

## **“How many more “Days of Christmas”?”**

If a man from Mars were to arrive here today, he could be forgiven for thinking that “Christmas” was some sort of tyrannical being or malevolent god that demanded our slavish attention and limitless financial offerings from the end of the summer through to achieving a “perfect day” on the 25<sup>th</sup> December but, after that what and how can we possibly cope with yet another twelve days??

*To view the complete reflection please click on the link below*

I don't have much (if anything) to offer by way of instant wisdom in this reflection, but I do rejoice that the Church, in its wisdom and in most denominations, starts the liturgical year with the season of Advent on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. Advent probably dates from around 480 and its penitential nature from Council of Tours of 567. Penitential in this sense does not equate to miserable but it does encourage us to use the time, not only to prepare pudding, presents, and turkeys but also to prepare ourselves for the birth of our Saviour, his constant presence with us in the Eucharist and importantly for his second coming at a time of which we are not going to get advance notice.

Advent ends at 11.59 on Christmas Eve and the Feast of Christmas begins but, contrary to what the media and the commercial world have been telling us, this is not a one day wonder but rather 12 days in which to celebrate and also, with a minute or two to spare, to ponder the magnitude of what has happened and what the coming of the Son of God to earth means for us at Christmas and in the days and years to come.

Just in case you find yourself at a loose end over the twelve days, I have set out below a fact (useless or otherwise) and some music for each day – I hope you enjoy them.

### **The First Day of Christmas**

*On the first day of Christmas 1964* Leslie and Lillian Bostridge from Hayes probably were not too bothered about the antics of a partridge in a pear tree, instead they received the gift of a son whom they named Ian. After education, which included an M.Phil. at St John's College the young Ian followed a career in teaching until at the comparatively late age of 27 he took up singing which of course he does rather well. Ian Bostridge is now recognised as one of the great tenor lieder and oratorio singers of our time. Although I cannot claim any of his musical talent, I do have the distinction of having been in the same queue as he in Buckingham Palace where we were both nervously awaiting our moment with the late Queen.

Although his voice is not suited to grand opera it is superbly matched to baroque music as is demonstrated in this recording of his rendition, at the Proms in the Royal Albert Hall, of “Love sounds th'alarm” from *Acis and Galatia* by G F Handel; to my mind it is plain simple superb.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcsfg5dZpqq>

### **The Second Day of Christmas**

The Palestine Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1936 under the leadership of Bronislaw Huberman. Huberman, a violinist, at first envisioned an international centre for the arts, but instead focused on developing a critically acclaimed symphony orchestra. Conditions in Europe had become such that the orchestra could serve as a haven for persecuted Jewish musicians. Many immigration certificates became available, as the orchestra could provide employment for the refugees. The new immigrants themselves provided fresh talent and energy for cultural pursuits in the Jewish community.

While Huberman continued to work on behalf of the orchestra, Arturo Toscanini (1867 – 1957) agreed to become its first conductor. He was quick to help establish the orchestra's reputation. In addition to drawing talented musicians to the orchestra itself, many other chamber orchestras and groups formed around it. ***On the Second Day of Christmas 1936*** the orchestra made its debut under the baton of Toscanini who by then was a renowned conductor on both sides of the Atlantic and already considering retirement

In 1948, the orchestra changed its name to the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. I am unable to find a recording of Toscanini conducting the orchestra but hope you will find Daniel Barenboim an acceptable substitute, here he is conducting the orchestra at a concert to celebrate their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LI4slVTrQh8&list=PLBjoEdEVMABJ4FgCJ8HR71GA5PN1R4hfk>

For those who feel cheated at not seeing Toscanini, he is here in 1952, aged 85, conducting the NBC Symphony Orchestra in Carnegie Hall

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t132rQ6i\\_zU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t132rQ6i_zU)

