

## Magnificat

The composer of the Annunciation and Birth Narratives that commence the Gospel of St. Luke must have been musical. I mean the composition includes what we call Canticles, long poetic pieces sung by John the Baptist's aged father and by Mary, the young mother of Jesus. Then there is the aged Simeon uttering a kind of finale beginning with *Now . . . you may dismiss your servant in peace, . . . / for my eyes have seen your salvation . . .* Even the dialogue could have been sung in the manner of Puccini baritones and sopranos.

As regards music, I grew up during the swing and jazz age. The air was full of Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Glenn Miller . . . vocalists like Bing Crosby and Dinah Shore doing love ballads. Then there was Spike Jones and his City Slickers. It made the air we breathed either bouncy or sentimental. And then one day my freshman high school class was ushered into the school's music room – about forty of us arranged in rows of desks. The teacher was Brother Raymond, a young and well built Christian Brother. He was going to introduce us to classical music.

Now try to get fourteen year old boys to sit still for an hour of classical music! He had a formidable task because whenever he turned to the blackboard, fidgeting and note passing and giggles grew noticeable. That is until Brother Raymond turned swiftly around and threw a piece of chalk at about ninety miles per hour at some prankster in the back. Soon it was quiet enough to play a piece, which happened to be Franz Schubert's 1822 "Unfinished Symphony".

Suddenly I sat transfixed. The melody infiltrated my being and lifted me to nameless and imageless levels of delight, peace. I was delivered for ever so lovely a moment from my adolescence. Assumption? The classroom receded from view as that spiral of notes carried me aloft like a gentle whirlwind from which vantage point I could sense the reality of a world beyond my hitherto petty interests. As an authority of those times expressed it: *The whole movement is a sweet stream of melodies, . . . so crystal-clear that you can see every pebble on the bottom. And everywhere the same warmth, the same golden sunshine . . .*

In this regard I think of the character in Marcel Proust's novel *In Search of Lost Time* – Charles Swann. Present at a Parisian salon party he heard a piece of music he had heard before – a sonata by Vinteuil. But now, like a confirmed invalid whom a change of air . . . seems to have relieved of his malady, *Swann found in himself . . . the presence of those invisible realities in which he had ceased to believe . . . of the power to re-consecrate his life.* It was as though *the music was coming from an immeasurable keyboard . . . on which . . . some few among its millions of keys . . . have been discovered by certain great artists who do us the service . . . of showing us what richness . . . lies hidden, unknown to us, in that . . . impenetrable night of our soul.*

Hearing Schubert's "Unfinished Symphony" set me on a path whereby I began to realize that my very life (even yours) could become itself an Unfinished Symphony if I could but shut up that prankster in the back of the room.

**Geoff Wood**