

FIDDLER

What? This thing? This case slung over my left shoulder?

Yes, I know, odd looking thing isn't it with that bulge swelling up and out from the bottom and then stopping half way up the case? Most likely you've never seen one before. Very few have around these parts, or, come to that, any other parts.

This one may well be the last of its kind.

In fact I shouldn't be surprised if it is the last. But I've taken it upon myself to try to keep it going to the very last (my last that is, for my last will almost certainly be its last too), to try and maintain some kind of public presence for it (and thus for myself of course) in the hope that I may just be able to lodge a few tiny grains of its offer in a folk-memory crevice, however misunderstood said offer now is.

My hope-in-desperation, indeed the very thrust of what's left of my (and its) life, is to try to embed it there as a sort of euphonious reminder of its promise of a now long-discarded other-worldliness, an other-worldliness that might still be holding so close to its chest the seeds of a leap into quite other sound-spaces, a leap that might jolt the steadfastly dogging harmonies of the commonplace right out of themselves.

When it and I are long gone I would like to think that, through some involuntary and quite unanticipatable association, suddenly, from out of the blue-black depths as it were, a slight reverberation will jolt the surprised hearer, however briefly, into that other place, a place bathed by the aureate light of the good times to come. For it is that very same place that I seek to evoke in my performances, to transport my listeners to that as yet impossible elsewhere. They will, I like to think, already have had the merest hint of this beyond, their beyond, as the tremors of my tremeloes passed through them. If, that is (and it's always a very big if), they and I were lucky with my (our) tremeloes on the night that they heard me, for such leapingly transportive tremeloes are all too rare.

Sadly (sadly, that is, if my most likely cloth-eared listeners felt short-changed by my performance on the night in question) luck does inevitably play its part, for I can never anticipate before the performance begins (or even when it is under way) whether it is going to be one (yet another) of those nights (one of those all too common nights of non-transportation). But even on what to me is such a night (a night when I am all too aware that, say, my tremeloes were ever so slightly below par, below their own ultra-high standards, or that my vibrato waivered uncertainly due to a nervous tic I have developed recently and which has been diagnosed as a variant of 'well-digger's elbow syndrome' characterised by an occasional uncontrollable finger tremor in my left hand, or that my wandering etiolated sound lines were just too long-drawn-out to hold my few listeners' attention), I can never know whether all my listeners share my own

misgivings.

After all I judge myself by the highest standards (though, I freely admit, these standards are set by myself alone and owe little or nothing to any of the usual supposedly overarching critical, gustatory, and supposedly academically verified criteria so often spatchcocked together by the state's taste-boundary patrollers). And, indeed it could even be that what I may have judged as a sadly ineffective tremeloe (or whatever else in my performance, say, a mistakenly foreshortened crotchet rest, or aforesaid pseudo vib courtesy of Variant W-D.E.S.) could, for a particular listener, have been, quite contrary to my best performing intentions, just the thing that acted as the means of delighted transport.

It seems one (I, that is, you too, almost certainly) is condemned to release one's arrow-in-the-dark without a clue as to its destiny or its transporting potential. One (I) can only perform in hope (desperate though it be).

Yes, hope is my rootless enclosing hedge (the hedge of bet-hedging), a hedge that as the years roll by finds itself thinned, brashed and struggling still to fix its ever-weakening rootlets in culture's fallow and self-eroding fields. Of course I didn't choose hope, no-one does, I just found that it was all I was, am, left with - a hedge this side of which I have to perform my last ditch struggle and without, it's beginning to seem, adequate ditching tools.

Look, I hope (as you'd expect) that I'm not dragging you down with all this. I fear I'm beginning to sound (contrarily for one whose daily round perambulates endlessly around hope's little - but sadly no longer grassy - knoll) far too pessimistic about the vagaries of the trajectory to which I have committed myself. No, that's not my intention at all. Far from it! It's just that hope needs to familiarise itself with the very real obstacles with which it has to contend so that it can drive both the bounce-back into the fray (for fray, let me assure you, indeed it is) and then the continuous re-engagement of said fray. For what else is hope other than a kind of constant keeping up, as when one says, perhaps in the face of some threat or personal knock-back, well, after all, I am trying to keep my hopes up, where hoping-in-action is nothing but this very effort to keep itself up? Yes, in some way up is hope's very word.

Oh, sorry! I'm afraid I've begun to stray, as is my wont, into deeper (although I admit that depth is unknowable - they could just be shallow but very (or even only slightly) different, say muddier) waters here. If this happens again just give me a nudge and haul me back onto the straight and narrow, back into line, back onto my right lines, back to my point that is, or at least help me to find the point, for it's the search for the point that is hope's, and thus my, very focus.

Oh Gawd, there I go again! I can see you're still wondering about the case and its contents and asking yourself what on earth I'm doing with it and all my other luggage (quite heavy enough in itself without the added burden of the case) staggering along this country road, seemingly miles from anywhere. Yes, I know, I really should get a hand-cart to relieve my neck and shoulders. Well anyway, what do you think of the case? Unusual isn't it?

Actually I made it myself. Had to because none of the commercially available cases had been designed for, nor could they be easily adapted to, my specific instrument, the instrument it now contains. The strap, scavenged from an old leather horse harness (look, you can still see the teeth marks right there where the sorely goaded horse (or possibly horses down the years) used to bite it, presumably because it was too tight for its (their) girth(s)), is hand-stitched with a strong twine into carefully shaped and sewn-together off-cuts of an old but still tough Persian carpet that had been in the family for years before being cast out (somewhat reluctantly, into the cellar from where I rescued it, or parts of it) as a result of the bare patches worn away by my dad's hob-nailed boots (on arriving back from the wells of an evening he used to collapse into his favourite chair in front of the stove too exhausted even to take off his boots, a job which I took upon myself when my wee arms were strong enough).

Its interior (the case's that is) is both capacious but supportively firm, for I've protected the instrument against the bump and grind of the everyday by padding the inside with strips of foam (cut from a discarded mattress) which are held in place by carefully hemmed pieces of cotton duck - remaindered off-cuts from my older brother's studio (he had for many years been a member of the Depressionist Movement - you may have heard of him, seen some of his pieces even). All in all it's served me well down the years, although I admit that it's beginning to look somewhat worn and raggedy in places, especially where the horn pushes out from the frame of the instrument.

Oh, the instrument itself? Yes, of course, it's my one-string fiddle, with its now almost hairless bow stitched into this long narrow pocket on the outside of the case. They accompany me everywhere. Always have and always will unless some awful disaster overtakes me and/or them. I scrape away at it at every available opportunity, seeking to coax from it whatever threnody is appropriate to the particular situation in which I find myself (and then, naturally enough, seek to lose myself through same threnodic fiddling).

Ideally my fiddling would be (indeed was for many years) almost a twenty-four-hour-a-day activity. I constantly exhort myself to treat every moment as a possibly available moment and then, after a moment's necessary but barely hesitant reflection on the character of the surrounding conditions, if the conditions are even minimally satisfactory (that is, not extremely hostile), as rapidly as possible to turn this moment assessed as available into an actual opportunity for taking up the bow (though occasionally pizzicato work may hold brief sway) and addressing the string itself. But sadly I have to admit that the quality and character of the available opportunities have changed dramatically down the years. It's certainly still true that I do try to turn every passing moment into an occasion for performance, into what I've just called an 'available moment', however I'm afraid it's no longer a matter of simply sitting back and waiting for the desperately desired abundance of opportunities to pile up in heady profusion (as indeed they did when my public reputation, slight though it was even then, was at its still lowly highest) thus enabling me to pick and choose the when, the where and the what of performance according to my (then) (and still today, or so I like to think) incredibly exacting and idiosyncratic standards and taste.

Opportunities, no longer offered to me on a plate as it were, are now matters of constant anxious concern for I have, largely, to create them for myself. And, as often as not, I have to create them out of very very little, almost nothing in fact, for there is virtually nothing in the conditions in which I now routinely find myself (although this finding is again compromised by a simultaneous losing) that facilitates, let alone encourages, my enwrapment by fiddling, that frees me in other words for the intense concentration required to maintain and develop the singularity of my dedicated relation to the one-string.

Whatever time there is that is left over from the time consumed in just getting by, in grappling with and trying to meet survival's pesky needs, is then taken up with manoeuvres geared on the one hand to generate fiddling opportunities and on the other, in parallel, to minimise the time taken up by the other necessary (but non-fiddling) activities of the day.

And night too for that matter!

For day and night are as one to me, indeed to fiddling generally - for, if she calls, one (I) must hearken. Indeed I'd as lief crank out my now stumbling, fractured, and indeed (sometimes) crotchety and quavering lines at, say, three a.m. as at an afternoon tea dance, for, as any mustard-cutting performer knows, it is the time within the line, the one-string-line stringing itself out in its own untimely time, that produces the swoon, and not the merely clockwork-time of its outside, its before and after and your wrist-watch.

So you can see that the tedious paraphernalia that just getting by inexorably gathers around itself, the dribs and drabs of self-maintenance, have somehow to be relegated to their, rightfully, secondary, tertiary and even lesser places in order that whatever turns out to constitute the numbing banality of each day's dailiness is definitively subordinated to the demands (complex and exhausting as they are) of fiddling's paramountcy. Were I to allow my supremely high standards to slacken, to slip even slightly (and the pressures so to do are both enormous and constantly expanding) into the shadows of the less-than-extraordinary, then the consequences for the quality of my performing would be disastrous. Being my own severest critic I would immediately recognise the ensuing sounds for the lustreless dross they would undoubtedly be (and perhaps endlessly are for most of my listeners for most, if not all, of the time, however short or long, which they devote (although devotion is not a common feature, nay it is all too rare, probably quite exceptional, in fact I can't remember the last time when I could have claimed, without reservation, that I had just had a devoted listener) to my performances).

