

LONDRES_NOV_2010 / LONDON NOV_2010

<http://s1178.photobucket.com/albums/x378/anacervantespiano/PEDRO%20PARAMO%20ROH%20DEVELOPMENT%20SESSION/>

<http://s1178.photobucket.com/albums/x378/anacervantespiano/PEDRO%20PARAMO%20ROH%20DEVELOPMENT%20SESSION/CONCERT%20ROH%20DEVELOPMENT%20SESSION/>

<http://s1178.photobucket.com/albums/x378/anacervantespiano/ROH%20ANA%20PLATICA/>

FLYING TO ENGLAND, VOLANDO A INGLATERRA

(Please scroll down for English)

Es otro *posting*, creo, en que alternaré entre los dos idiomas, quizás sin traducir ... sólo un aviso.

Tantas impresiones, y más bien desorganizadas ... no obstante intento concretarlas, algo; para que después, con el tiempo, se cuajen mejor.

Me llegó un mail de una muy querida amiga dos días antes de mi salida, diciendo "Brasil e Inglaterra en el mismo año, BRAVA!" Casi siempre viendo hacia delante, a menudo todavía olvido mirar hacia atrás para ver dónde estuve hace un año; y leyendo ese mensaje tengo que decir, *Sí, es cierto*. De manera que pienso en viajar de un hemisferio a otro, norte-sur; y de uno a otro este-oeste.

Muchas diferencias, y a la vez muchas similitudes. No tan sorprendentemente, un hilo conector es esa relación compositor-intérprete, y lo fructífero que es para ambas partes. Silvia Berg estuvo presente cuando interpreté el estreno absoluto de su *El sueño ... el vuelo* el 19 de octubre en el Cervantino; y por fortuna, también en la UTD cuando el estreno en EU. En algún momento comentó que siempre que compone tiene un intérprete en mente. En el Tube -el Metro de Londres- Stephen McNeff me dice casi textualmente lo mismo.

Inglaterra. Mi otra Madre Patria. Desde niña he querido venir acá. Es un poco como mi primera visita a España, que es también mi Madre Patria, una generación más allá de México. Mi bisabuelo paterno, zapatero, vino a México desde Murcia ha de ser en 1890; mis tatarabuelos maternos vinieron a EU un poco antes, quizás una generación, huyendo de una de esas periódicas hambrunas en Irlanda. Algunos de ellos originalmente de Inglaterra: un ir y venir casi constante entre una isla y la otra, desde el año del caldo.

Asomándome de la ventana del avión al amanecer cuando nos acercábamos vi el contorno de una costa, tierra en media del agua; e inesperadamente me sentí al borde de las lágrimas. Como cuando llegué a Madrid, en vísperas del Año Nuevo, al mero final del 2005.

En el avión pensé, por la madrugada, Es la primera vez que viajo a Inglaterra, es la primera vez que viajo en British Airways, es la primera vez que voy a un sitio invitada como asesora artística a un proyecto de un muy querido compositor -- ¿qué chido es eso, tener 50 años y hacer cosas por primera vez? Requete chido, sí.

OK, this I WILL translate ...

So many impressions, and rather disorganized ... nevertheless I will try to set them down so that later, with time, they will set better.

England. My other Mother Country. Since I was a little girl I've wanted to come here. It's a little like that first visit of mine to Spain, which is also my Mother Country, beyond Mexico. My paternal great-grandfather, shoemaker, came to Mexico from the Spanish province of Murcia around 1890 it must have been; my maternal great-grandparents came to the US a little before, fleeing from one of those periodic famines in Ireland. Some of them originally from England: there was a constant back and forth between those two islands, since God was a little boy, as they say.

Peering out of the airplane window around dawn when we were getting close I saw the outline of a coast, land in the middle of water; and unexpectedly felt as though I might burst into tears. As when I arrived in Madrid, at the very end of 2005, on the eve of the New Year.

In the airplane, in the middle of the night, I think: This is the first time that I travel to England, it's the first time I fly on British Airways, the first time that I go somewhere invited as artistic advisor to an exciting project of a very valued composer colleague; to be 50-something years old and be doing something completely new, how cool is that? Really, really very cool indeed.

I received an email from a dear friend two days before my departure saying, "Brazil and England in one year, BRAVA!!" Almost always looking forward to the next thing, I still often neglect to look back to see where I was six months ago; and reading that message I have to say, Yes it's true. So I think about travelling from one hemisphere to the other, north-south; and from one to another west-east.

Many differences, and many similarities. Not so surprisingly, one connecting thread is that composer-interpreter relationship, and how fruitful it is for both parties. Silvia Berg was in Guanajuato for the WP of her *El sueño ... el vuelo (The Dream ... the Flight)* and, wonderfully, present again for the US premiere at UTD. She commented a couple of times that almost from the beginning, when she composes she does so with a particular interpreter in mind. My first day here, Stephen says almost exactly the same thing to me when we're talking about this in the Tube (the London Metro).

SATURDAY!!

Yesterday I took my time about getting launched in the morning and arrive in Town -as everyone here calls central London - around 2pm. I decided to just get to know the area right around Trafalgar Square a little bit. Chilly and damp, just as I knew it would be. Nevertheless, vast quantities of people; I had the impression there were lots of tourists but also lots of Londoners. Quite merry! Even a medium-sized demonstration, urging everyone to get out of Afghanistan and Iraq, right under Nelson's noble profile. I walked around for a good hour and then ducked into the National Gallery for just a few minutes. I spent time looking at three or four Goyas and felt myself exceedingly well-nourished by that humanity and vividness.