## **The Third Day of Christmas.**

Niccolo Paganini 1782 – 1840 was born in Genoa, his father was not especially successful in his business as a ship chandler so supplemented his income by making mandolins. Niccolo started to play the mandolin at age five but by the age of seven he had switched to the violin with which he demonstrated a prodigious talent quickly outstripping his teachers

***On the Third Day of Christmas in 1801***, the 18-year-old Paganini was appointed first violin of the Republic of Lucca, but a substantial portion of his income came from freelancing. His fame as a violinist was matched only by his reputation as a gambler and philanderer. After a hugely successful career in Europe, in 1836, Paganini returned to Paris to set up a casino. Its immediate failure left him in financial ruin, and he auctioned off his personal effects, including his musical instruments, to recoup his losses. At Christmas of 1838, he left Paris for Marseille and, after a brief stay, travelled to Nice where he died on 27 May 1840, before a priest could be summoned. Because of this, and his widely rumoured association with the devil, the Church denied his body a Catholic burial in Genoa. It took four years and an appeal to the Pope before the Church let his body be transported to Genoa, but it was still not buried. His body was finally buried in 1876, in a cemetery in Parma.

As well as a violin virtuoso, Paganini was a significant composer for the violin, perhaps his most well know piece is his “Caprice No 24” which is superbly performed here by Augustin Hadelich.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVCNer89UeM>

## **The Fourth Day of Christmas**

The Savoy Theatre is a West End theatre in the Strand. The theatre was designed by C. J. Phipps for Richard D'Oyly Carte and opened on 10 October 1881 on a site once occupied by the Savoy Palace. Its intended purpose was to showcase the popular series of comic operas of Gilbert and Sullivan, which became known as the Savoy operas.

The Savoy was a state-of-the-art theatre and the first public building in the world to be lit entirely by electricity. In 1881, Sir Joseph Swan, inventor of the incandescent light bulb, supplied about 1,200 Swan incandescent lamps, and the lights were powered by a 120-horsepower (89 kW) generator on open land near the theatre.

Carte explained why he had introduced electric light: "The greatest drawbacks to the enjoyment of the theatrical performances are, undoubtedly, the foul air and heat which pervade all theatres. As everyone knows, each gas-burner consumes as much oxygen as many people and causes great heat beside. The incandescent lamps consume no oxygen and cause no perceptible heat." The first generator proved too small to power the whole building, and though the entire front-of-house was electrically lit, the stage was lit by gas ***until 28 December 1881 – the Fourth Day of Christmas***

The D'Oyly Carte Opera Company was founded by Richard D'Oyly Carte in 1875 and from then until 1982 regularly produced the operas resulting from the partnership of W S Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan. Following the expiry of the last copyright in 1961 the company had difficulty with finance and was wound up in 1982 although there have been some short-term revivals since then for specific productions some in conjunction with Scottish Opera.

The style of the Gilbert and Sullivan Operas performed by the D'Oyly Carte is unmistakable and is known all around the world, in the days before widely available recordings, piano scores sold in unbelievable quantities.

I must confess to a great personal affinity to the operas but think perhaps that one of the most unusual requests I have received as an organist has been to play the Overture to The Pirates of Penzance at the funeral of the widow of a local priest as her coffin left the church – beats a CD any time! Here is a recording of the "Pirates" by the D'Oyly Carte Company

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8sbo1YVDkM8&list=PLbNeIj4SIBGjNiv9UsIBFjABS5x8fSeCg>

## **The Fifth Day of Christmas**

***On this day in 1876*** was born Pablo Casals (1876 – 1973) a man recognised widely as the greatest cellist ever to have lived, Fritz Kreisler went farther and described him as "the greatest man who ever drew a bow.". Pablo Casals came from humble beginnings, his father was a church organist who evidently taught the young boy well since by the age of four, Casals could play the violin, piano and flute; then at the age of six he played the violin well enough to perform a solo in public. His first encounter with a cello-like instrument was from witnessing a local travelling Catalan musician, who played a cello-strung broom handle. Upon request, his father built him a crude cello, using a gourd as a sound-box. When Casals was eleven, he first heard the real cello performed by a group of traveling musicians and decided to dedicate himself to the instrument. Such was his devotion and commitment that, in 1890, when he was 13, he found a tattered copy of Bach's six cello suites in a second-hand music store in Barcelona. He spent the next 13 years practicing them every day before he would perform them in public for the first time.