And if I'm to be honest with you, which I'm trying to be, I would have to admit to a currently creeping suspicion that some of these deleterious effects are, even now, worming, however subtly and insidiously unbeknownst, their blighting way into the bud of my practice and performance (and thus, it has to be said, of my very life). You see, once the trivial, the necessary but still, for the fiddler (a.k.a. myself), trivial, begins to eat into the resources essential for making any real beginning with true fiddling, for getting to grips with whatever paradisial promise fiddling must be secreting somewhere within its holy bowels (however deeply), or even for just getting fiddling under way and off the ground (let alone any attempt (an attempt to

which any one-string-fiddler worth his or her bacon wants to commit every speck of their being) to burst out of the quotidian's skin and reach out, however falteringly and uncertainly, for sublimity's far stations, if I can put it that way), then the life-project (to just be a fiddler, to just fiddle incessantly away) is in severe jeopardy. Most, if not all (there may still be a handful of fourth-rate one-stringers, although I haven't come across them for years now, who are satisfied with less) fiddlers would agree that nothing-but-fiddling has to remain the defining goal-and-goad. Irrespective of the number of strings (in my case one such string is more than enough, nay, perhaps, as I'm belatedly discovering, is already too much, far, far too much for me to handle) fiddling is all that matters: fiddling is mattering!

No, let me push this even further and insist that fiddling only finally comes into its own when it devotes itself exclusively to the search for fiddleness, for fiddleability (if you will allow me this execrable expression), and thus to the attempt to dissolve, way beyond its fingered bleating stringiness, the outermost boundaries of fiddling's possibility.

What an absurd project you may be thinking!

Indeed you're probably asking yourself even now why fiddlers can't just stick to hunting out and laying down a good tune with a nice steady beat so that I can hum along with it and dance to it, something that I can relax to after a caustic day at the cement-works or the hospital laundry?

Well, I'd suggest to you that the best fiddlers, the essential fiddlers that is, do both. Yes, in ways not dissimilar to Hamelin's eponymous piper, pied to the eyeballs as it were, they'll beguile you with melodies you can't resist and then slowly withdraw you from your home regions before pitching you head-and-heart-long into the deep colonic recesses of an unknown and unknowable mountain. Bewitchment is their life project.

Of course, it's given (the utterly inexplicable (though uttered) giving of this very 'it' being exactly what makes all the difference in the world) to very few of us fiddlers to attain this level of bewitchingly skilful surface profundity. But the rest of us seek, however belatedly, to hang on to the pied coat tails in the foamy wake of the bewitchers. And, however minuscule the floating task may seem to you, just keeping afloat in this wake demands all the time in the world (well our world anyway). It's what drains us.

So you can probably begin to see that any loss of fiddle-reserved time through the quotidian's insidious and all too insistent demands is forever felt by us would-be fiddlers as an acute deprivation. For it's not just that practice time would suffer at the hands of the mundane (that is, would suffer both shrinkage and endless interruptions to deal with non-fiddling matters, such as a pan of burning porridge or a cry for help from the toilet), with obvious knock-on effects on the quality of subsequent performances, but that the very nature of the fiddling would undergo a mutation. For fiddling's place, or rather its attempt to make its place elsewhere, to drag itself and us into the mountain's secret unlocatable sanctum, through finding a way out of this all too timely place in which we seem so firmly wedged, would be compromised.

Profoundly.

Fiddling would then be forced to recognise that, contrary to what it had thought and desired with all its might, its place would be well and truly here, caught up with and enmeshed by the all too ordinary things of this (and likely every other) world. It would end up struggling with the world's pressing things rather than with itself as a way out of the world's compressions. We one-stringers would ourselves then be strung along (and out) by culture's under-managers (who are these people anyway... from out of what woodwork have they crawled... to whose beat are they marching (certainly not to fiddleness's beat?)), condemned merely to accompany their one-liners, to provide the musical background as it were for their and their corporations' inexorable self-aggrandisement.

And, on a more personal level, I don't doubt that the results would be disastrous. For it's not just that one's (my) practice time (that very time when one can (indeed must, if one is to draw others into and under the one-string's spell) develop a vital intimacy with the instrument's potential for sounds (I say sounds advisedly rather than music for the one-string offers so much more than just music) that could be offered to the world's ears) would be foreshortened, but that all the other recital-and-performance-related activities (repertoire selection and rehearsal, disciplined mind-and-body-focussing meditation, breathing exercises, programme note preparations, venue negotiations, alternation of hot and cold showers and so forth) would suffer accordingly. The fiddling-life-project would then, doubtless, rapidly start to teeter and begin a spiralling decline away from the dedicated heights that, soon enough, would become irreversible.

I've even begun to wonder recently whether said decline may not already have kick-started itself into motion behind my back for, although I am seeking to continue just as I have always done with my fiddle-committed round, little things round the edges of that round may just be beginning to hint that things, fiddling things, are no longer quite what they once were for me. It is with the greatest effort, then (now, in fact), that I struggle to keep my pecker up, my fiddle-dedication pecker that is, to convince myself that fiddling is indeed still the main track, my main track, even though it may (is) increasingly look(ing) like the track itself (that track which at one time seemed like an open highway, a royal-red-carpeted-road even, to one-string-heaven) is being obscured by tumbling swathes of viciously vindictive lianas that completely entwine me preventing my every attempt to move forward (though forward may not be the right word for the kind of movement that fiddling-on-behalf-of-fiddleness calls for). No, such is the strangeness of this movement that, at the very least, it involves extensive casting about in every conceivable direction (and not a few inconceivable (inconceivable, that is, until the very moment when one is press-ganged will-you-nill-you into them) directions as well), including falling over backwards and frequent plunging (or should that be plunging? – no let's stick with plunging) back into oneself at less than a moment's notice (so that when one is given no notice at all of the required change of direction, one simply has to respond to the irrecusable summons issuing from the mountain's lower bowel).

And of course one could not so respond if one didn't have one's trusty fiddle with one at all times. So even when I'm not on the road (as you find me now) moving from one venue to

another for my next one-night-stand, or working my way through a long or short season of performances in some distant palace of entertainment and/or uplift (the occasions when the fiddle most obviously seeks to come into its own-most), I still seek to ensure that it is ready-to-hand, alertly anticipatory and raring to go as it were (oh, if only fiddles could speak-sing without our help (and is not this precisely the illusion which maestro-and-maestra-fiddlers seek to give their audience - that indeed the fiddle has taken over?)).

So, to be permanently at the ready, I sling its superficially bulky, but actually relatively light, case (if you stick around I'm sure you'll get an opportunity to see just how slight the instrument itself is in spite of the metal horn attached to its base that acts as a simple (some might call it crude) amplifier and projector of its oh-so-thin sound) over my shoulder whenever I go out, whether I'm off to the shops to stock up on packet-soup and other essential fare, going to the barber's, or just getting some fresh air and a change of scene (a change, that is, from my frugal tent or cheap digs where there is little but the bare essentials necessary for continuous fiddling, for fiddling-without-end). Its instant availability at both opportune and inopportune (those when I simply have to respond to the summons even though the surrounding and prevailing conditions are anything but conducive to practice (let alone performance)) moments ensures that it can always take priority over whatever else appears to be in the ascendant during my daily round of necessities. Its still bravura promise relativises these necessities at a stroke.

When the occasion calls (and every occasion does some calling, however lostly faint) I can then whip it out of its case in a trice, tighten the bow (to which I apply a light dusting of the cheapest rosin), and immediately commence the search for the call's origin by trying to sound out my muse. If I draw a blank (as seems to be happening more and more frequently these days) and she fails to respond, fails to draw me to her and enfold me with her seductive response, then I use the time available, however brief and however inauspicious the place and conditions (a heavy downpour while playing to a sullen queue outside a local benefit office for example), for the most intense practice I can muster under the circumstances. Apart from the usual range of scales, arpeggios and endlessly irresolvable (and thus tensely depressing to some but not to me, no not to me, for I seem to thrive (if one could call the struggle that is my daily round thriving) on such tense irresolutions) minor-third-runs, I can work on my recital and concert routines which are always in need of a little tweaking here, some revising there, according to the requirements of the up-coming performance.

Sometimes I'll work on a new threnody to slip in between two good old tried and tested battle-hardened repertoire stalwarts with a view to assaying audience response, a response which, naturally enough (given regional (local even) variations in temperament and taste), varies markedly between venues. Some audiences can take, nay may positively lap up, a challenge (say, the insertion of a long wail employing slides between and across the whole twelve tone range with passing excursions into the micro-tonal) while others want desperately to stick within the comforting assonantic reassurances of the all-too-familiar.

Over the years, these so many years now, I have learned some of these audience differences and try to adjust my programmes accordingly. In the north-east of the territory across which my

concert (if concert is not too grand a term for many of the quirky, if not to say positively inhospitable, environments in which I have to set out my stall) tours generally track back and forth (a tracking with precious little logic I have to add, for my various agents have never shown the least regard for the exhaustion factor and its possible deleterious effects on my nightly performances) there is a considerable penchant for singalong which doubtless has a complex aetiology intertwining a communal-familial 'let's stick together in the face of overwhelmingly adverse odds' sort of attitude, a village choral tradition originating in an odd mix of fervent Methodist religious services, and ancient cultic fertility rites, all laced in and pumped up by the de-inhibiting qualities of the enormous quantities of a local real ale consumed by the yard before, during, and after my brief recitals. Thereabouts my audiences only have to hear a couple of notes that they think they recognise as lead-ins to one of their (many) favourite (all-too local) ballads and without further ado they pitch in together (well, together initially perhaps but speedily holding onto their many varied pitches, speeds, time-signatures and often different words (or the same words in different sequences)). Little of my own lone fiddling is audible even to myself under such circumstances. Though the participants do tend to take their visual cues from my activity, for, when I take my bow away from the string either in between themes or at a threnody's end, there is usually a gradual subsidence in their vocal accompaniments.

