his friends. He asked if I would mind about this. I thought about it very carefully and decided that he was a luxury I could not live without. One day, after playing consequences, when we were still sitting on the ponte del Diavolo, I told Stefano that we would have to get married. He smiled and I was relieved that he was not alarmed by my suggestion. I said that we would have to show each other our secret parts if we were to be married and Stefano understood this.

We stood up and walked into the marshes on the other side of the bridge. Here we were hidden in the reeds. He pulled down his trousers and pants and I lifted my dress and pulled down my knickers. We stared at each other for a short while and then we rearranged our clothes. I kissed him gently on the lips and told him that we were now married. On the way home I asked Stefano if he felt any different now that we were married. Stefano thought about this and he told me that he felt special.

'Will we have to live together now?' he asked.

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'No,' I said, 'that must come later. For the moment we will not tell anyone or they will ruin it.'

Stefano agreed, but he was more subdued than usual.

I felt aloof and very special. This, I decided, was what I had always wanted. Marriage defined me and set me apart from other children. When I reached home my mother asked where I had been. I said that I had been playing consequences with Stefano. I could never have communicated the importance of our activity to her or explain that it was too serious to be regarded as play.

My mother often asked why I didn't spend more time with my girl friends, but I loathed answering questions about myself. I hated being asked what I liked and I was very touchy about receiving advice. I regarded other people's thoughts about me as intrusive. I was outside their world and they knew nothing about me or about the importance of the task I had set myself. I didn't realise it then, but I kept many things hidden from myself. I only wanted to know about the part of me that I invented.

Soon after this Stefano told me that his family were moving to Brindisi. His father, who worked for the customs department, was going to be made a Captain. I was charmed that he was going to that part of the country where my grandpa came from. I liked the symmetry of it.

'How soon will you go?' I asked.

'In two weeks time,' he said.

I didn't complain to him about it. I knew that this kind of thing always happened to adults and sooner or later it was bound to happen to me.

'Now I will get to know what it felt like to be a widow,' I told myself. I would add the experience of his loss to my collection of research on feelings. It was to be one of my experiments. The next day I sat in my grandma's house on the Fondamenta Nuove, looking across to San

Michele, and made another solemn resolution. I would have no more friends and I would spend my days reading books. This is exactly what I did. I read and nursed my broken heart. I had no idea how difficult it would be to live with a broken heart.

Partners

After scraping a pass at the Royal College of Music I went to Manhattan where I saw a number of live events called 'Performances'. These inspired me to think of my talents in a new light and when I returned to London I found a flyer in a bookshop inviting participants to take part in 'open performance sessions'. The group running these workshops called themselves 'Performance Artists' and they were based in Chalk Farm. I had no idea what to expect, but I was eager to find out.

It was a dark evening when I made my way to the run down industrial building that was the venue and I felt a little intimidated. Inside there were than a dozen young men and women chatting and laughing together. They welcomed me nicely and asked what I did. I told them that I was an out of work singer and that I played piano three nights a week in a hotel lounge. This amused them. They were mostly, artists and writers. One of them told me that everyone attended the workshop on the understanding that they would carry out instructions to the best of their ability. This seemed reasonable. He said that I would soon get the sense of it.

I took off my coat, placed it with the others at the end of the space and studied the performers with interest. When they agreed that it was time to start, the man who I first spoke with gathered everyone's attention and told us that we would do a warm up exercise. We were to

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run around the space as fast as possible without colliding into each other. We all stood quietly while he counted to ten and then the participants started to career around the room at high speed. They flew in every direction, like disturbed ants. I too began to dart this way and that, avoiding contact, but getting very close to collisions. Some played the game dangerously, giving themselves very little space to avoid crashing into others. Before long, two bodies collided and hit the floor. A third body quickly joined them. Then the mobile ones appeared to attack the prone ones, darting and hurdling over them as they struggled to be vertical. Contact was still avoided where possible, but it was obvious that the chaos would only increase.

‘Freeze,’ shouted the man who had instigated this activity and everyone stopped mid action as though they had responded to a pause button. They were very good at holding their positions. I was breathing like I had just run a marathon and wobbling on one leg. Then I realised that the other performers were moving very slowly. I could just perceive that they were moving to an upright position. It was a beautiful action.

‘Interaction exercise,’ called a female performer and she picked up a large book lying on the table and read from it.

‘Using any words and gestures, address someone for thirty seconds. Repeat the activity with other performers until an agreed trigger causes you to stop. We should divide into two groups for this’ she said. ‘Simply freeze when you do not want to continue.’

The group divided naturally into two. Most performers started by addressing each other one to one, but a few addressed the side or the back of other players. The address was generally in the form of words and actions, but some expressed themselves by action only and some talked without displaying any particular gestures. There was very little consensus about the length of time thirty seconds was and before long it was impossible to recognise any form out of the cacophony of sounds

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and the complexity of gestures. I addressed a woman who addressed the back of a man who turned and addressed her, just as she turned and addressed the profile of a woman who was addressing another man. The man was addressing the man next to him and, when he turned to address another man, he turned to address the profile of a woman who then turned to address him.

I noticed a very attractive woman in the other group and decided to break ranks and stand next to her. I stood at her side whispering and then I went down on my knees and repeatedly made proposals of marriage to her. When she turned to face me, I started to offer her my undying love. She smiled and I was pleased that my conduct amused her. She placed her hands on her heart to indicate that she was touched by my intentions and then she turned her back on me and addressed another man. Having addressed her for more than a minute, I turned away, but almost immediately I turned back again and expressed my appreciation of her beauty. Then I noticed that my previous group were standing still and silent and only a few in this group were still active. I froze.

After we had all been still for a few seconds everyone laughed and repeated their experiences to each other. I smiled at the beautiful woman, but I was too embarrassed to talk to her. There was too much that I wanted to say. I discovered that these were ‘warm up’ exercises and we were now going to carry out a sustained improvised performance. The guy who seemed to be running this picked up the large book, found a page and called for everyone’s attention.

