

Mellow Cello

by
Gill Tennant



Fairhaven Press

ISBN: 978-1-62992-037-5

Published by Fairhaven Press.

Copyright 2018 by Gill Tennant.

Other images are copyright to their owners as noted. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be copied, scanned, photographed, stored in a retrieval system, posted online, or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, except brief extracts for the purpose of review, and no part of this publication may be sold or hired, without the express written permission of the publisher. Fairhaven Press is a registered trademark. The Cello Bass Clef Logo on the title page is also a trademark of Fairhaven Press.

Front and back cover illustrations by R.J. Ewer.

Printed in the USA, UK, EU, and Australia.

Fairhaven Press is an independent publishing company. We thank you for supporting us by purchasing or considering our titles.

www.fairhavenpress.com

Programme

Key	Year	Title	Page
A	2018	<i>Prelude</i>	4
Bb	11,500 BC	<i>Dreaming</i>	5
B	1720-1760	* <i>Katerina's Cello</i>	13
C	1703-1830	* <i>Pietà</i>	23
Db	1960-1965	<i>If Music be the Food of Love</i>	33
D	1830-1935	* <i>The Age of Great Cities</i>	46
Eb	1950-1960	<i>Syna...</i>	55
E	1938-1945	* <i>Terezin</i>	63
F	1946-1993	* <i>After the War</i>	75
Gb	1986	<i>Solange</i>	89
G	1995-96	* <i>Solange Goes to Lyon</i>	95
Ab	1715-1761	+ <i>The Devil's Instrument</i>	101
A#	2465 AD	+ <i>Sky Music</i>	118
C#	1575-1677	~ <i>Angela Serafina</i>	129
D#	1677-1896	~ <i>Angela Serafina Goes to Paris</i>	143
F#	1896- Pres	~ <i>Angela Serafina Goes Home</i>	155
G#	1912	<i>Four Cellos and a Lifeboat</i>	163
	1948-1990	<i>Encore</i>	179

* Stories following the history of a single cello

+ Stories following the history of a single family

~ Stories following the history of a single being

Æ Prelude

A chance remark in a cello forum, where I mentioned that I couldn't play my cello now for long periods because of physical problems, but had reverted to my other love, writing, started me inventing stories about and for cellists. A few, such as the first one here, have a humorous link to the instrument, others are about the players, the music or the inspiration behind both.

The time-span, even without including *The Dreaming*, is more than the entire time span of the existence of the cello as an instrument. Some concern its development from its roots in Italy. I have given story dates to help. A number include a great deal of musical history, some none. Sometimes the edges between fiction and fact are juxtaposed: e.g. Piatti is historical but Béla, also in *The Age of Great Cities*, is fictional.

A group of stories have a single instrument running through them: those are the 'natural' stories from B to G: *Katerina's Cello*, *Pietà*, *The Age of Great Cities*, *Terezin*, *After the War* and *Solange Goes to Lyon*. This last has a prequel called *Solange*.

Ab and A# are a linked pair, separated by seven hundred and fifty years. Three of the sharp stories: C#, D# and F#, have a narrator in common. The other 'flat' b stories and the G# story and *Encore* are separate without deliberate links to any others.

However each story is also designed to stand alone. I hope you find something to enjoy.

B Katarina's Cello

Katerina Roda left her home in Füssen two months after the death of her father. For the past five years the majority of the work in their family instrument-making workshop had been hers. But although both her father, and grandfather, had owned the workshop, after his death it was stipulated she could either marry their preferred candidate to obtain the new licence to make violins in the workshop where she had kept the work going all through her father's long illness, his decline and up to his death; or she could leave Füssen and seek a workshop in another town. Since 1562 the guild of instrument makers in Füssen had limited the number of luthiers in the town to twenty, and it seemed obvious, to everyone except Katerina, that a woman could not be a guild member. The fact that wives and daughters often helped out in the workshops of their men was not rated as skilled craftsmanship, that was just the workshop owner, and it was his name that was shown on all the labels. This, despite Katerina had always created the labels for their workshop as her father was unable to read or write. The guild pointed out she had been born in Vienna, rather than Füssen. She had no more energy to argue her case.

Katerina was definitely not going to marry the fifty-six year old workman who they favoured as the next licensee: he was nearly three times her age. So she gathered together the best of the tools she could carry into a big bundle, and with little else but a vague

idea of apprenticing herself to one of the famous Italian workshops, she shook the dust of Füssen from her feet, glanced back at the proud stands of spruce in the foothills of the Alps, which had provided the front plates of all her instruments to date, and shook her head. Would women ever be valued for what they could do?