Naturally enough in trying to take the audience's pulse and respond accordingly, any would-be-soloist such as myself, who, longing to be heard above, over and beyond the interminably stolid cacophony of the everyday precisely in order to knock that very everydayness off its all too concrete perch, to deliver it a final knock-out punch, has to curb drastically the virtuoso aspects of performance and retreat into the certainly less personally satisfying (but equally yet differently challenging) role of accompanist. Naturally, as accompanist one is subject to the vagaries and idiosyncrasies of the singer's or singers' timing, pitching and memories of melody and lyrics all of which one must strive to follow, support and, so subtly perhaps, correct. Yet surely the mark of the good accompanist is their ability to lift those accompanied, irrespective of surrounding conditions, out of the depths of their own bathos onto a higher musical plain (or plane come to that)? Paradoxically one has to lead-while-following, a most complex demand calling for acute listening and response sensitivities, all of which, I like to pride myself, of having in some abundance (if you'll excuse the hubris so necessary to my wee enterprise).

After years of working within the most musically treacherous contexts I have at last begun to feel that I can take on all-(well almost all, even I have my limits of tolerance, sensitivity and technique)comers and find some molecule of sound in their ravings which, over the course of our shared performance, I can work on to our mutual benefit (as well as that of any audience remnants still lending half (or less) an ear to our output). Obviously the intensity required in such a focussed listening to the other has a negative effect on and requires the subordination of the complex of unfathomable urges which give solo performers their *raison d'être*. When audiences take over (hijack would not be too strong a word for what happens to me frequently, sometimes nightly even) or an individual demands to come up on stage and perform a song close to their heart, it takes the virtuosic in me all its time to re-focus my latent intensities (previously set in place to dredge the depths of my being for the little urges and scintilla that, hopefully, will

make all the difference in the world to my interpretations-to-come) on the singularities of their offering. I then bend over my instrument with renewed and ever self-renewing devotion, but a devotion now diverted into the *cul de sac* of alignment to popular taste, or even to that region of passing whim which surely comes and goes, passing through with the super-agility of a neutrino, without ever being snared by the rigidities of taste. Catching whatever hints of sentiment and, to me, misplaced feeling are issuing from their tortured and self-and-other torturing vocal cords, I seek to coax, goad, and guide (in a word - to seduce) them into areas of their selves which they may never previously have visited. At the very least I seek to get us through to the song's end without a surfeit of jeers from whatever is left of my original audience.

On a wider front my performance under such conditions is more of a foil to a generalised ribaldry founded on, laced with and perhaps congealed by a seemingly unbreakable chain of what might, at best, be dressed up as an earthy humour just about holding together, while seeking to conceal, the endless stream of fragmented tragedies that make up my audiences' daily lives. At least this is the sense I get from the occasional pathos-laced story confided to me when, my performance over, I'm standing alone at the bar having a last pick-me-up and quietly playing back the evening's events (its highs - precious few - and lows - all too many) to myself and trying to recoup some sense of personal and musical integrity as a justification for proceeding to my next venue.

For the possibility of sensitive renderings, let alone openings onto the sublime (or into the abyss), are unceremoniously dumped, pitched out on their by now long since degraded ear into the featureless night of true performing's absence, at the first reekingly sentimental whiff of audience participation and its subsequent drift into the simple indulgences of a good night out. Of course what counts as a good night out for members of my audience and my idea of a good night out rarely, if ever coincide, for the good includes the assumption that it's just fine to shout out suggestions or expletive-laced insults during a performance. Why, only the other night, when I was trying to establish a somewhat sad mood through some long-drawn-out notes in the instrument's upper register a young man shouted out, "Get that scranting bitch out of here before we all have kittens!"; the bitch part I could appreciate, in spite of the species-mixing of the metaphor, for I had indeed been striving for something redolent of the essentially feminine through my tonal qualities, but the scranting left me scratching my head for, as I later established courtesy of the Complete Oxford, this was, apparently, a first time outing for scrant(ing). Unless of course I had mistaken the k of 'scrank' for a t in which case 'scraggy bitch' might well have fitted the case. But my ears are pretty acute where these things are concerned and the interjection occurred during both a distinct lull in audience background noise as well as the quietly delicate string passage which I was trying against the odds to develop. No, I'm convinced it was scranting and I took the whole epithet as the intended insult it undoubtedly was. But all in a night's work, eh?

And yet where would I be without these audiences? Precisely by now (these many years down the line, *my own very line*, that is) nowhere! For my performing blood, even though steadily thinned over many many years by constant over-exposure to the musically disastrous, remains, still, my life-blood. As long as it courses (as the faintest reminder, perhaps, of some pre-

Dionysian ichor) *I will perform.*

Indeed it may just be that I am beginning (at last) to see that weak performance (performing, that is, *as I now perform have to*, in all weakness and with constant nods in the direction of humility, and with my head and heart turned definitively away from the already-signalled hubris so necessary to the virtuosic) could be, nay is going to be (perhaps has already become...) my true *metier*. For is it not the case, I ask myself more and more frequently (and our little chat along the way is giving me the ideal opportunity to think this thing through more clearly, perhaps even to bring some kind of conclusion (we shall see, we shall see)), that I may finally, at long long last, be coming into my very own own-most with this emerging (belatedly, all too belatedly as I'm now beginning to realise) weakness?

Could it be that, all along, unbeknownst to myself, I have been secreting somewhere (cocooned in some lost or hidden pocket of my inchoate soul) my own true, yet truly distinctive, weakness, a weakness the strength of whose virtue I could not possibly have recognised while performing, as I have for so many, many years now, under the auspices of and in full-hearted commitment to the presumed strengths of virtuosic genius? Perhaps I now, finally as the terminal throw of my already senescent dice, need to explore, to seek out and push to the very limit, the ways this weakness might, if only I could open myself to its promise, its promise, that is, of giving oneself, myself, up, of laying oneself, myself, open to, open to...?

Yes, but to what, to what?

At this stage my weakness is simply too weak to throw up any answers to this question. But that, of course, could be its permanent virtue - the possibilities latent in laying and leaving oneself open, the replacing of the founding bravura certainties entailed in a commitment to the strengths necessary for virtuosic accomplishments (the commitment that enables one to keep going through thick and thin, sure in the knowledge that practice makes (or is at least the only and royal road to the) perfect. So perhaps these odd audiences (for no performer dedicated to the long-inculcated strengths of expressive virtuosoism could regard my gathered auditors as anything but odd, if not to say pathetic, to be shunned like leprosy) are turning out to be a boon, both my everyday saviours (through them my one-string life stumbles along on its own side-track) and my guiding mentors, perhaps even my most important teachers. Indeed I am consoled by the dawning realisation that as long as I have an audience, and especially perhaps audiences such as those to which I have recently become so accustomed, a faint hope remains that my performances (so often now joint performances through their (the audiences' that is) own very distinctive contributions (see aforesaid skrant ref.)) will draw me towards and into musical spaces of whose delights I could never have dreamed when I was entirely caught up within the old frames of musical discipline and presentation.

Weakness, I am beginning to see, is perhaps the key to sublime differences, to as yet unlocatable and bottomless abysses into which, delirious, one (I, in fact) is cast will-I-nill-I, there to be flung around and about by dervish-music's forceless forces. In this way I may just be able to hold on to some hope for what I like to think of as my curiously haunting scrapings (scrapings that often

seem to be on the very edge of, if not beyond, what we ordinarily recognise, allow, and celebrate as music) as they strive in all helplessness (and under what, from within a traditional view of performing, would be regarded as the most appallingly negative circumstances that would rule out from the word go (the very first note) music's emergence) to lay themselves completely open to threnodic enravishment - to be torn out of themselves and tossed into a dithyrambic-elsewhere.

Looking back on the rag-bag of performances through which I have been subsisting for so long and across all the venues (monday nights at working men's clubs across the well-digging region, friday night intermission spots on the housey-housey/beetle drive/bingo circuit) at which I now ply my playing, I believe that I have caught the faintest of cracked reverberations from this lost spot just once or twice when, for example there has been a brief hush in the chat-and-clink monotone that is the near universal performance-drowning background to my stage-work.

Mind you I have to say that being first on the bill of the evening's programme typically means that not many of the few that do attend my recital have even finished ordering their drinks (let alone found and settled into their seats) before I've arrived at the penultimate number on my evening's schedule. I am thus all too accustomed to the *ostinato* rumble that, trundling along without a break, accompanies, nay is a fundamental contributor to, the rising chat-and-drink polyphony that all too frequently drowns out my wandering but sparse lines. And I have asked myself many times, while trying to keep my lines going with some semblance of musical dignity and truth-to-composer's (often myself) intentions during this insane self-fomenting babble, what is it about these people? Is there no longer any respect for authentic striving, no acknowledgment of the so real struggle to force a song's path through the choking thicket of contra-forces which is music's, *any and every music's*, only way? Why do they come to these tawdry palaces (a tawdriness that seems now to halo my every recital with a near-divine scintillation) if they cannot generate even the briefest silence necessary for music (for even under such dire circumstances I still like to think that music itself, music-as-such, might just be possible) to lure them, pluck them up and whisk them off and away out of the incessant thrum of the humdrum?