‘This performance is governed by instructions,’ he began. ‘The instructions indicate how words and props are to be used.’

He returned the large book to the table threw dice and read from it, ‘The verbal strategies are: *One; give instructions to another performer. Two; talk continuously about a single topic without repetition.*’

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He turned to another page, threw the dice again and read, 'The prop strategies are: *One; work with a prop that you can move continuously. Two; find a prop that will keep you off the ground.* Let's go back to our previous groups. Each group will choose two performers by chance.'

I stood with my second group, next to the beautiful woman, but this made the groups unequal so I returned to my first group. Someone placed crosses on two pieces of paper, folded them and put them into a hat along with similar, but blank pieces of paper. I chose a crossed paper, so I was to perform together with a tall woman with mousy coloured hair. It was agreed that a pair from the other group would start and they chose which of the verbal and prop instructions they would work with. The woman was required to speak continuously and find a prop to keep her off the ground and the man was required to issue instructions while keeping a prop in continual motion. She chose a ladder and he chose a broom. I watched them intently.

The woman climbed the ladder and started to describe all the members of her family. The man swept the floor and instructed her to move up and down the ladder. The man gave his broom to the woman, pulled the ladder against the wall and instructed her to sweep away the cobwebs that had gathered in the corner of the wall and ceiling. He then pulled the ladder to another position along the wall and instructed her again how to sweep. She continued to talk about her family and he continued to give her instructions about the presence of cobwebs. He then pulled her and the ladder about the room as fast as he could, instructing her to attack the cobwebs. After a while, he discovered that the ladder was easier to move if he stood between its legs and pushed it. The woman, like Don Quixote astride an unsteady horse and with a broom for a lance, followed his instructions to do battle with a great number of demon cobwebs that the man conjured for her. She was now inventing ancient members of her family.

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I was greatly amused, but I frequently turned to gaze at the beautiful woman who had been the subject of my declarations of undying love. Now and then she smiled at me knowingly. There was something about her that held my attention. I was breathing her in. I remember exactly how she looked.

Then it was time for me to perform. I stood with the tall woman to choose our instructions. It occurred to me that she was reticent and difficult. I felt nervous about working with her. I was required to talk continuously without repeating myself and she was to give me instructions. I had to have a prop that I moved continuously and she a prop to keep her off the ground. She chose a chair and I did also. The task of talking continuously preoccupied me more than the prop did. In fact I was terrified and I had no time to think.

Then an image came to me as fresh as a dream remembered upon waking up. It was in fact a memory of a day in my life when I was about ten or twelve. I stared in the direction of my performance partner. She sat on her chair facing the audience. Her feet were on the horizontal bar at the front, her elbows were on her knees and her head was in her hands. I walked around the space with my chair and began my monologue.

I can see the head of a Mexican boy about ten years old. Sweat is pouring from his face. He is under considerable strain. The Mexican boy is holding onto two boots that are placed on each of his shoulders. The camera pans out to reveal that he is supporting a man on his shoulders. The shot pans out further. The man who is standing on the boy's shoulders has his arms tied behind his back and he has a bandanna over his eyes and a noose around his neck. The noose is attached to a branch of a tree. The boy is balancing his father, preventing him from hanging. Two cowboys are sitting on horses nearby.

One of them says to the boy, "if you're lucky someone will come and rescue you before your old man falls off."

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They both laugh and ride away. They are in a desert landscape, in the middle of nowhere. The camera returns to the boy. I am transfixed by his struggle to prevent his father from hanging on the noose.

My performance partner stood on her chair and instructed me to place my chair next to hers. She stepped from her chair onto mine. She then directed me to move her chair to the other side of my chair, the one she was standing on. When I had completed this she stepped onto her own chair again. I continued talking.

This was an image I saw on television one morning when I was about the same age as the Mexican boy. I was not supposed to be watching television and my father was trying to gather everyone together to go for a walk. I had the volume turned down so as not to attract attention, but my father came into the room. I turned the television off and ran out. I was shocked by what I had seen and I did not want my father to see it. I ran downstairs to a little place in the basement under the front door. It was a storeroom, but I thought of it as my workshop because the tools were kept there. It was a place where I made things. I sat down in the semi-darkness thinking about the film images I had just seen. I had not seen such violence before and I could not comprehend how it was possible for the two cowboys to do such a thing to a boy.

My performance partner repeated her instructions. Every time I moved a chair she stepped onto it and we travelled in a straight line across the performance space.

I was desperate to return to the film, but I could not tell my father how important it was for me to do this. The boy could not stand there for long before the weight of his father caused him to drop to his knees. Someone had to rescue them. I wanted to save them from this terrible fate. The unfairness of being delivered this unbelievable image and then have it taken away from me was too much. I felt that I could never calm down until I knew how this disaster was resolved. I wondered if the boy would feel responsible for his father's death if he fell. What would I do? Would I run away

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or stay and watch my father die? What was the father thinking about? I could not talk to my father about this. I repeated the image to myself. I could see the Mexican boy's sweating face, his father balanced on his shoulders. What I would do if I had my father hanging from a noose above my head? Would my feelings for him change if I were in that situation? What would it be like to be responsible for his life? How sad would I be if he died?

By this time I had facilitated my partner's move to the other side of the performance space and she was standing on a chair by the wall. She then instructed me to me to take the chair that was free and to place it in the middle of the room.

When I was certain that my father had stopped his prowling I went to my bedroom to look for two cowboys so that I could re-enact the scene. I did not have a hanging man or a boy with his arms up by his shoulders, but I did have a cowboy with arms out, ready to draw his guns and another one with his hands up. To make them look like Mexicans I filed off the guns and holsters and cut off the cowboy hats. I tied the hands of the 'draw your gun' cowboy behind his back and he became the father and the 'hands up' cowboy became the son. I wrapped wire around the son's hands to connect them to the legs of the father. I found a tile that I could use as a base, but there was no glue in the workshop. I needed superglue to stick the Mexicans to the tile. As I was making for the garden shed I bumped into my father.

