

GRAHAM LACK

The apprentice and the docent

The summer of 1972 was marked by the floating of the pound by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Bloody Friday, the worst UK air disaster to date, a strike by thousands of dockers in solidarity with the miners, the premiere of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the first Gay Pride March in London, the admission of the first women to Cambridge University colleges, the Cod Wars with Iceland, and the hated ROSLA act – the Raising of the School Leaving Age.

I had just left school, getting out when I could, but found myself ‘kicking out into space’, as the composer Percy Grainger once put it. Fortune then entered the fracas that was my personal and family life, for the clearing house scheme had offered me an interview at the University of Chichester. I recognised at once that I had found a mentor. It was Michael Waite, Head of Music of what was at the time Bishop Otter College. And it was he who gently guided me towards composition.

Three years passed faster than words can adequately describe. I had learned to sail – the college had a Fireball, had vastly improved my hockey skills, and had even ventured occasionally into the classroom for what was called teaching practice.

But music exerted a stronger pull than education, and after an uneasy year in a minor public school I was an undergraduate once again, at the University of London, studying Composition with Anthony Milner at Goldsmiths’ College before migrating across the river, where I read Historical Musicology at King’s College, becoming a personal student of Brian Trowell.

In the 1970s, Bishop Otter College was a markedly liberal and quite radical think tank. It offered places to those whose careers were obviously already set in stone, and handed out the occasional wild card to the more refractory – to me in this case, someone who lacked direction but in whom it apparently saw talent. Examinations, ones set by the Music Department at least, were designed to test what we knew as opposed to that which we did not. Course work was challenging but set at an achievable level. And the tutorial system ensured originality of thought as well as commitment – there were no line managers in those days.

It is a sunny afternoon in Munich, my present home, and the intervening years were no less marked by my experience in Chichester than the later ones in London. The Technische Universität Berlin offered me the chance to start a doctoral thesis, and I spent eight years as a lecturer at the University of Maryland. One thing led to another, but I realise now how important was that ‘one thing’.

I have good reasons for thinking that musical life at the University of Chichester is as healthy as it always was. Tradition breeds tradition. Leafing through my early compositions (I kept every score and every sketch) I can make out the musical seeds out of which more substantial works were to be generated. The results of good teaching are there for a lifetime it would seem.