Casals musical achievements are legendary and cannot be listed here but by way of a diversion it is worth mentioning that following the death of his first wife, in 1955 Casals married as his second wife long-time associate Francesca Vidal i Puig, who died that same year. In 1957, at age 80, Casals married 20-year-old Marta Montañez y Martinez. He is said to have dismissed concerns that marriage to someone 60 years his junior might be hazardous by saying, "I look at it this way: if she dies, she dies.". The following link will take you to an amazing recording made by Cassals in 1971, just before his 95 birthday.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8DjwLt\\_c4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8DjwLt_c4)

## The Sixth Day of Christmas

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky 1840 – 1893 was of course a Russian composer of such renown that he needs no introduction from me in terms of his music. What may not be as well-known however is that though musically precocious, Tchaikovsky was educated for a career as a civil servant as there was little opportunity for a musical career in Russia at the time and no system of public music education. When an opportunity for such an education eventually arose, he entered the embryonic Saint Petersburg Conservatory, from which he graduated in 1865. While the formal Western-oriented teaching that Tchaikovsky received at the Conservatory set him apart from composers of the contemporary nationalist movement in Russia at the time and his music did embody a great measure of the musical tradition in which he grew up, some Russians did not feel it was sufficiently representative of native musical values and expressed suspicion that Europeans accepted Tchaikovsky's music for its Western elements. Tchaikovsky was a somewhat anxious character and the variable reception of his music caused him more than one crisis of confidence in his life as well as the almost inevitable financial difficulties.

***On the Sixth Day of Christmas 1876*** Tchaikovsky's fortunes changed when he received his first letter from the wealthy Russian businesswoman Nadezhda Filaretovna von Meck who offered him financial support to enable him to develop his work as a composer of opera. Von Meck was more than generous in her patronage, offering Tchaikovsky 6000 roubles per year which was a huge sum in those days – there was however one condition which was that they were to correspond but NEVER meet. This arrangement continued for six years after which Von Meck paid a further year in advance and terminated the arrangement. Von Meck died shortly after the termination of the arrangement and although there has been much speculation over the years as to why the arrangement ended as it did, it is certain that Tchaikovsky did not break the central condition.

The success of opera as part of Tchaikovsky's output is well known with his "Nutcracker" perhaps the most familiar at this time of the year. Here it is, performed by the Mariinsky Theatre Ballet and Orchestra.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQIOH5s95DA>

## The Seventh Day of Christmas

King's College, Cambridge has had a succession of shining stars as Director of Music so it may seem invidious to single out one but, ***on the Seventh Day of Christmas 1948*** an exceptionally bright one dawned at Bromley in Kent in the form of Stephen John Cleobury. Stephen had a distinguished grounding in English church music long before coming to Cambridge; he sang as a chorister at Worcester Cathedral under Douglas Guest and then Christopher Robinson; he was organ scholar at St John's College, Cambridge, under the musical directorship of George Guest, and sub-organist of Westminster Abbey before becoming the first Anglican master of music at the Catholic Westminster Cathedral in 1979. In 1982 Stephen Cleobury succeeded Philip Ledger as Director of Music for the Choir of King's College, Cambridge, where he also taught music. In leading the annual Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's College Chapel on Christmas Eve his most notable contribution was, from 1984, the incorporation of specially commissioned modern works to complement the traditional carols.

Among the composers contributing were Thomas Adès, John Tavener and Mark-Anthony Turnage. Harrison Birtwistle's *The Gleam*, which requires the choristers to stamp their feet and shout, caused some controversy. Stephen introduced singing lessons for the choristers and expanded the repertoire to include more singing in Latin, and composers such as Kodály, Janáček and Arvo Pärt: He established the Festival of Easter at King's and "Concerts at King's", a concert series throughout the year.