My female partner directed me to return and stand with my back to her. Without any warning or new instructions, she leaped onto my back and assumed the 'piggy back' position. I picked up her chair and moved it around as best I could. We remained in this position for some time.

My father told me that I should get ready as we were going to the park. I insisted that I was too busy making something and I returned to the workshop, throwing the bolt across the door. I could hear my mother and father talking. She was telling him to let me be and he was grumbling about me being tied to her apron strings. There I

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was, trying to save my father from certain death and all he could do was to act like the cowboys. I wanted him balancing precariously on my shoulders, vulnerable and reliant upon me. I wondered what I would tell my mother, if I had failed to save my father from hanging.

With the woman on my back I began to think that she imagined she was playing the father in my narrative. She was not light by any means and I felt strangled by her arms that clung tightly around my neck. When I could not remain standing still any longer I began to move, carrying her and the chair with me. The woman instructed me to carry her to the chair in the middle of the room. I was greatly relieved when I deposited her there.

In the workshop I settled to the task of making a base for my Mexicans. I cut some wood to act as my base and proceeded to dig out two holes with a chisel. These holes were to receive the legs of the Mexican boy. I made the holes too big, so I had to bang little pins into the toes of the boy to achieve more stability. I liked it that the boy was sinking into the ground under the weight of his father. I tied string across the father's eyes in imitation of the bandanna and gazed long and hard at my desperately balancing figures.

The woman then instructed me to take my chair over to the opposite wall. After I had completed this she directed me to carry her to this new position. I picked up another chair, went over to her, turned around and allowed her to get on my back again. I hated her for doing this. She was definitely playing the father in my story, but she was also playing the horrid cowboys because she was demanding that I carry her. I imagined her smiling derisively on my shoulders, disrupting the story and robbing me of its meaning. I carried her with great difficulty, feeling like the victim of her cruel joke.

My Mexicans failed to stay in place for very long and I spent a considerable

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amount of time attempting to balance them. I then decided that the way to support them was to hang them from the noose around the father's neck. I wasn't certain whether this would spoil the effect of the heavy father standing on his young son, but I went to the garden and cut off the end of an apple tree branch. I pulled off the leaves, returned the workshop and nailed the branch to the side of a large, brick-like piece of wood. I made a noose out of string and then hung the father and the son from the branch.

Halfway between the chairs I came to a halt, dropped the chair I was carrying and dropped to my knees. I could not sustain this kneeling position, so I put my arms down on the floor to support her weight. I was now in the position of a donkey. Gradually, the woman moved out of the 'piggy back' position and sat on my back as though she were riding side-saddle. I did not move and she did not instruct me to do so. I continued talking, but my sentences became slower and the gaps between them grew longer.

At first the son's feet didn't reach the floor and then when I lengthened the string it was too long and the son was not in a vertical position. Once I had settled this I gazed at my work and considered how they might be rescued. I imagined the Mexican boy trying to figure out what his chances were, given that time was running out. The noose I decided was too far away from the branch.

I could no longer support this woman who had become a bossy pile of luggage on my back. I eased myself down to the floor carefully because I had to give her enough time to adjust her position without falling off and touching the floor. I lay flat on my stomach. The woman's bottom was on the top of my back and her feet were resting on my legs. I remained there, static, pinned to the floor. She gave no further instructions and she sat very still, expecting me to cope with her weight bearing down on my chest. I continued with the narrative, but my voice was quiet and strained. I felt like a survivor in a collapsed mineshaft,

my small voice being my only means of communication to the rescue team.

Maybe... if the noose was shorter... it would be possible... for the son... to run from... his supporting position... climb the tree... and pull his father... up to... the branch... before he was... strangled.

Then the audience started clapping. The woman got off my back and I stood up in a dazed state. I could never have imagined then that this woman and I would live together for the next two years. I have no idea why I allowed it to happen. Our years together can be characterised by the pattern of behaviour we had established as partners in the performance space.

Connections

I have arrived for the 'Open Lecture' at Ca' Foscari early so that I can get a seat at the front. I like to be close enough to sense the speaker and get the full effect of the performance. Today Luciano Berio is talking about Music and Literature. I don't know him, but I have just read the programme notes. He was born in a small town in Liguria and he is now professor of composition at the Juilliard School in New York. Come September I will be studying at Ca' Foscari, a degree in Anglo/American Language, Literature and Culture. Yugh! It sounds so awful; too many words and subjects here for a course on literature. I can't find a university in Italy that offers a course in writing and I can't leave my country just yet. First I must improve my English then I will go to London.

My mother says that I am not making the most of myself. She says that I am an attractive young woman and I should go out more and enjoy the company of girls my own age. Imagine if I dressed up and ran after boys as they do, she would soon voice her objections and demand that I pay more attention to my studies. No fear of this though, I spend most of my time writing. With writing I can live in my dreams. It helps time flow beautifully. Walking does too. I have walked every island and every pathway in Venice and of course I still go regularly to Torcello. Writing, walking and reading, that's all I have. I have read everything

I can find: Dostoyevsky, Kafka, Lampedusa, Verga, Svevo. I am now looking for other authors.

Two men enter the auditorium to enthusiastic applause. One sits in a chair and the other stands at the lectern. They are both very handsome.

‘I will not waste many words introducing Luciano Berio,’ the man begins. ‘You know him well as the pioneer of music whose works are internationally regarded as modern classics. This afternoon he is going to talk about the threshold between the new and the borrowed, between music and literature. I give you Luciano Berio.’

Great applause as Berio comes to the lectern.

‘Boundaries,’ he begins, ‘are the place where things become blurred. I am intrigued by this place. I listen harder here than anywhere else. I like it best when music connects with distant points, when it is allowed to pursue a very wide transformational trajectory. I like to invite interventions that send music in every direction. I actively seek out these possible invasions. Today I am going to talk about the wonderful invasions from literature that I have invited into my work. I will start by playing something for you. In this composition I wanted the listener to pass from a ‘poetic’ listening space to a ‘musical’ listening space. This musical listening space is based on poetic material that I have transformed into music. The first work I will play is called *Thema*. In it I use the ‘Sirens’ episode from *Ulysses* by James Joyce. Italo Svevo once said that when Joyce had finished a page of prose he imagined that he had made a page of music. I do not imagine that my music makes a piece of prose, but that it creates a space where everything comes together.’

