

wanted: not to be a burden to anyone. Today isn't really a final farewell, but just a longer break before the next act.

You're reunited now with your beloved Mum and Dad, the two Reggies, the two Jacks, and a whole host of others who have gone before you. They've had a long wait, and their gain is so very much our loss.

With all our love from your family & friends

We're going to listen now to music for a departed hero, played by the orchestra of - and with - our own departed hero. We are sure to be affected by what we hear so please remember that we are all friends - friends with whom it is right to grieve at this time. If the tears come, let them come.

Henry Scott Holland : All is Well

Death is nothing at all....I have only slipped away into the next room.

I am I and you are you.

Whatever we were to each other, that we are still.

Call me by my old familiar name,
speak to me in the easy way which you always used.

Put no difference in your tone;

wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.

Laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes we enjoyed together.

Play, smile, think of me.

Let my name be ever the household word that it always was,
let it be spoken without effort, without the ghost of a shadow on it.

Life means all that it ever meant.

It is the same as it ever was; there is unbroken continuity.

Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight?

I am waiting for you, for an interval, somewhere very near,
just around the corner.

All is well.

Readings at Alan Taylor's funeral service

Book of Ecclesiastes Chapter 3

To every thing there is a season,
and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant,

and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

A time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

A time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones,

and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace,

and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to get, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

A time to rend, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate;

a time of war, and a time of peace.

I'm going to read a letter to Alan which I've written with help from the many people who have shared their memories and thoughts in recent days. It's a letter that alas can never be sent, yet I believe that Alan is indeed here amongst us now, or at the very least in the pub around the corner.

Dear Alan,

Well you're gone and my, how we do miss you. I know that we only rent our space on this planet, but after 71 years we had gotten used to having you around. For your family and nearly all your musical friends and colleagues you were always the person we had known the longest, and we felt you were a fixture of the music profession that would always be there.

You've been recently described as "a public legend of an unsurpassed virtuoso timpanist" but outside your family only those of us who had the marvellous good fortune to work with you knew what a fabulous human being you were. A word heard again and again is "privilege" – what a privilege it was to have known you, to have played with you, to have sat next to you. Not just at the Royal Opera House for those incredible 50 years, but also further afield – such as in Brighton and Tunbridge Wells where you also played for decades of Sundays.

Despite your genius, you were always so modest and so humble in dealing with the respect in which you were held. Had you seen the emotional display of tears at the back of the pit during the Puccini opera performance on the day after your death you would surely have told us to "pull yourselves together." The idea that we could love you would probably have appalled you, yet we surely did.

You were a man who never strove for anything less than perfection, and of course never suffered fools gladly. Yet should a younger player come to you with a problem, you would give of your time and yourself so freely. You also frequently acted as a diplomat and mediator in disagreements between our more volatile colleagues. "Storm in a teacup" was the usual dismissive phrase. I always felt that there was perhaps just the hint of benevolent tolerance of us lesser treble clef players.

You will never truly know what an inspiration you were to players all over the world – some who tried to copy your technique, some who tried to copy your sticks – all in vain attempts to achieve that perfection of tone, tuning and musicality that you could obtain from

just that single piece of calf or plastic. We all learnt more from sitting next to you than any lessons could have ever taught. I never heard one string player ask for screens or earplugs when you were "on the pots"; you were a real musicians' timpanist, and the possessor of a pair of unequalled ears.

The joy we had from your exchanges with conductors will be part of our folklore for years to come, and perhaps one day they will fill a book. You'll remember a Wagner rehearsal at Covent Garden when you were puffing away the wrong side of the pit door and Bernard Haitink noticed that you'd missed playing a couple of notes. When you finished your cigarette and returned he said "Mr Taylor - you are the finest timpanist in London, but sadly the most elusive!" Without hesitation, you responded, "Only in London?"

Now you are with the Orchestra of the Angels, and I can see Sir Georg welcoming his "safe boy" to his first rehearsal. You'll be able to ask Richard Strauss all about that timpani pedalling, have words with Wagner about that roll at the start of Siegfried, tease Puccini about his women, and perhaps apologise to Prokofiev for always leaving out those three timpani notes in Act Three of Romeo as they interrupted an otherwise perfectly good fag break. I don't hold out much hope for an easy time for Minkus or Meyerbeer, but Bellini might just be let off lightly – after all, your last ever Royal Opera House appearance only a few weeks ago was a Bank Holiday performance (for double money) of *Sonnambula* which involved you for just three whole minutes at the start.

And of course there will be so much to talk about with George Eastman and his Kodak, Gunther Ringer and his special drums, Akio Morita and his Sony gadgets, seminars with the John Player Heavenly Brewers and Vintners Association, and chats with W.O. Bentley, Charles Stewart Rolls and Frederick Henry Royce. These last would surely have been very impressed with the recent presence of a Rolls-Royce in the car park of the William Harvey Hospital in nearby Ashford. I know that your family learnt from an early age all about what a "real car" was, and they also had to live with your keeping everything – diaries, payslips, programmes, parts of old tamps, parts of old cars, just to mention a few. It would surely be easier to bring the Royal Opera House archives to Littlestone than to transfer your collection up there.

And so we say goodbye to you, our very own unique "guv'nor": world class musician, dear and cherished friend, husband and father. Sudden though it was, your leaving us would have been what you