But now, approaching, as I seem to be, the threshold of weakness, and allowing its slowly dawning light, its oh so pale (barely visible in fact) hue, to cast an entirely fresh aura on my and music's possibilities, I can begin to recognise the debt I must owe to these same audiences. For is it not indeed they who, quite un-selfconsciously, have led me to this epiphany? Was I not required, however grudgingly and gradually, over the many many years, to alter entirely my inner relation to the lines I had so fervently been laying down for them solely as a result of the qualities of their (non-)response to same lines? In other words, have they not, through their very actions, guided me, however unbeknownst to themselves, to this aforesaid threshold where I am now forced nightly to confront my ineradicable debt to and endless involvement with the very weak, my own so weakly weakness?

There on the threshold's thither side, I can now almost begin to make out traces of a quite different paramusical track (if you'll allow me such a clumsy and for the moment perhaps less

than helpful neologism - only time and my ability to accept my own inabilities will tell whether this paramusicality could ever bear any harvest, however frugal) that may just offer me a way onward and through into my own ineffably weak openness.

Perhaps! It remains to be seen. Or rather heard...

No longer must I seek to create myself as the Heifetz or Luc-Ponty of the one-string-fiddle. Far from it!

What 'the weak', as I'm now beginning to catch echoes of its call (over-there, always seeming to arise over-there), apparently wants from me is to lay myself open to the severe limitations of the one-string and make those very limitations the focus of my musical- (and therefore my life-) search. 'Essence of limits! Sing the essence of limits!' it seems to be saying-singing to me.

And these echoes have more than a faint resonance with the mantra that I picked up from Wally and which I have always fallen back on for reassurance and renewal at (the all-too-frequent) low points of my musical vagrancy, for it crystallises my life project. You're probably already familiar with his "Picking thin music on the rustiest string". Were you ever in Reading (Pen.) or Hartford (Con.)? Have you ever bumped into him? No? That's a pity - he was invariably on the right lines, well some of them - those that he made his own - at least. Anyway, I am beginning to pick out a certain strain in that thin music of his - perhaps in its overtones, undertones, offtones, and atones - of something I'd previously passed over. For I hear the thin of his sounding-out, as yet ever so unplaceably faint, but still unequivocally clear, chiming with my weak.

Peering back through the past's sludgy mists, vague but different patterns are emerging. Exactly the same things are there, but even now as we talk, they are recongealing into new shapes. It is as if my entire life-involvement with the one-string has been based on a wrong turning, a turning taken at the very beginning of our relationship (the fiddle and I) onto a one-track that, as is now becoming, slowly but surely, clear to me, has led to the swingeingly ruthless suppression of precisely what it is that distinguishes the one-string-fiddle from every other instrument. Does it not throw up the question of where music might begin and end?

At first sight it has all (well some certainly) the appearances of a musical instrument. It looks like one, yet one stripped down to sub-zero. Almost immediately it forces us (well me at least and you too, I hope, now that you've had a chance to close in on and take a peek at it) to ask if it could possibly generate something we could ever come to recognise (and come to love) as, just, music. In its bastard (for what an odd mix it is) peskiness it appears initially to condemn itself to an endless teetering on music's outside edge, an edge where music might indeed fall almost immediately into farce, but then, through its untimely repetitions, it might (and this of course is my hope, the plighted-pledge that is my life-stake) just pass out of and beyond farce and cast itself and us ultimately and deliriously onto tragedy's far shore (and who knows, perhaps Karl heard some faint advance echo of the one-strings's plaint, a premonition of the thinnest historical sounds yet to come, as, contemplating pathetic Louis B.'s fate, he sought to bush-whack history's tangled undergrowth into submission). I am sensing that, so far, as I continue to serve out my

time in the hollow of sub-entertainment's inhospitable crypt (having already fallen off music's bottom rung), I have only skirmished with its farcicality.

Now it is time, is it not, for me to try to exhume the one-string's so-long buried propensity for the tragic (and thus for the ineffable), to see not only if it could be dragged into music's fold but also, and much much more seminally (I use this word with due caution but with immense hope), if it might just, through the particularity of its so-slimmed-down absurdity, force music to re-think itself, or, at the very least, give music something challenging to chew on?

Or is all this merely the bloated hubris of a sad-case, lost cause, fantasist?

Possibly.

But isn't that exactly where the challenge lies - to pluck the tragic kernel from out of entertainment's so heavily defended shell? Might this then become the challenging offer the one-string could lay down at music's back door? And what a challenge this would, perhaps will indeed, be for me! For from the outset, from those earliest hesitant but erotic fumbblings, far from being encouraged to find, explore and drive to their very limits (and beyond) exactly what it was that distinguished the one-string-fiddle from every other instrument on earth, to find and celebrate, in other words, its absolutely unique voice, have I not been forever frog-marched into the country of 'As If'?

Approach it, they cried (not literally of course, but this was the cumulative effect of the fragments of formal education and training on the instrument, of what encouragement (little enough), what reproof, what well-intentioned but nevertheless punishing directives, I was on the receiving end of during my formative years around the academy's fringes, and forever subsequently) AS IF it were a violin, a violin-cello, a double bass, a *viola da gamba*, a rebec, a guitar, a sitar, a ukelele, a banjo, a banjo-uke (I spent months, nay years, transcribing and adapting George Formby solos), a whatever-else-that-is-not-a-one-string-fiddle-but-has-a-trait-more-or-less-in-common-with-it.

Everything, every word in my ear, every knuckle-rap, was geared to getting me to approach it as if it were something else, a completely different instrument, as if all my efforts had to be directed to a kind of conversion work, to making it sound like something it was not and never could be. They were all, all my so-called teachers, advisers, supervisors, tutors, mentors and colleagues (yes, even my closest of colleagues - that tiny and close-knit but far-scattered group of fellow one-stringers) that is, *in denial*, denial that my extraordinary (for extraordinary it was and is to me) instrument could have its own absolutely unique (and thus differently special and specially different) qualities that needed, wanted, nay screamed out, to be addressed, first of all, only in, for and as themselves.

This fiddle, I used to say to them all, just wants to be itself. And I just want to be at one with it. They laughed derisively, indicating by word or gesture or both (together and/or apart) that I was a sadly but wilfully misguided idiot. The gist of their responses was that there was not nor could

there ever be any in-itself-for-itself of the one-string-fiddle - the issue was simply not worth considering let alone discussing as a musicological, let alone a metaphysico-aesthetico, conundrum. Just get on with your practice, they would say, and leave these airy-fairy questions to the philosophers. But don't you see, I would yell back at them, that this so-called practice of yours is full-to-bursting with, completely bogged down by, the thought-full, it's all too mindful of itself, it minds exactly how it's to be done, it's completely and chokingly stuffed with and hemmed in by the most complexly patterned and tightly woven straight-jacketing set of rules and rituals anyone could ever have dreamed up!

After my outbursts (which they undoubtedly saw as a symptom of some much deeper and underlying instability or pathology that would forever prevent me from getting anywhere near, let alone entering, their fame-pantheon) they usually turned on their heels and walked off with a snort or a sigh. Yet, as I'm sure you're beginning to grasp by now, I have never been able to divorce the two (or more), for the turmoil churning away without end so close to my multiple surfaces, the turmoil that energises my now-faltering engine, arises precisely from my complete inability to separate practicing from thinking. As my fingers (for indeed my fingers seem to be the most obvious recipients of and executors for my whole-minded-body-and-embodied-mind embrace of the one-string), through their supple but strict play across and through bow, string, and finger-board, coax paramusical sounds from the instrument (yes, to me it still is an, THE, instrument, despite others' dismissals), my so-called thought (as if it could ever be separated from the roiling turmoil that passes back and forth incessantly through every fibre of my becoming!) is absolutely engaged in and pressed by said coaxing. Indeed as soon as I began to offer to these diverse boundary-policing others some halting representations on my instrument's behalf they would quickly cut in and say, as if to end the discussion with a final *coup de grace*, but there is simply no repertoire for the one-string-fiddle. Where are the concerti, the sonatas, the duets, the landlers, the mazurkas (or mazookas as Jelly Roll M. used to pronounce it), the rags, the *études*, the preludes, the *poussettes*, the marches, the blues, the whatever-anything for the one-string-fiddle, they would ask with a cuttingly superior sneer, knowing full well that I could come up with nothing in reply. No, they would say without a hint of an understanding of my plight and my singular yearnings, you must get back to your transcribed solos, studies and exercises, for only by absorbing the ways and forms of our tradition (they always emphasised the our, and often added great, noble or majestic or somesuch as a prefix to tradition), the approaches of the supreme and past masters, will you ever put yourself in a position to wring some faint echo of music's established achievements out of your own (I could invariably hear their summary dispatch of my one-string in their overtones as they articulated this 'own') instrument. They never actually said 'pathetically inadequate' instrument but such was the all too audible sub-text in their unquestioning rejection of my pleas on behalf of the one-string. Young and impressionable as I was (in the early critically formative days and years that is), I was easily cowed into submission (or at least into a submissive front which hid a smouldering anger (later, on one of its rare surfacings, to be described by one of my supposed advisers, as a 'giant chip on my shoulder')) and I fell into line soon enough, concentrating my studies and practice exclusively on the materials indicated by my mentors.

Beneath this apparently compliant surface I continued to seethe.