He nods to someone in the control room and sits down. A woman’s voice fills the auditorium.

Bronze by gold heard the hoofirons, steelyrining imperthnthn thnthnthn.

I am not sure that I am catching every word.

And a call, pure, long and throbbing Longindying call.

Berio has amplified and distorted the voice.

Smack. La cloche! Thigh smack. Avowal. Warm.

They are lovely words.

A sail! A veil awave upon the waves. Lost. Thristle fluted. All is lost now.

And Berio is distorting everything.

Pearls: when she. Liszt’s rhapsodies. Hissss.

Berio speeds up some lines of speech and slows down others. He causes the voice to echo and stutter and I wonder if this is some kind of dream. I don’t know where I am. I seem to be lost. It is better when I think of myself as the music, then I am searching with it and know where I am. I make brief arrivals and then almost at once I am searching again. Each time I am in a bigger space. It is so big I can only get lost. The woman’s voice is now repeating itself over her own voice. I am not listening to individual words or sounds now. I am lost in the layered beauty of the sounds. But now it is coming to an end. It is over. The auditorium is quiet. There is applause. Berio returns to the lectern.

‘So, in this work I am making a reading of Joyce’s text within certain restrictions dictated by the text itself. I am establishing a new relationship between speech and music. Suddenly Mr. Bloom’s day in Dublin takes another direction. It is no longer possible to differentiate between word and sound, sound and noise, noise and poetry, poetry and music. Everything is relative.’

I listen to Berio’s words, but my mind is awash. I am floating. I hear phrases like ‘electro-acoustic transformational possibilities’ and regard them as music. ‘Sound families and groups of syllables’ become exactly

that. I move in and out of understanding. ‘The scale of vocal colours and consonants.’ ‘The voiced and the unvoiced.’ ‘Elements marked by abrupt breaks or sonic discontinuity are converted into periodic or pulsed ones and then they are stitched together into continuous lines of sound.’ I love him. ‘Elements that are initially continuous, like sibilants, become periodic and ultimately discontinuous through electronic manipulation and transformation.’ I listen intently and feel my own transformation. ‘Periodic or rhythmically repetitive sound elements are rendered first continuous and then discontinuous.’ My world becomes a discontinuous sequence of rhythmically repetitive events. ‘All these transformations are edited. I superimpose identical elements with varying time relations, frequencies and filtering processes.’ He is describing me. This is what I do.

Suddenly, there is loud applause. The other man returns to the lectern and informs us that we are to take a break and return to the auditorium in twenty minutes. I stand up with other members of the audience and file out into the lobby. Tea and coffee has been provided in one of the side rooms. As I enter I feel that it might be too crowded for me, but my need of a drink lures me in. The audience are queuing up to help themselves from thermos flasks that are placed at the front of a table. The lemons, milk and sugar are in the middle of the table and plates of biscuits have been placed at the back. The space above the table is filled with arms reaching above, below and around each other.

The flasks are not clearly labelled and some get tea when they want coffee and some get coffee when they want tea. The flasks will only release their liquid if a particular spot on the lid is pressed in a particular way and this too is creating difficulties. Some, having failed in their attempt to press the flask for liquid, have given up and are relying on those who have developed a particular skill for filling cups to provide them with refreshment. The cups are handed back to the waiting crowd, but some

get coffee with lemon in it and some get tea with milk when they want it black. No-one, unless they are next to the table, gets biscuits.

The old gentleman next to me looks perplexed. His cup has overflowed into his saucer and he cannot reach for a biscuit until he has reduced the liquid. He empties the saucer and part of the cup’s contents into another cup on the table, wipes the cup and saucer with a napkin, adds some milk and then grabs as many biscuits as he can hold.

I am satisfied with a cup of black coffee and I commence my move away from the table. I stand next to another gentleman whose cup and saucer is also swimming in black coffee, but he is too far from the table to pour away the excess liquid. He holds the saucer in both hands and sips from the horizontal cup. When he has created some space he pours the contents of the saucer into the cup. This is not an easy task with so many bodies moving in every direction.

The kindly ones, who have mastered the craft of thermos pressing, remain at the table and ask others about their choices and the amounts they prefer. The eager recipients shout their requests over the shouts of others. Soon the dance of arms extends from the space above the table to the space between the table and the remainder of the crowded room. When the plates of biscuits become properties in this dance the clamour increases. Some need napkins to wipe tea and coffee stains from their clothes, adding outrage and recrimination to the sounds in the room. There is a plate of biscuits heading in my direction, but the angle at which it is being delivered is too steep for gravity to hold and the load of biscuits is delivered to the floor.

The crowd does not diminish, the activity does not become less hectic and the process of getting a drink does not get any quicker. The people at the back of the room are intent on receiving refreshment but they do not provide any space for the people at the front to exit. Nobody moves anywhere and the chatter that flows over all this includes insistent

views about Berio's talk. Suddenly, a voice on the loud speaker informs everyone that it is time to return and the previous movement of cups and saucers goes in reverse. I leave my cup on the windowsill and return to the auditorium.

Berio and a few others are on the stage talking happily while the audience take their seats. The gentleman who introduced Berio asks to us to be quiet and the maestro comes to the lectern.

'The next work I will play for you is *Sinfonia*. The title for this work refers to my ambition to create a simultaneous sound of various parts. I am interested in the interplay of a variety of things, situations and meanings. The musical development of *Sinfonia* is constantly conditioned by a search for balance. I am looking for identity out of the complexity of voices and instruments. I want to establish relations between the spoken word and the sung word. I want the sound structure of the whole to be the work. This is why the perception and intelligibility of the text should not be taken for granted. It is an integral part of the composition and it should enjoy varying degrees of intelligibility. The hearer's experience of almost failing to understand is essential to the very nature of this composition.