Outside of Cambridge Stephen had a busy musical life, was president of the Royal College of Organists from 1990 to 1992 and much in demand as a conductor, he was chief conductor of the BBC Singers from 1995 to 2007, and was then their conductor laureate. More locally he graced the console of West Wrattling organ for a prominent funeral. Most fittingly Stephen Cleobury died on St Cecilia's Day in 2019. The following recording demonstrates Stephen's talent as a conductor with King's Choir and the Brandenburg Consort performing an early version of *Messiah*.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v\\_mZ6GYh2ls&t=165s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_mZ6GYh2ls&t=165s)

## **The Eighth Day of Christmas**

As well as being the day on which eight maids decided to go milking (what happen to the poor old cows every other day?) it is also New Year's Day and thus a cause for more celebration or perhaps nursing a sore head after too much celebrating on its Eve. Rather than offering you something traditional such as the New Year's Day Concert from Vienna I thought we might just deviate from the conventional and turn to Robbie Williams, the star of the boy band "Take That" and since then the astronomically popular solo singer. Robert Williams (yes, his real name) was born in February 1974 to parents who ran the Red Lion in Burslem and in his school days took an early liking to the stage most notably in the role of the Artful Dodger in a production of *Oliver!* There is nothing new that I can tell you about Williams runaway success as a singer but just by way of useless information did you know;

- He gained a Guinness World Record in 2006 for selling 1.6 million tickets in a single day during his *Close Encounters Tour*.
- By 2008, Williams had sold more albums in the UK than any other British solo artist in history.[151] His record sales stand at over 77 million worldwide, making him one of the best-selling artists of all time.
- He became an ordained minister with the Universal Ministries to officiate the wedding of friends. (You can do it too – instantly online, no need for theological college)

On 22 November, Williams released his first Christmas album titled *The Christmas Present*, it went to Number 1 in the UK charts outselling Rod Stuart. Here is Robbie Williams - New Year's Day

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlLXZ\\_cyFBs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlLXZ_cyFBs)

## **The Ninth Day of Christmas**

Glenn Gould was born in Toronto, on September 25, 1932, the only child of Russell Herbert Gold and Florence Emma Gold (born Greig, a distant relative of the Norwegian composer and pianist Edvard Grieg). From a very early age the young Glenn proved to be a virtuoso pianist, He learned to read music before he could read words, and it was observed that he had perfect pitch at age three.

At age 10, Gould began attending the Toronto Conservatory of Music in Toronto, he passed his final Conservatory examination in piano at age 12, achieving the highest marks of any candidate, and thus attaining professional standing as a pianist.

***On the Ninth Day of Christmas 1955*** Gould made his American debut in Washington, D.C. at The Phillips Collection. The music critic Paul Hume wrote in the Washington Post, "January 2 is early for predictions, but it is unlikely that the year 1955 will bring us a finer piano recital than that played yesterday afternoon in the Phillips Gallery. We shall be lucky if it brings us others of equal beauty and significance." Hume's prediction turned out to be true although Gould proved to be a highly idiosyncratic artist who was widely known for his unusual habits. He often hummed or sang while he played, and his audio engineers were not always able to exclude his voice from recordings, also the piano had to be set at a certain height and would be raised on wooden blocks if necessary. A rug would sometimes be required for his feet. He had to sit exactly 14 inches above the floor, and would play concerts only with the chair his father had made. He continued to use the chair even when its seat was completely worn and became so closely identified with it that it is displayed in a glass case at Library and Archives Canada.

