

Retirement North

I have never understood the attraction of a diva's "farewell tour" until experiencing the joyous events of my own musical retirement:

- Coordinating the Tallis forty-voice motet "Spem in alium" (with four conductors!) to celebrate the anniversary of the Pittsburgh Camerata that I founded forty years ago, recently turned into a professional ensemble;



- Delivering five lectures on the history of western music (available online at arthurwenk.ca), fulfilling a long-held dream of presenting issues of harmony, tonality and structure in terms that any music-lover might apprehend;
- Conducting the Mozart Missa Brevis in D and the horn concerto in E flat, then performing the great C major piano concerto, K.503, incidentally marking a quarter-century association with the chamber orchestra that I first engaged for a Sing-Along Messiah at Aurora United Church;
- Offering a final organ recital of "French Fireworks" featuring virtuoso works by Guilmant, Franck, Lefébure-Wély and Vierne that I'd learned during the three years since Jubilee acquired the Phoenix organ;
- Inviting twenty former members of the Toronto Camerata and Quodlibet to join present the former members of the church choir to produce a mighty chorus of forty-five to sing Mozart's "Ave verum corpus" and William Dawson's stirring arrangement of "Ain-a That Good News" to conclude a decade of service at Jubilee. (You can see the

performance at <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=10152127761646447&set=vb.530821446&type=2&theater>)

You read so many stories about people dying within six months of retiring that what had started out as a rather straightforward adventure begins to seem almost perilous. On the one hand I'm determined not to succumb to Parkinson's Law—that any task expands to fill the time allotted to it—where in retirement there would be a grocery shopping day and a laundry day and a housecleaning day, etc., concluding with watching the six o'clock news on television. On the other hand my plans don't accord with those of well-wishers ("Surely you're going to find another church job, start another choir, write another book," etc.)

It has been said that retirement is a second childhood, in which you get to make the rules, in contrast to the first, in which your parents made all the decisions (e.g., "How can you sit inside reading on a beautiful day like this? You should be outside playing").

While our condo was being painted we spent several days at a friend's cottage enjoying the unfamiliar experience of reading for hours at a time: Ben Tarnoff's *The Bohemians: Mark Twain and the San Francisco Writers Who Reinvented American Literature*; Donna Tartt's sprawling novel *The Goldfinch*; Margaret MacMillan's *The War That Ended Peace: The Road to 1914*. I no longer begin the day with the Toronto Star, with its front page calculated to arouse anxiety or indignation (though I couldn't resist reading about Rob Ford's expulsion from group therapy for bullying and shoving other residents of the laid-back rehab clinic he attended).

"Angels Rejoice When We Repent" proclaimed the bulletin board outside Brechin United Church, part of a rural two-point charge. We joined the congregation of thirty only once—quite aside from doctrinal questions, and the lamentable Wurlitzer organ, the mold-fed mustiness made Patti ill. Next week we'll try Beaverton.

The movers mistakenly re-assembled my piano so that the dampers on the bass end of the instrument fail to function. But they promised to send someone out to correct the problem so that I can start practicing Chopin Etudes.

While five pots can hardly be expected to substitute for an entire garden, a visit to the local nursery enabled Patti to add a fair bit of colourful vegetation to our deck, from which we enjoy a view of two canals.



If “peacefulness” seems like too abstract a word, let me describe what it means for me in Lagoon City:

- Sleeping with the windows open for the first time in years and substituting cross-breezes for air-conditioning, since the air here, unlike that in Oakville, doesn’t need to be filtered and purified;
- Listening to birds, including the (to me) unfamiliar black-throated blue warbler, without subconsciously having to block out the low-frequency roar of an expressway;
- Watching boats glide along the canal in front of our deck;
- Redefining time in the absence of scheduled events. Eventually I expect to settle into a routine of sorts, but one without appointments or rehearsals or obligatory keyboard practice;
- Living on water, for the first time since my apartment on the St. Lawrence River in Québec thirty years ago.

As the summer progresses we expect to meet many more of our neighbours and co-inhabitants of this waterfront community of 3000. (Weekly BBQs and other association activities should hasten the process, such as the “Sailaway” sponsored by the yacht club in which we took an hour and a half sail on Lake Simcoe with the owner and his wife, six passengers, and a dog, part of a fleet of nearly two dozen participating sailboats.) And with futons

and pull-out beds, four bathrooms and three showers, we're well-equipped to receive visitors. Perhaps you'll be among them.

Cheers,

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