Almost inevitably though, I collaborated with the reality principle as it commandeered and held sway over the surface of things. Quotidian necessities all but squelched my desire for the singular voice; it was awakened only at the rarest intervals by some incidental everyday event that must have had an unconscious association for me with a long-lost one-string-fiddle-specific moment such as, when tasting again a home-made shortbread biscuit dunked in a mugfull of smokily seductive lapsang-souchong tea I would be whisked back (although the words 'whisked back' don't do justice to the absolute speed, the 'in-no-time-at-all', with which this occurred) to a far distant moment of early adolescent practice during which I used to take the briefest of breaks from my *études* and refresh and re-fortify myself for the dedicatedly singular (devoted only to the one-string) practice still to be done by clearing my head and raising, if ever so slightly, my blood sugar level. But more or less from those days on, to all intents and purposes I became little more than a servant of tradition's dreary ways, thoroughly inculcated with, heeled into, yes and in a way also healed (but only on the surface for it was always only a surface healing by the doctors of quiescence) into, tradition's increasingly barren tilth.

Not that I wasn't utterly seduced by certain pieces from tradition's gloriously monstrous output!

Had it not been for them I would doubtless have led a one-string-free (and thus knuckle-gnawing-stress-free) life. But such pieces always seemed to be precisely those which had themselves, in their passing moment, dealt crack-hammer blows forcing tradition to give way and stare down into its own inner abyss. And though they were frequently held up as exemplars of the heights (of achievement) and depths (of feeling) towards which we should all aspire, these aspirations, we were assured, could only be translated into accomplishments through the most rigid adherence to the extant programme of best practice. I became as committed as the next fiddler (number of strings notwithstanding) to not only accepting but maintaining and even increasing (if such were possible) the one-string's utter subordination. I was completely under the sway and in the strangling grip of the 'as if'.

And this orthodoxy was constantly reinforced on every side by the obeisance made across all sites and organs of so-called culture (let alone what has passed and still seeks to pass for art among us) to the notion of the genius, he or she who, by virtue of some quirky mix of towering technique and acutely deep musical (or whatever else) insight, elevates themselves above the rest of us (mere mortals) and thus establishes themselves as, apparently, the only true interpreter and regenerator of aforesaid tradition. Under the auspices of another 'as if', although one that doubtlessly issues from the same underground stream, we treat them as if they have privileged access to a sublime causeway to the beyond which is simply beyond the reach of us lower life-forms. Encouraged to believe that we need them, that only they will do, we pass by the busker at the bottom of the elevator without a second ear or thought, even though she/he is playing and pouring their heart out for nothing (almost) and no-one but us.

Yet now, as the strange attractions of the weak begin to infiltrate my being in their seemingly off-hand and formless ways, I am slowly but so surely coming to realise that we pass by the buskers of this (and any other) world at our peril, and I don't know about you but I could do with

a cup of tea - lapsang preferably - I don't suppose you've got any shortbread in that knapsack have you, we seem to have been going for ages without a break? No? Aaaaah well, I'll just have to soldier on. Don't worry - I've learned to steel myself to such deprivations now that I need to walk from one venue to another; the back lanes I take are not exactly littered with transport caffs or welcoming hostelrys where rubicund landlords offer drinks on the house in celebration of their buxom daughter's forthcoming marriage to the handsome plough-hand. Not very often anyway. I'm not unused to it. I live perennially unslaked. Aaaaah me...

But could it not be that the plaint busked into being at the elevator's foot through a fog of echoing mispitchings and barely realised song-lines takes us (me) closer to the lost (if indeed we have ever possessed or found it) heart of music (yet perhaps there is no such heart), of the creative drive even (if this isn't going too far - what do you think?), than the most celebrated genius-generated performance?

At the very least I am having now to take this possibility with all the seriousness (a reluctant seriousness I have to admit, so used is it to the abiding comforts of the site to which it has been acclimatised for so long now) I can weakly muster. It seems that the challenge I am facing is to slough off, without falling back on and into, the unequivocal simplicity and universal appeal of strength's muscular ways (a.k.a. brute force laced with the usual dash of blooded ignorance), all those bodily mindful and mindfully embodied habits so firmly inculcated in me over the many, many years by tradition's stony-if-not-po-faced minders whose tutelage has so rigidly fenced me in. Somehow, if I am to drift into weakness's open (what, if you will allow it, I might call its patency) I need to embrace loss, giving (a)way, dissolution even, so that the imaginary mechanical gloves, which seem to have guided with such precision the play (although play here is obviously inappropriate to the iron discipline required and enforced by my machine-minded inculcators) of my fingers over the one-string's fingerboard, are cast off without further ado.

Yet I have to make a living. And my living to date has been built upon and is entirely in hock to the inculcators' wily ways. Surely it cannot be possible for me to nail my already so tattered colours to the flews, the flaccidly drooping mast, of the utterly weak, while continuing the whiles to ply my trade (for it has indeed over recent years become little more than a trade) under the inculcators' stultifying rubric? No, that would require an extraordinary combination of impossibles almost certainly beyond my steadily calcifying resources. For I would have to maintain all the appearances of tradition's wily but self-convinced showy (one might almost say bravura were it not for the fact that so much of the bravura is now well beyond my fingers' reach) ways, while simultaneously laying myself (my fervid fingers) open to the utterly bereft call of the oh-so-weak. In order to engage the wandering, always wandering, attention of the punters (who after all are responsible for my bread and butter) these same fingers would have to hold to the sinewy tricks of the trade and, in those very same movements, somehow succumb (initially, perhaps, only at intervals) to the drift off and away, the free-fall, into the fingerless open. Some chance, you may think!

But is there any alternative? What other option could there be for me now at this so late stage of my one-stringing? Certainly I have little or no chance of taking a serious sabbatical break, a

period of time out for renewal and the making of all the difference in the world through giving myself up entirely to the painful delights of the insatiably weak, for, were I to stop my public appearances, the result would be rapid starvation. My, so far, endless but broken and halting itinerary of one-night-stands means that I am a para-musical vagrant of no fixed abode. Lacking permanent lodgings (let alone a home of my own), I am unable to receive the state benefits for the unemployed for, being eternally on the move, I am not available for work in any specific locality. Without contracts, pieces of paper stating terms of agreed employment, I never know from one week (day?) to the next whether each engagement will be honoured or cancelled on the instant whim of some club owner or supposed agent. At best the state's representatives would regard me, with their fixed jaundiced stare, as a member of that peculiar category shared with down-at-heels members of the acting so-called profession, that is, never quite out-of-work but just temporarily-in-between-jobs. Surely, they would almost certainly say to me, knowing, as you must after all these years of experience in your chosen career (these are the terms they would use, completely failing to understand not only that I had no such choice in the matter but that it was certainly not a career in any of the senses that they would give to that word), the uncertainty of your terms of employment you will certainly have made provisions for such a contingency. Do you not have a reserve account in some bank or under some slate on whose resources you can draw to tide you over both the bad times and the sabbatical breaks? Have you not put something aside for a rainy day they would be bound to ask.

And I would then have to explain that, for some time now, not only are virtually all my days rainy, but also that the fees I receive for my bottom-of-the-bill appearances barely suffice to cover my running costs (mixed forms of transport to the next gig, the occasional room for a night as a respite from this tent and bed-roll, boot allowance, basic sustenance), let alone some trifling surplus from which a prudent joe such as myself could hive off a regular percentage to defray expenses that would be incurred in the inevitable bad times to come. To which their reply would be "Next please"!

No, there is simply no way around it. I can see that I am condemned (yes, yes, I know it is in part my own doing, a self-condemnation if you insist, for I can see from that passing grimace of exasperation that, as yet, I haven't been able to win you over to my cause - never mind, I live in hope, always in hope) to work out this life-threatening (for it could be the death of me) dilemma on the job, on the stand, as a matter of practice, standing face to face with and squaring up to the sheerly vertical coal-face of performance itself. Of course it's more than a dilemma. It's a life-splitting schiz - a great slashed and still oozing (perhaps fatally so) gash right down and through the middle with no obviously available means of staunching and catching the flow or of suturing this deepest of wounds. My musical being is, it seems, left hanging by a thread, a line, a line of cat-gut (I'm of the old-fashioned school, none of these modern metal strings for me), my response to which will either stitch said life up or allow it to wither and, all too soon doubtless, necrotise on its decrepit vine.

So will this line, on which, soon enough and once again, I'll be stringing myself out and up when I bare myself before my next audience, turn out to be a life-line or a death-line? I know, it's an unanswerable question - one which can only be put and answered for better or worse in

practice, in and as my performances (however few they turn to be) to come. And, knowing my audiences as I do, I expect neither sympathy nor help from that quarter. Yes, of course, as I have explained, I am indeed now recognising the massive debt I owe to them for having, however unwittingly, brought me face to face with the promise of weakness and confronted me with the one-string's true challenge. Yet I cannot turn to them for either guidance or tolerance. I know well enough the non-existent tolerance limits of their mercy.

No, I shall have to make my own way through performing's lacerating briar patch, probing, however haltingly, tentatively and tenderly (thus beginning to pay my due respects to weakness on the way through), anything that comes to hand to undermine my so deeply inculcated rigidities. And even now, as I'm confronting myself with this awesome life-saving-or-failing project, I'm picking up the faintest of hints from experiences past that all may not yet be up for me with the one-string life. For recently I have become more and more aware, although I have tried painstakingly not to let it put me off my stride in my compulsive search for my own music's moment-yet-to-come, of ragged raucous cockshies at other songs, songs of more recent eras and different (I now hesitate to say lesser let alone cruder) sensibilities for whose moods and sentiments I have had, so far, little ear or sympathy (let alone time), that rise, fall, collapse and then rise of a sudden again in the region of the bar behind my sparsely scattered audience.