'I am going to play you the third part of *Sinfonia*, a section that lasts about twelve minutes. It is perhaps the most experimental work I have ever written. It is a tribute to Gustav Mahler and, in particular, to the third movement of his Second Symphony, or *The Resurrection Symphony* as it is sometimes called. I treat this third movement as a generative source, from which are derived a great number of musical figures ranging from Bach to Schönberg, Brahms to Stravinsky, Berg to Webern, Boulez, Pousseur, myself and others. The various musical characters that are constantly integrated into the flow of Mahler's discourse are combined together and transformed as the work progresses.

'The libretto, like the music, is also complex. Using the self-reflexive

monologue from Beckett's *The Unnamable* as a basic pattern, dozens of other textual threads are shuttled through the narrative loom to form a tapestry of language in all its forms. There are fragments of German, Yuletide solfège, snippets of song, radical slogans, clichés from the classical music crowd and various sighs, exclamations, gasps and grunts. I have set these familiar musical and verbal objects in a new perspective, a new context and light where they can unexpectedly take on a new meaning.

'The presence of Mahler's scherzo in *Sinfonia* is like a river running through a constantly changing landscape, disappearing from time to time underground, only to emerge later, totally transformed. Its course is at times perfectly apparent, at others hard to perceive, sometimes it takes on a totally recognisable form, at others it is made up of a multitude of tiny details lost in the surrounding forest of musical presences. Now we will listen to the music. Can we have the music now please?'

The auditorium is filled with a hush of mystery. Sounds emerge from the silence.

Where now ... keep going ... and now ... there is nothing more restful than chamber music ... I ... say I ... la ... la, la, la ... do, far, me ... there is nothing like exercise ... there's not even a small mountain on the horizon ... a man will wonder where his kingdom ends ... keep going ... what ... keep going ... a danced poem ... all round an endless exchange ... da ... see ... sea ... this represents at least a thousand words I was not counting on ... I may well be glad of him ... it seems that Daphne has been counting the seconds while nothing has happened ... an obsession with ... what ... and in the end everything, the walls, everything yields, opens, flows like pale rain ... yes, I feel the moment has come for me to look back ... I must not forget this ... I have not forgotten it ... but I must have said this before since I say it now ... but these are noises ... oh! so there is an audience ... it's a fantastic audience ... keep going ... whispering ... whispering ... I shall make my own peace ... and I shall not live ... they say that I'm alive and not in the womb either ... even that takes

time... keep going... it's as if we were routed... that the earth will have to wait... one doesn't know what it is... maybe it's a kind of competition on stage with words forming... where now... who now... and now... now I will say my own... if I can remember it... I must not forget this... I have not forgotten it... but I must have said this before since I say it now... I'm listening... well, I prefer that, I must say... I prefer that... well, I prefer that... oh, you know... I suppose the audience will... well, yes there is an audience... it's a public show... you buy your seats and you wait... perhaps it's free... a free show... you take your seat and you wait for it to begin... perhaps it's compulsory, a compulsory show... you wait for the performance to begin... it takes time... you hear a voice... perhaps it's a recitation... that's the show... reciting selected passages over and over again... someone improvising... you can barely hear it... that's the show... you can't leave... you're afraid to leave... you make the best of it... you... but you came too early like me and its only beginning... its just begun... he'll be here at any moment... it'll begin any moment... that's the show... waiting for the show... to the sound of a murmur... you try and... be... perhaps it's the... because it's the air descending, flowing to a lake full of colours... and the spectators, where are they... we didn't notice any... anguish or... never noticed you were waiting alone... for the fools in the palace... waiting... waiting alone... that's the show... waiting alone for it to begin in the restless air... while every now and then a familiar passing hand comes through, accompanied by noises... waiting for the songs to begin... for the sounds... for there to be something else to do... picking your way to the corner... trying to overcome the incessant... what... he says that the simplest noise could stop the... but there'd be nothing more to say... be reasonable... perhaps you're blind... probably deaf... the show is over... all is over... but where now is the hand... the helping hand... it's a long time coming when you are far away... that's the show... waiting alone... you don't know where... you don't know for what... for a hand to come... to draw you away... somewhere else... perhaps its worse... where now... keep going... when now... keep going... what did you expect... they don't know who they are either... did you hear it... keep going... stop... stop... keep going... yes, there...

stop... you... I'm just... I see it... I hear it around me... it holds me, covers me... if only this voice would stop for a second... I long for a second of silence... I would know... if I had known it was going to start again... it's late now and it's still talking incessantly... it barely stops talking, unceasingly... talking... outside of itself... it's late now... we will never hear again the rush of the stream... in a chamber, dimensions unknown... do not move... what... what was that... the fact is I troubled no one, but I did... and after each group disintegration the name of Mayakovsky hangs in the clean air... ha... air... hair... he... ha... da, de, do... and when they ask why all this, it's not easy to find an answer... for when we find ourselves... face to face... now... here... and they remind us... all this can't stop the wars... can't make the old younger or lower the price of bread... **say it again louder**... it can't stop the wars... can't make the old younger... ignore the price of bread... we can't erase the solid truth outside the door... we can only nod... but no need to remind you... perhaps at certain moments it's... what... and tomorrow we'll read that Eindrucke made tulips grow in my garden... and altered the flow of the ocean currents... we must believe it's true... there must be something else, otherwise it would be quite hopeless... but it is quite hopeless... unquestioningly... but it can't go on... it... say it... not knowing what... it's getting late... where now... when now... I have a present for you... keep going... page after page... keep going... going on... call that going... call that on... just wait... it's barely moving now... almost still... should I make my introductions... we have Olive Simpson, first soprano... Nicole Darde... second soprano... Christiane Legrand, first contralto... Helene Devos... second contralto... Philip Sheffield, first tenor... Joseph Noves... second tenor... Ward Swingle, first base... Jean Cussac, second base... but now it's done... it's over... we've had our chance... there was even for a moment hope of resurrection almost... we must collect our thoughts... for the unexpected is always upon us... in our rooms... on the street... at the door... on the stage... thank you Mr. Boulez.