She had heard that the Viennese army was moving south towards Venice and it was only two days until she managed to overtake the supply wagons of its baggage train. She made herself useful when camp was struck for the day, cooking over the large fires, earning her keep. A Bavarian soldier took a shine to her. He asked her to marry him, but Katerina told him he would need to establish himself first, as she did not intend to become a pauper or a whore, trailing along in the wake of his army. She also told him she needed to get to Brescia, or Florence, or Cremona, to complete her training. She wanted to be, not just a good instrument maker, but a great one.

They passed through Trento and as they came close to Verona she thought about her destination. The army were making for Venice, but that might be a less than safe and stable place to settle since the Venetians were embroiled in disputes with Vienna. Then there was Brescia, that lay only a short way off, to the west of their present position. She picked up her bundle, and without any farewells, headed west towards Brescia.

Her father had mentioned Brescia but she wished she had taken more note of which families had workshops in which towns in Italy, when her father

had spoken about them. He had always wanted to visit them, but had no opportunity, taking over his workshop from his father with a full order book. He would be proud that his only daughter was fulfilling his ambition.

Katerina reached Brescia at nightfall, but the small town seemed cold and unwelcoming. She ended up spending the night in a barn, nowhere could she get lodgings. Perhaps they had heard the Viennese Army was approaching. Early in the morning she stood on the road, wondering which way to turn now. She heard a merry whistling and a young man, perhaps five years her senior, came into view, a violin slung across his chest and a tool-bag over one shoulder.

He smiled at her, The young man said, indicating himself, “Io sono Pietro.”

She decided to speak to him, and although she did not speak his language, he offered to share his food with her. They sat down and she pointed to his violin and then opened her bundle of tools. Ah! Recognition dawned and a smile spread across his face. She was a fellow luthier! By signs and drawings scratched in the earth he indicated that he came from a family like hers, where his father had a workshop making violins, and the occasional cello. Katerina’s eyes lit up. It was her ambition to make a violoncello. She could not understand what would make him leave his father’s workshop, but by mimes and signs he indicated that he and his father did not get on, they argued, and he was leaving to go to Venice to continue his trade there.

Pietro wanted that Katerina to go with him to

Venice, but she shook her head. The army was even now surging towards Venice. She mimed soldiers, but Pietro just laughed. Then she took a label from her father's workshop out of her bag of tools and showed it to Pietro. He nodded, and she tried to communicate that she wanted details of his father's workshop. It had occurred to her that if Pietro was leaving, there might be a vacancy for her there. He chipped out the details on a piece of wood he picked up, and passed it to Katerina. Then they wished each other luck and he pointed her just a little west of south and indicated that it would be walkable easily within the day. With a wave he was off east, whistling as he went.

Greatly cheered by this lucky meeting Katerina travelled on. It was late afternoon when she reached Cremona, and soon, showing her scratched piece of wood to a tradesman selling his wares in the street, was directed to the workshop she sought. She would need to learn to speak Italian quickly, she realised. At the workshop she knocked and entered. Two men were bent over a bench working together on a violin. They both looked up, anticipating a customer. Katerina gave her name, laid her bundle on the workbench and unwrapped the tools. The older man went to a small chest and brought out some small coins. Katerina shook her head. He had obviously assumed she wanted to sell him the luthier's tools. She showed him the piece of wood with the name Guarneri scratched on it, and said "Pietro". The younger man looked at her, and said "Mio fratello". She indicated that she could show them what she could do if they gave her some wood. The

C# Angela Serafina

A small party of Benedictine monks came across me, while out searching for medicinal herbs in the beech and fir forests. I had no idea of where I had come from or how I had got here. I couldn't speak or remember my past life. It was 1575, and I was utterly alone. I looked like a girl, so the monks took me with them back to the Abbey of Vallumbrosa, fed and ministered to me, taught me their language and their customs, but said as soon as I had recovered fully I would have to leave. Enquiries brought no response about a missing girl. The monks told me that the remote lake in the Apennines where they had found me was in the comune of Reggello in Tuscany. They were generous and it was a pleasant life, full of hard work and song, which I found particularly attractive. I had the feeling that I had never heard music before, but they put that down to my loss of memory.