And all this while my own recital is actually under way!

I do, of course, seek to maintain my lines, struggling to ensure that they sing out above and beyond the world of these alien and disparate counter-sub-melodies. Try as I might (and have) I have found no means to date of altering my performance in ways which might yet enable me to co-opt these, to me jarringly banal alternative sounds (do they even make the grade as melodies, as songs (in the true sense of that word), I ask myself as I strive to find some element of delicacy, of development and form among their ruins?), to my own ongoing performances, performances I have rooted as ever and thus far in the rock-hard but trusty crust of tradition's so-called soil. My inculcations have to date held them at bay, much much further away than arm's length, as unembraceable you's, beached on the furthest shores of my distaste.

But now, now that I'm beginning, perhaps, to recognise, however belatedly and haltingly, the emergent necessity of openness (that dread patency...), of allowing myself at last to drift free-floating into the sea of weakness, it may just be that I will fall ever so slightly under their sway, enter their so far utterly and obnoxiously foreign sensibility (although, to me, it has been precisely sensibility in which they are totally lacking), and become entangled by what, judging from their loud-mouthed interpreters' brash but committed renditions, must be their (to me as yet hidden) innate charms. And, should this occur, it would surely be a short step for me to incorporate some fragment of said charm into my own persistent and simultaneous (to wit: my life-long struggle just to keep on one-stringing along at whatever cost and come what may) performance and, further, to do this in a way which might gradually, or rapidly even, cause the bar-singing to subside and the punters to swell the anorexic ranks of my audience.

By dissolving some of the boundaries between our seemingly absolutely alien worlds of feeling,

worlds that so far (and so far apart) have not even brushed tangentially one against the other, through a single-minded (it will require everything I've got (left)) attempt at the merging (however briefly to begin with) of forms and the interleaving (however simply at the start) of lines, my performance, forever underwritten by 'the hope principle' - nice one Ernst! (incidentally did you ever bump into him in Berlin... no?... pity, he was a real sweet guy) - might just be able to draw its dissonant deriders and rejecters (well at least some, a few perhaps, of them, for there will always remain a hard-and-soft core who remain forever beyond the pale of any attempted co-option) into itself on its new found terms. Obviously, at this, so far theoretical (perhaps even purely and forever hypothetical (for will I ever have the will to summon the sheer naively naive guts and brass neck required to actually put this into practice and risk not merely the immediately forthcoming verbal and physical brickbats but even what little is now left to me of a performing life?)) stage, it is entirely premature to try and anticipate outcomes. But it might just be that the kind of instantaneous collaged line I would be required to generate in and as my performance could be the opening up of quite new fields of musical experience (one would hesitate, as yet, at this merely mouth-watering stage of trepid anticipation to call them (even potential) forms). Certainly there would be an essential element of call-and-response in any such performance (would it still be recognisable as what we call music though, or even a performance?) for which there is a multiplicity of precedents across so many regions of being (and becoming).

And might the improvisatory component also be a defining feature? Yet any improvisational input would most likely be dependent not upon variations of given harmonies or themes but more on an acute aural and digital (a.k.a. fingeral) dexterity, on an aurally tactile ability to copy, cut, cut in, paste, re-paste, call and re-call, open up, open out, insert, delete, repeat, and generally expand (and/or contract...) the one-string lines as they went on their absolutely unpredictable ways. At the very least the so-long inculcated severity of the very-serious (the slight frown, the set jaw-line, the over-determined rejection of the play of chance) that has cast (as I am beginning to see so clearly, now that the cataracts of sad experience are being slowly peeled away) such a pall over my own narrowly peculiar commitment to the transformation of sound into music, would, I suspect (nay, desperately hope and pray), have to be replaced from performing's very outset by the playful, by an embrace (at least partially) of snook-cocking, by a willingness, no, willingness is a poor understatement, more like a cock-a-hoop manic enthusiasm bordering on the psychotically delirious, to put to work (yet, of course, it is not work, and will, if it ever comes off (for it must, given my ever-dwindling resources, be still very much in the balance) bear not the slightest resemblance to anything you, I or the lamp post would ever recognise as work) every shade and weight of irony from the ploddingly loam-footed to the sylphan terpsichorean (actual shade and weight naturally being entirely context-dependent).

I know... I know... I can see that you're worrying about what would happen to my force-fed and by now deep-seated near-unshiftable inner commitment to stick to others' lines, to being nothing more than the dedicated interpreter of all those (countless) composers' lines already lying around waiting so anxiously for their moment to come and come again (and again and again). You're right of course! Yes, it would (will) take an enormous gut-and-soul wrenching act, a life-changing leap, to plonk myself down in this chancy elsewhere. But, increasingly, I'm

coming to feel that I have no alternative; it's either that or an immediate retreat into the living death, the bare existence, of a privatised silence. And there may just be one or two things going for me in attempting this leap to energise my initial take-off.

So dedicated have I been to the country of 'as if' that I have never even considered raising the latent potential of the one-string-fiddle to the surface, and yet, without realising it, without, as it were, making it a topic for disclosure and celebration, I can see that I have, right there (here) at my finger tips, everything (well, almost, probably) I need for this grand (if grand is not already to be risking that plunge into self-inflation that I find so viscerally distasteful; grand perhaps, then, only in the diminutive context of my own incredibly small and still shrinking world) gesture. Enough, anyway, to kick-start it!

If I can make the slightest of lateral moves while simultaneously staying stock-still I can then look back at myself from somewhere completely different and see my diehard habits for what they now are, senescent self-sclerosing remnants of a once promising one-string-fiddler who, quite without realising, was corralled into a relation to the one-string that never gave it (or himself) a chance to become itself. Seeing my ever-shrivelling self from over there, I would, I suspect, undoubtedly have to laugh at the pathetic shrinking clown figure (so obviously and doggedly oblivious to all of the effects he was having on others) cut by this very same self. And it is exactly this laughter, a laughter (advance echoes of which are already drifting through to me from my performances-to-come (performances that will be collaborations rather than recitals)), which will, I'm hoping (yes, hoping still), provide both the energising motive for and the trembling teetering ground from which the leap into my performing's flip-side can take off: a last-minute, last-chance saturnalian restoration of the playful to an almost-doomed playing (hopefully).

No, no, on second or third thoughts, or perhaps even thoughts-to-the-nth-power, it's too much, far far too much, to hope.

No, you're absolutely right. I can tell from that brief but gravely affirmative nod that you're with me on this. It will never happen.

The pathetic gap between the oppressive reality of my thinning gig-itinerary and the wistful euphoria of the revolutionary fantasy I have just evoked is simply too wide to bridge, the more-so given the paucity of my ever-diminishing resources, energy, and musical nous. It's surely time to shut up shop, buy a third-hand tent (instead of this second-hand one), find a secluded clearing in some dense thicket, learn to survive off nuts, berries, and edible fungi, and flog my one-string-fiddle to some curiosity shop where it would doubtless lie for years, a dust-gathering reminder of long-lost innocent days of the odd-ball, the quirky, but finally inconsequentially marginal strolling player (and his ilk, all the other side-show freaks hanging from the bottom rung) who was forever condemned to patrol the unmarked (but so unremarkable) borders of entertainment's outer fringes. The fact that I have shared this patrolling over the years, these many many years now, with an assortment of other acts which, from their outset, condemned themselves to, indeed thrived in and welcomed, these very margins as their only possible space

and opportunity (a flea-circus, a musical saw, a soodlums renderer, a one-armed mouse juggler, a clog dancer from Clitheroe, a contra-bass Carinthian yodeller) should have alerted me to the sad future that awaited me in those far off days.

But in the ice-age of my youth (those bleak mid-winters of so 'long ago' in which, as Christina Georgina R. hauntingly showed us, a 'Frosty wind made moan' whose very moaning, I have absolutely no doubt, drew me inexorably toward my one-stringed life-sentence) I was headstrong and blinkered, blinkered by both inclination (it was referred to quite openly by my nearest and dearest (very few) as a stubborn pig-headedness, but with the chill fixity of youth I was deaf to their pleadings and cajolings) and aforesaid formally tutored inculcation. Encouraged by my disciplinarian inculcators to see this performing space as 'the first rung on the ladder to success', I repeated that phrase to myself endlessly during the early years and managed, with my eternal optimism, to convince myself that it wouldn't be long before I was talent-spotted and raised several rungs.

In reality, of course, as my fellow rung-occupiers realised full well, this was our only rung, our last and very bottom rung. Bottom rung was bottom of the bill, a rung on its own way down there in the hold with a firmly battened-down hatch, never mind a glass ceiling, above separating it definitively from all higher rungs. We circulated endlessly amongst ourselves, each self-cocooned differently in our various states of illusion and disillusion.

And yet, even in the face of this merriless-go-round, I managed to maintain my tattering shreds of hope and continued to cultivate and devote myself to all the procedures I identified as necessary to rung ascension, to miming all the models that had been held up to me as exemplars of the country of 'as if'. As self-protection from the virus of clapped-out cynicism which seemed to be endemic, ineradicable and constantly proliferating in new strains throughout the bottomrungian bilge, I determined to insulate myself from its let's-stick-together-in-this-hole camaraderie which seemed to me like a desperate attempt to divert attention away from the black hole over which they (we) floated nightly (and daily). Staring fixedly at the stars above, towards which I projected my rungs-to-come rising steadily till they disappeared from sight in the outer blue-black, I steadfastly refused to speak unless spoken to and was rapidly excluded from all the forms of sociality to which the others clung in order to preserve some grains of sanity. Left to myself I had no excuses - nothing could interrupt dedication to the one-string. I simply kept at it.... in my own way, of course, always in my own way.