Silence...

Later that summer I read Beckett's *Unnamable*. It was the first book I read in English. I fell in love with his profoundly beautiful voice, so conscious of itself, aware only of its own existence. I felt saved and connected to things that I already knew but was too dumb to voice. I wrote to Berio, thanking him for *Sinfonia*.

'It introduced me to eccentric joy,' I told him, 'and confirmed my voice. It enabled me to keep going and prevented me from wasting away under the cover of my querulous feelings.'

Say it again louder.

'It introduced me to eccentric joy and confirmed my voice. It enabled me to keep going and prevented me from wasting away under the cover of my querulous feelings.'

Home

I feel dreadful. I wish I had not drunk so much. I wish I had not stayed up so late. I was arguing with Richard. He's a stupid ass. He thinks that avant-garde artists are committing spiritual suicide! I only visited him to collect the key to his studio that I need to use today. I am to perform for three Arts Council assessors who will decide whether to give me a grant or not. The studio, on the fourth floor of an old warehouse, is in an unbelievable mess. I remove the debris, tidy the materials, clean the walls and floor, paint the multicoloured sections with white emulsion and move my props in.

Three o'clock is approaching so I have no time left to rehearse. I put on my performance suit and open the bottle of wine that I bought for my guests. They might look more favourably upon my work with alcohol inside them. I have already consumed the pack of lagers I found in Richard's fridge, but I still need a drink. I have eaten nothing, but it's too late to go out now. I sit in my performance armchair and wait for my guests. I could sleep now. I wish I had not stayed up so late. I wish I had not agreed to do a performance. I wish Mrs. Pageant were here to encourage me.

I will tell you about my performance. It's called *Home* because I repeat my arrival home nine times. I perform in a space about four metres square and this occupies one end of the studio. My furniture

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props, a small coffee table and an armchair, are placed in the middle of the square. My repetitive actions are all facets of one scene. Like a cubist painting they present a whole out of fractured components. There are thirty components in each scene, one lasts fifty seconds and the shortest are five-seconds long. They are all divisible by five and I must count them precisely in my head, for they coincide with sounds on a pre-recorded tape. Most of the sounds are the telephone, but there are also recorded snippets from the Allegro con brio movement of Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony.

The action continually turns round, giving the audience an opportunity to view it from different sides. There are nine repeating scenes and each scene starts from a different corner of the square, travelling round the square in an anti-clockwise direction. I start from the rear right corner, travel diagonally to the front left corner, then along to the front right corner and back diagonally to the rear left. I start the next scene from here and travel a similar route, ending up at the front left and then start the next scene from here. I have to move the furniture ninety degrees during each scene to facilitate the repetition of my actions.

The difficulty for me is that not all of the five-second components occur in the same order and they all progress differently, using one of four different methods. Some sequences are built additively, some subtractively, some are static and some are built inconsistently. The actions, the words, the props and the state of my costume all respond to these types of development. The audience may see the same scene nine times, but they do so from a different angle, in a different sequence and with new content each time. They see variations on the same theme. It's like a complex dance that I must count precisely. It requires considerable presence of mind.

The doorbell rings. I press the buzzer to release the door downstairs

HOME

and prepare myself to greet them. The woman who walks in is Constance Merewether, the Theatre Panel representative. She is very smartly dressed and asks if the two members of the Visual Arts Panel have arrived. I tell her that they have not and this annoys her. I offer her a glass of wine, which she declines adding that she would like me to get started as she has an important engagement to attend to after this.

I walk over to the cabinet, pick up the bottle of wine and place it on the coffee table, next to my tape recorder. I walk to the other end of the studio, take a few deep breaths, straighten my tie, walk back to the performance space and turn on the tape recorder. I pick up my coat, scarf, box and bag and walk to the rear, right-hand corner of the space. I fix my face in a broad smile. I am holding the coat over my right shoulder, my index finger through the coat hook tab, and I am holding a woman's scarf in the same hand. In my left hand I am holding a travel bag and between my arm and my body I am supporting a large, gift-wrapped box. I am leaning forwards as if I am flying into the house. I hold this position in a freeze until a sound from the tape recorder cues me to begin.

'Bang.' It's the sound of a door slamming shut. I hold my coat up to a wall that has no hook and the coat falls to the floor. I am still smiling, *'Hello Bee, I'm home.'* I move to the back of the chair, lay the scarf over it, and turn it through ninety degrees. I hold out my big present: *'Are you there, Bee?'*

'Dung.' It's the recorded sound of the lowest note on the piano. I let the present drop to the floor, pick up a rose, smell it and put it in my buttonhole. I move across the front of the space and languidly pretend to push a door open. *Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges.* I pick up a newspaper from the seat of the chair and sit on the floor to read it. *'Ta, tee tum, tee tum tum tee tee.'* I stand up, leaving the newspaper on the floor and sit in the armchair. I take a pill from a

bottle that is on the table, put it on my tongue, pour myself a glass of wine and use the liquid to help me swallow the pill. I can feel the effects of the alcohol. This is a disaster. I have put the real bottle of wine on the coffee table rather than the performance bottle. The bottle with grape juice in it is still in the fridge. I dare not think about the repercussions of this. I drink the wine, stopping only to throw back my head in an effort to get the pill down my throat. I do not succeed. I take the pill out of my mouth, put it on the table, place my empty wineglass next to it and swivel the coffee table through ninety degrees.

'*Ring, ring, ring, ring,*' the sound of a phone ringing. I lift the handset. 'Hello.' I listen to it, tap the phone against my hand, press the reset button and listen again. No response. I look at the handset quizzically and replace it on its base. I pick up the handset and dial.

'*Brrr brrr, brrr brrr, brr brrr, brr brrr.*' These sounds come from the tape recorder. There is no response. I replace the handset, pick up the scarf, bag and coat and walk to the rear left-hand corner to take up my starting position with the big smile: 'Hello Bee, I'm home.' I offer my present: 'Are you there, Bee?'