Gould did not enjoy public performance and set forth his doctrine, half in jest, in "GPAADAK", the Gould Plan for the Abolition of Applause and Demonstrations of All Kinds. On 10 April 1964, he gave his last public performance, at Los Angeles's Wilshire Ebell Theatre but, fortunately for us, concentrated then on studio recording. He is seen and heard in the following piece with Leonard Bernstein

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZX\\_XCYokQo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZX_XCYokQo)

## **The Tenth Day of Christmas**

History (or perhaps legend) has not been kind to Antonio Salieri (18 August 1750 – 7 May 1825) and anyone who has watched either the play or the film "Amadeus" will almost certainly have been misled about the man cast as perhaps "the biggest musical failure and loser of all time". So, at this time of goodwill to all men let me please dispel a few myths about Salieri and, at least partially, set the record straight:

- No! Salieri did not poison Mozart – there is absolutely no evidence that Mozart was poisoned by anyone
- No! There is no evidence that Mozart and Salieri hated one another; they were certainly musical rivals but all the evidence points to their being mutually respectful of each other's work
- No! Salieri was not an inferior composer to Mozart; their work is certainly different in style with Salieri lacking some of the exuberance of Mozart but he was a prolific and well-respected composer who for many years held the highest musical appointment to the Austrian court.
- No! Salieri can hardly be described as a "musical failure and loser" he did after all number among his pupils; Franz Liszt, Franz Schubert, Ludwig van Beethoven, Anton Eberl, Johann Nepomuk Hummel and Franz Xaver Wolfgang Mozart (son of Wolfgang) – quite an impressive collection by any standard.

***On the Tenth Day of Christmas 1799*** Salieri's opera "Falstaff" received its premier in Vienna you may like to judge for yourself whether this is the work of a "failure". The first recording is a modern production by the East 13<sup>th</sup> Street Theatre in New York, the second a much more conventional performance of the whole opera from Vienna.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m\\_9gC1Wjad4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_9gC1Wjad4)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6CGmugvqFM>

## The Eleventh Day of Christmas

Johannes Brahms (7 May 1833 – 3 April 1897) needs no introduction and in his lifetime was recognised as a composer and performer of considerable stature. It is perhaps therefore little surprise that in 1880 Brahms was notified that the University of Breslau intended to award him an honorary doctorate in music. Brahms assumed that a letter of thanks would be a sufficient gesture of thanks for this honour and was subsequently a little miffed to find that nothing less than a composition was expected: He therefore set about composing his “Academic Festival Overture” which received its premier in Breslau on the ***Eleventh Day of Christmas 1881***. Brahms had an ironic sense of humour which is demonstrated by the fact that the piece is largely based on student drinking songs and requires the largest orchestral ensemble of all his works.

Brahms Academic Festival Overture is performed here under the impeccable direction of the Swedish conductor Herbert Blomstedt in his 94<sup>th</sup> year.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgJhsa-wLNU&list=RDAgJhsa-wLNU&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgJhsa-wLNU&list=RDAgJhsa-wLNU&start_radio=1)

## The Twelfth Day of Christmas

So, if you are still with me after twelve days there really is only one piece with which to conclude and that was probably first published as a children’s memory and forfeit game in “Mirth without Mischief” a children's book published in London around 1780. The song exists in many languages and there is no clear evidence as to which came first although there is a strong suggestion it is French as the French Partridge (which perches in trees unlike the Common Partridge) was not introduced in England until at least the 1770’s, also earlier versions mention “Bretton Hens” rather than “French” which is common today.

The now-standard melody for the song or carol as some call it, was popularised by the English baritone and composer Frederic Austin who, having arranged the music for solo voice with piano accompaniment, included it in his concert repertoire from 1905 onwards. A Times review from 1906 praised the "quaint folk-song", while noting that "the words ... are better known than the excellent if intricate tune".

So on ***the Twelfth Day of Christmas*** lets listen to the members of the Choir of St George’s Chapel, Windsor in what, by any standard, is a memorable performance of The Twelve Days of Christmas.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0kncxg1R1E>

I would like to thank you for reading and listening. May I offer you every good wish for a happy and blessed Christmas and in this troubled and uncertain world ask you to spare a thought for those who, for whatever reason, have not found it a happy time.

Keith Day

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