This surely was the problem, my problem's very root. For, as you can now see, in trying from here-on-in to confront the need for my in-house revolution, it will be the very possibility of a 'my own way' that is precisely in question and at stake.

In those frosty long ago days of getting under way, 'my own way' was, of course, definitively not just my way but, rather, that of the tragic conjunctive clash of my 'stubborn pig-headedness' with the authoritarian disciplines of 'as if'. In this sad but all too common conjunction, 'my own way' was to adopt a surface pretence of silent meek submission while barely suppressing, just below my surfaces, my seething angry rejection of the authoritarian version of repertoire and

method. In struggling to survive, to just about get by, while tossed back and forth between these irreconcilables, the felt sense of there being a destination to match my long-term hope has, I now recognise, been steadily disappearing through an erosion for which I am myself responsible. . . . so much for the true pantheon!

I'm beginning to suspect that, if I am now to leap out of this absurd tension and cast myself adrift from all submissive pretence, I may have to jettison also the very idea of way, of there being a 'my way', a way, any way at all. Most likely there is no way - no way for me, for any of us, any more (if there ever was, which I have always doubted). . . . or, at the very least, no one way that is mine alone, somewhere out there, up ahead, waiting for me to collude with its seeming offer.

No, if I am to try somehow to engage with and weakly pursue, as a matter of urgent doings and undoings, some kind of cata-practico-inert (I just hit on this term while you were lighting that ciggy, what do you think of it? No, really? Okay, no worries, I'll jettison it next time around) making-project that might just withstand the lure of 'way' by making for some aloof 'beyond' resisting any such 'my', any sense of ownership and property, then surely it will entail some kind of dramatic collaboration with whatever audience(s) I may still have left. I'm almost certainly going to have to coax and seduce whatever audiences turn up into moving into, with and through the performance-to-come on different terms, turning performance into co-performance through exchanging, swapping, turning, calling-responding, throwing-catching, projecting-rejecting, losing-saving, miming-fracturing, in short, searching out whatever undoes the proprietorial to generate something both participatory and, finally, aside from the authority of authorship.

You're looking po-faced - what do you think, impossible, a waste of time, no different to stand-up comedy routines, not what people pay their money for, all been done before and with disastrous results and no legacy? Yeah, you're probably right. . . . just living in cloud-cuckoo-land, dream-on-time eh? Still, I can't survive much longer in the absurd cleft I've devised for myself without, most crucially, ceding something, some morsel at least, to my audiences of that which I previously took utterly for granted as intrinsic to the very art and act of performing itself. Surely if I integrate elements of the responses of my collaborators-to-be into my performance as it unfolds, then it becomes theirs as well as mine. I become simultaneously in-and-out-of-control just as the performance's form becomes an altogether-now and all-at-once mutual venture. Its sinuously fractured lines-to-come (I'm leaping ahead of myself on this one, anticipating things that will never be as I am imagining them. . . .) will certainly require different initial inputs from me and, hopefully, subsequent invention of new modes of reciprocal movement across the so far yawning chasm between me and my attention-dulled and errant-eared listeners.

Yes, I know, my own performing may still turn out to be the prime instigator of these co-performances, but, as shared compositions, each such event will remain communal property, thus putting itself most likely beyond the reach of the law of copyright. The random, the chance, the instantaneous qualities of such called-for(th) motion, such passing off and away, will not, I

suspect, be gatherable under the currently operative Taylorist vision (recalling my earlier remarks re the insidious effects of the individual virtuoso-genius as the now exemplary model for all musical out-sounding) of the 'one right way' still haunting the academies of Asifia.

No, I'm getting the feeling even now that, as far as 'way' is concerned, the game is up for me. And perhaps, further, this could be a *mene mene tekel upharsin* moment not just for me, but for way more generally. Could it be the writing on the wall for way as such (or at least way in the context of putting on a supposedly recognisable and formal performance (just the kind of predictable performance that we are now all too used to with a clear beginning, end, and a memorisable shape, content and form, about which we like to say that, knowing when it is both under way, on the way and all over, we can now put it to bed and be done with it))?

But what's your take on way? I have to say that, as we meander along this village's outer lanes, I'm warming to the possibilities of such a way-scattering open-ended vision of performing. Yes, indeed, as my conviction gathers its strength, I'm beginning to feel like declaiming to all comers, nay screaming at the top of my rattle-throated voice that, **for performing there is no way!** There isn't any being on or under way to some destination beyond itself, no else-where to which it is heading. In fact, I would shout (hoarsely by now) to all and sundry in my (this, our) vicinity that there is absolutely no other 'where' (far or proximate) at all! No, I would yell, there is only this all too real floating hole right here within which performing condemns itself to try to stay afloat for the nonce, this very nonce, till this nonce itself gives way away, peters out, and we all drift off down our separate exits.

And, still bawling as loudly as I could manage, I'd most likely continue by adding that, actually, of course, in reality, this so-called floating hole right here would be just over there on the all too real performing platform (a.k.a. stage, arena, ring, bar, gym, bare-boards, saw-dust, field, yard, open space, or at whatever-place performing pitches itself whole-heartedly towards a nascent audience-to-come) where mattoidal-performing, as ever whirling dervishly, casts itself (yes, and casts you too if you are in luck) adrift and, in that same whirl, tries so very desperately to take place, to make that place, however fleetingly, *its* place, knowing all the while so deep within itself that it is forever condemned to fail. KNOWING (and by now I'm at my breathy limit straining to yell it, the essential reduced afflatus that is, out with the very last breath in my exhausted frame) FULL WELL (yes, those are the very words – 'full well' - I'd try finally to squeeze out) THAT IT CAN, IT WILL, NEVER TAKE PLACE.

Okay, okay - sorry, sorry... there's no need to back away like that! I don't know quite what's come over me; look, I'm calming down now. There, that's better. I think all this, this embattled confrontation with fragments of my shrinking self (but where is it now, it's beginning to fade isn't it), is getting a bit much for what's left of me. It's all happened so suddenly - this revelation, this vision of sloughing off performing's armour and embracing (musically that is) its and my other, I mean. It seemed to come from nowhere, an apparently chance association, yet it's forcing me to confront the possibility, nay the dire and pressing necessity, of topsy-turvying my performing life (my life in and as the 'nothing but' of my performances) and everything that seemed to secure it so comfortably, to keep it plodding steadfastly along fenced within the

narrows of its sadly predestined way, content apparently to go on churning out its by now drear and exhausted sub-song-lines.

No-way, no-where, no-place, then, only this odd instrument to be goaded into sounding out its own instant through some unanticipatable rapport with others unknown and unknowable! A shapeless prospect indeed! And all entirely dependent upon my overcoming the legacy, the so very very intimate legacy, of my ingrained life-time habits courtesy of which for so many many years now I have reciprocally enfolded this cata-musical freaky one string-thing with the-way-that-became-my-way. Yes, the freak found its own way of spreading itself throughout my very vitals, taking me over unbeknownst through an alchemical mixing of immiscibles.

You really want to see it? Okay. But it's not much to look at. I'll just unzip the case. Best let me handle it; it may well be the last of its kind. Certainly to my knowledge they haven't been in production now for many years. I'm not saying it's valuable, just that it's irreplaceable, probably. To me anyway. There! Now you can see that it's simplicity itself, little more than a barely shaped and varnished wooden neck-cum-body with its one string attached to and tightenable by the peg at the top. Stretched over the little bridge towards the bottom, the string is knotted round that small retaining post. The most interesting feature, don't you think, is this horn screwed onto the lower left side of the body; it's adjustable and can be tilted up or down according to the direction the player wishes to project, everso slightly, the sound. It looks very like the horn on an old hand-wound gramophone just as depicted on that famous record label, you know, the one showing the mongrel apparently captivated by and listening intently to said gramophone. Of course, whether or not this dog had any relation (other than that of utter species-alienation) to the gramophone is entirely moot. For, I must say, I can as easily interpret the the dog's look (with its head cocked slightly to one side) as one of total vacancy as of the wrapt attention towards which the anthropomorphically grounded illustration seeks to draw us. Alternatively, if indeed it is wrapt attention that could just as easily, and much more likely, have been generated by the slight whiff of a distant (or proximate but, in any case, beyond the illustration's frame and point) bitch in soundless but sniffable heat.

Naturally compared to today's electronic gadgetry the amplification provided by aforesaid horn is feeble in the extreme, but it does manage to pick up from the narrow wooden body some of the resonances of the vibrating string and project these, however negligibly, into the space immediately in front of the instrument. You'll note that there is no extendable pin at the bottom of the body as there is on a violoncello or contrabass; this is because the player grasp's the body between the knees (it is something like the pre-modern violoncello in this respect at least) while resting the neck-end on the left shoulder, and fingering in the conventional way with the left hand and bowing or plucking with the right. Simplicity personified!