'*Bung.*' The tape recorder plays another low note from the piano and I drop a smaller box to the floor. It is supposed to be funny, but I get no response from Ms. Merewether. I pull my jacket off, throw it to the rear right-hand corner and again make a gesture with my arm to indicate that I am hitting a door. *Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges.* I repeat the game with the pill, taking several gulps of wine. I throw a newspaper to the floor and move the table through ninety degrees. The phone rings. I pick it up: no-one. I dial.

'At the third stroke it will be 11:18 and 50 seconds. Beep. Beep. Beep.'

I put the phone down, pick up my things and assume my arriving home freeze in the front left-hand corner. I hang up my coat on the fictitious hook: 'Hello Bee, I'm home.' This time I add a growl while

pretending to look at myself in the mirror: 'Are you there, Bee?' She isn't. I drop the present.

'*Dong.*' The notes from the piano move up an octave each time. I take off my tie; throw it to the front right-hand corner and rush with determination across the space. *Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges.* I pour myself another glass of wine to help swallow the pill, play around with a cigarette and then move the table through ninety degrees. I am swaying not acting. I am drunk.

'*Ring, ring, ring, ring.*' There is no one there. I lift the receiver and dial. *'At the third stroke it will be 11:25 and 10 seconds. Beep. Beep. Beep.'*

I throw another newspaper to the floor and return with my props to the start: 'Hello Bee, I'm home.' I take out another newspaper and an identical but smaller gift-wrapped box from the bag and put the newspaper in my mouth, growling at myself: 'Come and get me.' I laugh as if this were a joke: 'Are you there, Bee?'

'*Bong.*' I drop the present, take off my shirt and throw it to my left. I bash the door. *Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges.'*

'*Ring, ring, ring, ring.*' Still no one on the line. I dial.

'*Brrr, brrr, brrr, brrr, brr brrr, brr brrr, brr brrr.*' I count the rings. No reply. 'Hello Bee, I'm home. Grrrr. Come and get me. Ha, ha, ha, ha.' I pick up a woman's shoe, admire it and shout: 'It's me, Bee. Are you there, Bee?'

'*Pang.*' I drop a smaller present. A recording of the music I have been humming comes from the tape recorder. I put my shirt on, while shouting and waving my arm. *Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges.* I pour myself another glass of wine and drink greedily, forgetting about the pill. I tuck my shirt in my trousers, turn around and lose my balance. I fall headlong into the chair, bashing my kneecap.

'*Ring ring, ring ring.*' No-one. I dial the clock.

'At the third stroke it will be 11:30 and 30 seconds. Beep. Beep. Beep.'

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‘Hello Bee, I’m home. Grrrr. Come and get me. Ha, ha, ha, ha. It’s me, Bee.’ I hold up the scarf that I have been carrying: ‘You dropped your ...’, but I give up on the sentence. I go to the chair and offer up my little present: ‘Are you there, Bee?’

‘*Tang*’ Beethoven’s *Eroica* starts again. I put my tie round my collar and stumble painfully as I throw my arm extravagantly. *Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges.*

‘*Ring, ring, ring, ring*’ I listen to the phone, drop the receiver and dial a number. ‘*Brrr brrr, brrr brrr, brr brrr, brr brrr, brr brrr, brr brrr, brr brrr, brr brrr, brr brrr.*’ There are nine rings, but I replace the receiver after eight. I pour myself another glass of wine, drink from the bottle and giggle as I spill wine on my shirt. I pick up the pill bottle, shake it to the rhythm of a Salsa beat and throw the newspaper into the air. I’m in the front left-hand corner. There is music. ‘Hello Bee, I’m home. Grrrr. Come and get me, ha, ha, ha, ha ...’ I freeze. I am lost. I cannot remember what to do next. I panic and go for the chair. I know that I have forgotten something. I see the shoe on the floor, pick it up and throw it to my left: ‘It’s me, Bee.’ I hold up the scarf: ‘You dropped your ...’

‘*Ping*’ The piano note should accompany the offering of my box. I’m late. ‘Are you there, Bee?’ I drop the present, pick up the jacket and put it on while hobbling across the space. *Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges.* The music starts again. I have no idea which scene I am in and my leg hurts. I take out a wallet from my breast pocket, open it and throw piles of receipts into the air. I do the same with the newspaper. I pour myself a glass of wine, drink it in large gulps and suck on the pill bottle like a baby drinking milk. I take a coin out of my pocket, spin it in the air, catch it, place it on the back of my hand and offer it to Ms. Merewether, inviting her to choose heads or tails. She does nothing. I move the table through ninety degrees.

‘*Ring, ring, ring, ring*’ ‘Hello.’ There is no-one there. The music starts

HOME

again and then stops. I dial the clock.

‘*At the third stroke, it will be 12:40 and 25 seconds. Beep. Beep. Beep.*’ I return to start at the front right-hand corner. ‘Hello Bee, I’m home. Grrrr. Come and get me. Ha, ha, ha, ha. It’s me, Bee. You dropped you’re ...’ and without finishing, I point the scarf in the direction of the entrance. There is an envelope on the floor in the place where the doormat should be. I pick it up and open the seal. I place the scarf over my eyes: ‘Is this a surprise?’ I ask, holding up the letter before dropping it onto the chair. ‘Are you there, Bee?’

‘*Ting*’ I let the tiny pearl-like present drop to the floor. I am accompanied by the beautiful sounds of Beethoven as I take the rose out of my buttonhole and throw it over my shoulder. It’s an injured man who goes through into the lounge and knocks the door off its hinges. I sit in the armchair and send the newspaper flying in every direction. There is hardly one bit of floor that is not covered with debris. I take dozens of credit cards from my wallet and add them to the mess. The music has stopped and I am completely drunk. I dial the clock and as I am about to return I hear the phone ring. I pick up the bottle rather than the phone and pour myself another glass of wine. *Eroica* starts again and I drink long and pleurably. All is lost now. I pick up my coat and bag from the floor and assume my original starting position in the rear right-hand corner. I wait for the sound of the door banging shut, but I am waiting too long. The music starts again and I am not sure that it should.