After a couple of weeks one of the monks accompanied me to the Villa Capponi closer to Florence, where there was an order of nuns. It was about thirty kilometres north-west of the Abbey, a fairly easy day's walk for me. The nuns there called me Angela Serafina Perduto, because they said I had been dropped in the forest edge like an angel descending from heaven. Later they said it was also appropriate because I had an angelic voice.

The Abbey was a four storey, white building with an arched door and many small separate cells.

Gill Tennant

Here the villa was smaller, more intimate, and I, along with the nuns, spent much of my time in my solitary cell. I emerged to sing in the services they held, and to join my voice with theirs in the wonders of song. But I knew I needed to see more of this world I had found myself in, and so after ten years I left the Villa with the blessing of the nuns, to set out to find out where I had come from and who I was. The nuns remarked that I looked not a day older than I had when I first came to them – their angel.



Cloister Vallumbrosa by Jacob H

The prioress suggested I head for Florence. As I left, early one spring morning, one of the nuns came out to point me in the right direction and gave me a small bundle, “a little food for the journey”, she said. When I sat down to open it, I found a flask of clear spring

water, some crusty bread and Pecorino cheese, and a few coins. The nuns had been kind to me, and I left them my good wishes. It was the first of March, the first day of the new year at that date.

When I reached Florence I was amazed, it was so different to the quiet seclusion of the Convent and the Abbey. I got the feeling that this world was totally alien to me, I was as out of place here as in the remoteness of the forest by the lake. I followed the directions the prioress had given me, found the house of Giulio Caccini and delivered the message she had entrusted to me. Giulio looked me up and down and nodded, then directed me to leave my few possessions in a small attic room, and to help his household with whatever work the housekeeper allocated to me. I had been well trained by the nuns and could clean and polish, and sang as I worked.

I was polishing the cutlery and glasses when I became aware of someone standing behind me. I turned. Signor Caccini was leaning against the door jamb, smiling.

“Angela Serafina!” he said, “You’ve got a beautiful voice.”

“Thank you Signor Caccini”, I replied with a curtsy.

I heard him talking animatedly to his wife in the adjoining room. Later, after the family had eaten, and I had taken my repast in the kitchen with the cook, I was called into the family room. There I was introduced to the young boy Pompeo, and Lucia, Giulio’s wife, who was also a singer.

“Come and sing with us,” Giulio said.

I was happy to sing with Guilio and his wife. They began with some of the songs I had learned in the Abbey and convent, both sacred and secular music, as the nuns often sang as they went about their work. Now I realised why the prioress had sent me to this household. As well as having a good tenor voice, complimenting his wife’s soprano, Guilio was already teaching the small boy Pompeo the basics of music and singing.

Over the next months I discovered a new element to music. Guilio played the archlute and the harp and the viol, all new to me. It was this last that attracted my attention, but of course, as a servant, I could never ask to play it. Both husband and wife were being asked to perform more and more frequently in the city of Florence, and it was not long before the attention of the Medicis was aroused and the family would be called upon to perform for the court. Whenever we were in the crowded city I felt as if this were more like the world I had known before the monks discovered me, but also as if my own world were a very different one from this one. I did not recall having a name before the nuns had given me one, and yet here each person had one name or several, and seemed to be a distinct individual. I felt as if this were not what I had grown up with.

It was two years after my arrival when Lucia told me she was expecting another child. I had been happy helping her with Pompeo, doing various household tasks and often being invited to sing with

the family in the evening. Now a second child was about to make an appearance. On the 18th September 1587 Francesca made her entrance into the world. I became her carer whenever her mother and father were needed at the court of the Medicis.

I came to realise that I had a talent and twas able to encourage both those children to love music. Pompeo was becoming a proficient little singer, but I had an instinct that Francesca was going to be particularly special – my Cecchina, as I thought of her. Her father taught her music and her tutor taught her and the boy Latin, some Greek, modern languages, literature and mathematics. I sat in on these lessons with the children so that I could supervise their homework. I found I picked up the modern languages, French, German and English, easily and rapidly. La Cecchina would sometimes be frustrated that I remembered the new words more easily than she did. The thought came to me that I had been specially trained in another place to learn languages quickly and well. In fact she would have thought me a romancer or a fool had I said that I did not think that this was the world where I had been born. The longer I spent in this place the more convinced I became that I had dropped through some hole and found myself in a different universe. It would explain the fact that I looked still not a day older than when I had been found.

Three years after Francesca was born the family was enlarged by the birth of another daughter Settimia. By now her father was gaining a reputation as a famous and popular composer, but her mother's health was