Now, one thing which might still secure it some value (were it ever to come on the market) is the name inscribed on the under-side of the body; if I turn it over you can just make it out in spite of the worn paint. Look, 'Garside of Bacup'! Heard of them? No, I'm not surprised. But to an *afficionado* of the one-string world that inscription would speak volumes. For Bacup was the Cremona of the one-string-fiddle. In the instrument's heyday Bacup (long before the Central

Lancs League became the main focus of most (male) Bacupians' attention) was a veritable hive of one-string-fiddle production with perhaps half a dozen single-handed workshops working flat out to meet the demand. *Primus inter (almost) pares*, Garside was the most famous, for his fiddles were (are still?) renowned for the sweetness of their plaintive resonance; indeed a Garside was regarded as the Strad of the one-stringers and to own one was to draw looks of admiration, if not to say envy, from fellow professionals and lay-persons alike. There was strong competition though, among whom Jerome Sykes of Todmorden, hard by but to the east just across the border, ranked foremost. If you ever come across one in a rummage sale or junk shop snap it up - they'll be museum pieces soon and will undoubtedly steadily accrue in value. Jerome used to inscribe his as 'Sykes of Rome', omitting the local reference altogether and seeking to gain added prestige from the Italian citation. This may have impressed naive beginners or outsiders but it was well known in the one-string world that one-string production never went further south or west or east than Knowsley Road. As for the north there was but one outlying maker of repute, Florrie Beale-Mason of Bashall Eaves. But she resolutely refused to sign or mark her instruments in any identifiable way, arguing that it was the music not the instrument that was crucial and that her name emblazoned across the instrument would only serve to distract listeners and performers from the song-lines themselves. It is worth remembering that she is known to have done some delicate pearl inlay work on just one or two of her very favourite pieces and to have paid great attention to the final lacquered finish, using a rare and specially imported lacquer from old Honshu which was thought to add a particularly subtle richness to the reverberations. As far as I know no-one copied her in this so if you ever come across a deeply maroon-lacquered pearl-inlaid one-string fiddle you will almost certainly have a genuine Florrie Beale-Mason of Bashall Eaves instrument.

The bows too were made in the same workshops using wood from the abundant local wild euonymous groves and strung with hair culled from the tails of the (semi-)wild ponies that used to roam freely across and around the Trough of Bowland in those long ago days. Small groups of the makers' families would take a day trip in early spring on the Trough of Bowland Light Railway (a single line track) into the foothills of the Trough and then trek upwards to where the ponies grazed. Several, seduced by handfulls of proffered carrots, were lassoed and held and fed gently while the tail hairs were combed and cut selectively for hairs of the appropriate thickness and length. Enough sackfulls were gathered in this way to provide for the annual output of bows. Over the years, so Jerome once told me, the ponies became so used to the ritual hair-culling with its associated carrot treat that they would skip down the hill sides quite of their own accord at the first sight and whiff of the hair gatherers. Neither completely tame nor completely wild, the ponies, through their hairs, seemed to contribute (synechdocically speaking that is, only synechdocically) something of this in-betweenness, this nature-becoming-culture-and-culture-reverting-to-nature, to the bows themselves which were renowned not only for their longevity and the tonal breadth which they offered to the adept player, but also for their strangely coarse delicacy through which, on those rare performing occasions when performer and audience were as one, the delphic plangency which they could coax from even the most inferior of instruments and banal of materials would uproot player and listeners alike in a mutual levitation, scattering them across ecstatic regions on knowing's farthest side. Despite their rarity it was precisely the open possibility that these occasions could (and did) overtake performances at any time

unbeknownst that confirmed and boosted the reputations of said bows, instruments and their fashioners. And all this happened (when, very occasionally, it did) in spite of the one-string-fiddle's ubiquitous lowly position on performing's under-card.

All the more surprising was it, then, when a one-stringer, the proverbial warm-up act, kicking off an evening's performance with his or her customary medley and well before the restive audience were comfortably ensconced, would suddenly from out of nowhere (nowhere in the perceived surroundings that is) hit a strange groove and, dragging the audience from their torpor, seem to rise with them into the auditorium's tobacco-fumed aether (however low or high its ceilings). As the medley souged to its end they would all be gently released to settle back down again, but now overtaken by and wrapped within a spreading euphoria which even some of the weaker acts towards the middle of the evening's billing failed to dissipate.

Such, then, were the hopes and possibilities for the one-stringers. So you will see, perhaps, how and why they (well, many of them at least and myself included) entertained what might be called 'ideas above their station', for it was this very sense that anything was possible that fixed them fast to their task and led many of them (myself included) to believe that the rewards of the Asifian economy of desire might be lying just around performing's very next bend. Yet what an illusion that has turned out to be! There was no next bend. Performing's road, the one-string road, had, from the earliest, become a straight-jacket-of-a-line stretching all-too visibly out in front towards the as yet hazy but steadily emerging outlines of the terminal gig, well this side of infinity.

The challenge now (now, that is, that co-performing seems to be offering me one last chance) is thus to find ways of locating, unlocking and sharing the altogether unique virtues of the one-string, its singular but passed-over (and doubtless all too frequently vilified) qualities, to wrench it out of its lostness into its ownmost. Vanquishing the all-smothering cloud of digitally-induced conformism, which to date has so doused the one-string's possibilities, requires a practical re-assessment of each of its attributes, followed by or even in tandem with a supreme effort to push the peculiarities of each attribute to, or beyond even, its very limit. For how otherwise could I (we) begin to realise what its, the one-string's that is, true potential is? By allying it with, nay gathering it so unquestioningly under, the string family (of which of course it is indeed a kind (but only a kind) of cata-member), by treating it as a ridiculously, indeed childishly, inferior mutant of the violoncello genus, we are closing off entirely its mould-breaking capacity. Quite simply, we are failing to hear it. We know it produces lines only but, precisely because it lacks any kind of sound box, any reverberating chamber, the character of these lines, as they stretch out or fragment may just begin to take us towards and then through and beyond melody, song, let alone tune, on quite different terms.

You're looking doubtful, sceptical even. Well I'll tell you why! Because, without a soundbox, all the overtones and undertones, the high harmonics and the low harmonics, all those reverberations which, when played on a violin or cello, would surround every note played and give it its rich sonority, are effectively absent. What overtones there are on the one-string are so faint, effectively inaudible, that our ears are left with nothing but that note in its singularity.

Always and everywhere the harmonics surrounding a note will tend to draw us away from that note into another world - the world of rich resonance. In short, under these conditions the note serves merely as a pretext for other associations, it becomes, not to put too fine a point upon it, a vehicle for meaning, encouraging us listeners to ask of ourselves something such as, 'well what does that remind me of' or 'oops, look where this is taking me', or even 'so that's what it means', as if the note's very reason was to distract us from itself and draw us towards something outside itself.

You can see what I'm getting at I'm sure can't you? Yes, exactly, *we lose the note itself*. But with the one-string it's a different matter entirely. No longer seduced by richness, by resounding depths and heights which immediately tend to transport us away from the very centre that the note itself is, in other words, from precisely that which the player, the composer, or the player-composer, wanted us so desperately to hear before and after anything else, we are forced (yes, forced, for the sound is offering us nothing else) to stick with the note in its unalloyed and pristine freshness. At last, perhaps for the first time indeed (the first time in the West that is, for, obviously, such essential notes are ever-present features of what we over-sophisticates tend to dismiss as folk-music, or not-yet-quite-music) the one-string, with its one line, its insistently non-resonant de-reverberated line, enables us, however abjectly, to confront something that is nothing-but-the-note in all its inordinate weakness. Indeed if the note is all that there is then we cannot even talk about its centre, for that implies that there is something else surrounding it. No, no more talk of a centre, just the thing itself, the insane only-this that maybe, just maybe, lies at music's ex-centric heart.

You see, my diminished instrument's very coarseness and simplicity enables it to perform nothing but itself, to coincide with its note, to hover above and trace over a spot, otherwise spotless, which is so deeply buried by and lost to all our modern instruments that are now completely in thrall to their technical over-specification. And by abandoning the now universal metal strings with their so-tightly bound coils and opting for good old fashioned cat gut, I can achieve an even deader and yet more (I hesitate to call it this but it does seem apposite to the point I am trying to bring home to you) lifeless sound, that is to say a sound of bare life, of an only-just-life, a sound that finds a perverse form of richness in the very absence of anything that might conventionally be taken as a prerequisite for richness's emergence. It's a sound that plods through a neuter zone without reference, I hope, to anything outside its unvarnishable dullness.

And now, as I hear it somewhere just ahead of us and in anticipation of the fiddling yet to come, I can see it opening a road, the very road I will have to take hereafter if I and the fiddle together are to seize this one last chance, a track that I suspect is nothing but bends, twists and hazardous forks, for already I can see no further than the first precipitate bend. Yet when I hear this sound in all its keening desiccation I begin to think I'm almost home and dry. But it's the just-falling-short of that 'almost' that requires the one-string and I to stumble on, bound inseparably together under the failing authority of the one last project.

Look, why don't you tell me what you think? Let's sit down on this rock while I get trusty old Garside of Bacup out of the case. There! No need to tune up on this instrument, it's always in

tune with itself, ready to lay down its halting line. I'll just tighten the bow a little; I find that a certain tautness helps to clarify the plod. Now, try listening to, no, more than that, see if you can let yourself *become*, however fleetingly, this brief line in all its spare inner consonance. Release from whatever part(s) of your anatomy they issue, any and all panglossalalic sounds which my notes may call forth from you - they will all, I can assure you, be entirely and equally appropriate. I and faithful Garside will respond with whatever sonic fractals your utterances provoke and hopefully this will cast the line and all of us right up to that bend in the road, so very very near now. This will be more than just a dress rehearsal for my new performing life, it will be the very first performance. But don't forget, it will be entirely up to you to keep the line going for we (Garside and I) will always respond to your sounding-out calls. We will, as I say to my long vagrant off-springs, always be here for you. For, as I can see so clearly now, it is our destiny, Garside and mine, to institute and offer endlessly the least of lines in the hope that another, others, you yourself here, now, will pick them up, over-develop them beyond all recognition and, in that very movement, cast all of us deliriously way beyond the next bend. Right. Ready? Good. Off we go