‘*Bang*’ ‘Hello Bee, I’m home. Grrrr. Come and get me. Ha, ha, ha, ha. It’s me, Bee. You dropped you’re ... Is this a surprise?’ I hold up the envelope. I open it, read the letter and drop it on the chair. ‘Are you there, Bee?’ I slump dejectedly to the floor falling heavily on my wounded knee. I take a great quantity of playing cards from my pocket and throw them into the air. I pick up my rose and sniff at it in perfect

time to the music: 'Sniff, sniff, sniff.' I put the rose in my buttonhole, walk slowly and quietly while knocking the door off its hinges and dial the clock.

'At the third stroke, it will be 12:45 precisely. Beep. Beep. Beep.' I put down the handset, pick up the bottle of wine and carry it with me as I walk out of the square. I stand by the wall and drink from the bottle.

'Ring, ring, ring, ring.' I have no intention of answering the phone. I have drained the last drops, but the phone continues to ring so I lift the handset. Someone is there and I speak to them: 'Hello Bee, I'm home. Grrrr ...' I take the phone with me to the edge of the performance space. 'Come and get me. Ha, ha, ha, ha ...' I walk past Ms. Merewether. 'It's me, Bee ... You dropped your scarf on the ...' I am now by the door. I open it and walk outside. 'Is this a surprise?' I stand silently in the hallway. The performance has ended. I come back in through the door and look directly at Ms. Merewether. She claps. I walk back to the performance table and put the phone down. I give her my best formal bow. She claps again. I sit down in the performance chair. I pick up the bottle, look at it and return it to the table.

I laugh: 'Ha, ha, ha, ha.' I take off my jacket and drop it on the floor. I growl and feel slightly sick. Ms. Merewether says that she loved the sniffing of the rose in time with the music. I nod. She says that she found the repetition a bit difficult to take. It embarrassed her.

'Why do you want to show us so many episodes of the same thing?' she asks. I shake my head and she asks if I see the work as a tragedy.

'A tragedy!' I exclaim. 'You make it sound like a play in the theatre. It's a performance. I'm a boy in a box, not a character in a play.'

She shrugs her shoulders and I notice how beautiful her collarbones are. I tell her to think of the performance as a dance, but she says that it still goes over the same territory without leading anywhere. I tell her that it's a journey, but she insists that I should have more to say about

the character. I tell her that he is a product of the structure and we argue about the importance and function of structure.

'So you are inviting us to consider this performance on the basis that there is a geometry that holds the drama together?' she says and I say that I am. She doesn't think that this is enough. I walk over to her, sit in the chair next to hers and stretch my wounded leg out to stroke my knee. Constance Merewether studies me carefully.

'I love it that you use the word geometry,' I tell her. 'It isn't exactly accurate, but it's a much better term than tragedy. It has a sense of space about it. The performance plays with space. It's just a dance with a few words. That's the only logic that governs it. It's more interesting than yet another theatrical display of tragedy.'

Constance is offended. She rails on about tragedy but ends by telling me that she likes my boy in the box. She wishes that he would do more than arrive home.

'Sometimes, getting home is an achievement in itself,' I laugh and Constance laughs with me.

There is something very attractive about her. I gaze at her neck, her collarbones and her shoulders. A heaving rhythm starts beating in my chest. Can it be that Constance has a heaving rhythm beating in her chest? I feel warm and nervous. We are gazing at each other without saying a word. This is lasting too long. We break eye contact. She looks at her watch and says that she must be going. She stands up and I stand next to her, very close. Suddenly she is moving her head towards me. She is lifting her arm towards my shoulder. She is going to kiss me. The world goes blank and I lean my head forward. She kisses me on the cheek. I can feel it like velvet. She looks at me, smiles and puts her hand into her handbag. She takes out a tissue, screws it up and licks it. She says that I have lipstick on my cheek and she rubs it with the tissue. I remain completely still. I am looking at her face as she concentrates on

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her task. Slowly and purposefully she places a kiss on her finger. She lifts her finger and presses it gently against my lips. I am silent and very still. Not even my eyes are moving. My lips have used up every potential I have for sensory experience.

‘It was exciting having an exclusive performance. I must go now or I will be late. Goodbye. I hope that we will meet again soon.’

I have a lump in my throat. Constance is walking towards the door. She turns her head and moves her fingers gently, waving at me. She leaves the studio and closes the door behind her. I take a few steps forwards, a few steps backwards and then I fall into the chair. I look at the bottle, lift it up and growl. I pick up the scarf to wipe my face. I get to my feet and feel the pain in my knee. I don’t know in which direction to go. I hobble to the window. I try to lift the lower section but it does not move. I pull on the handles and feel my back go. It’s a dry click and I know what it means. I hold myself completely rigid, praying that my worst fears are not confirmed. They are. I cannot move. My back has frozen. I see Constance walking down the street. I watch her until she is out of sight. I stay at the window, staring at the empty street. I should try to take a few steps, but I am stuck at the window. I have no idea how I am going to get home.

‘Come and get me,’ I laugh.

PURSUIT

FALLING

In the spring this year I arrived in London. I organised to live with Cathy and Robert Smithson in Chalk Farm as their au pair. They have two young daughters, Carla and Sophie. I take them to and from school, cook their supper and stay with them when their parents are out. I have also enrolled on an English course at the Literary Institute. On my second day here I was out walking when I passed a big old shed, called The Roundhouse. Outside there was poster advertising, ‘Recital 1 (for Cathy) by Luciano Berio’. I was so excited. I took it as a sign, a happy connection between my old and new life. I bought two tickets and asked Cathy if she would like to accompany me. Cathy was already busy, but Jack, her brother, who lives in the adjoining flat, agreed to come. Jack describes himself as a performance artist. He is very handsome.

In the Berio performance a curtain was placed across the middle of the space. Cathy Berberian sang on one side while the orchestra played on the other. First she sang of her frustration at the lateness of her pianist and then gradually, as the orchestra became increasingly independent of her, she agonised about the near impossibility of performing an opera. Afterwards Jack and I went to the pub and