Stephen, in another moment of that ongoing conversation about composer and interpreter, says (I paraphrase), "My goodness, I leave out an articulation mark and these performers who check every little meaningless detail need to know from me if that's what I really want. I feel like saying, just LISTEN to it and decide for yourself!"

In my opinion, this kind of hyper-dependent behaviour comes from the interpreter not having convictions –or even opinions!-- about the piece. Obviously, you have to ask the composer about certain things – *tempi* which seem completely out of line with the notes, for example. But at a certain point the interpreter has to take the helm. I've said for years that once the composer commits the piece to paper he or she has given it to the world: in effect, she no longer has any control over the work. For heaven's sake, this is one principal reason why a composer has to take the responsibility of putting good directions in the score! Thus the composer, at that point, has to hope that the piece will get superb performances and accept that it will get some which are less than superb.

FROM MONARCA TO RUMOR ...

I had only two weeks between the US premiere of those ten pieces of *Monarca* and my departure for London. I had to move my head, soul, fingers, intellect –everything! – back into *Rumor de Páramo*. Since I've been invited to London as artistic advisor to a development session at the Royal Opera House of Stephen McNeff's new chamber opera on *Pedro Páramo*, my way of moving back in was through Stephen McNeff's *Pavane (in the old way) for doña Susanita*.

It's the third or fourth time I've picked up this piece after giving it a rest. This time I go back to the score, listening to and questioning everything from articulation and colour to large architecture and how I want to define it. This is what convinces me that the great majority of these *Rumor* pieces are "keepers": when I go back to them after a time they are still rich, there are still things to discover, I still deeply enjoy playing them. So much new music gets commissioned, premiered, and then forgotten. So much never truly becomes repertoire, and there's a lot that surely deserves it. One reason why I so respect my colleagues like Tambuco and the Cuarteto Latinoamericano: they not only commission new music, they make it part of their repertoire, and record it.

INTERLUDE OF THOUGHTS ON MUSIC AND INTERPRETATION (some of which got re-posted to the blog in July '11 because I am so absent-minded) ...

SATURDAY I had a really wonderful meeting with a British music writer whom I greatly respect. Wonderful to meet in person someone whose writing I so like. Check out my new section, of various ONGOING THOUGHTS ABOUT MUSIC & INTERPRETATION, for more material like this ...

Lots of stuff during our conversation but one issue in particular came up: I was asked, What about this business of composers writing –and being commissioned to write– new music for old instruments?? Hmm ... This is another of those disquisitions which I clearly need to write, but for now these are my thoughts: There should be no limit to what a composer's sonic imagination can engage with. I suppose one could say that this is just a trend, but really we don't have the perspective, right now –see, THIS is why I think context is so valuable! – to be able to judge that. And in any case, it may not be, I think, just a passing fancy: Horacio Franco, here in México, has commissioned significant quantities of music for all the recorders (*flauta de pico, flute à bec*), as has Anna Margules in Spain. Last year Stockhausen's daughter commissioned a piece for basset-horn (how 'bout THEM Haydn-apples?!) and orchestra from Ana Lara of México, and has commissioned other works from numerous living composers. So yes, if the idea is interesting to a composer and to an interpreter, then let the good times roll, as they say.

I have to note as well that I think it's really important for us as interpreters to have very present the sounds of other instruments. Axiomatic, of course, that a pianist should have the sound of an oboe (including a BASS oboe! – quite different from that of a bassoon) and of a 'cello, for example, present in her or his inner ear ... but I think it's also essential to keep in mind what Brahms' preferred Erard piano must have sounded like. You look at the denseness of Brahms' left hand writing and you have to imagine –so as to reproduce!– the clarity of that piano's lower register, unless you want the result to be mud. Even French pianos of more recent vintage give us ample clues to what that must have been like. I remember playing in Cuba (jin Cuba!) a Gavot. Another pianist who'd played the piano a day or two before complained bitterly that if you just breathed on the damned thing, it made a sound. OK, difficult; but as I've written before, that's part of what we itinerant piano-players do, unless we are prepared to lead the kind of life necessitated by bringing our own instrument with us. And what an opportunity to experience the unearthly sensitivity of such an instrument, such a conception of piano sound.

I also wonder about the opportunity to bring to an audience the experience of such small but expressive sound, in our daily sonic context of assault-sound. And I definitely do NOT mean in the too-often exquisitely precious context of an "original-instrument" concert -- unless such a concert is performed with the idea of magically and inclusively recreating the context in which that music was originally shared with listeners whatever their walk of life: no airplanes, automobiles, televisions, sound-reproduction systems. Does this sound a bit Luddite? no matter, I'm prepared to say that anything which stimulates our imaginative faculty is healthy.

Which brings me full circle: if a composer wants to write for that sonic universe ... well, why not? And perhaps even more important, for me at least: why not be able to conjure up, on a modern Yamaha or Steinway, the ILLUSION of the sound of that Gavot or Érard, or even of a clavichord? We interpreters are, among other things, illusionists, *ilusionistas*, conjurers of illusions and dreams and yearnings. For people who molest me with original instrument dogma, I remind them that Emmanuel Bach knew the harpsichord, organs of various types, and the earliest versions of the pianoforte as well as, of course, the fortepiano; and that on consideration, his favourite instrument was still the clavichord – because in spite of its tiny sound, its expressiveness was unexcelled among the other keyboard instruments. In other words, and he himself says it, the clavichord was capable of the most VOCAL sound.

MONDAY 22 NOVEMBER

Today is my last day of being a tourist here. From tomorrow through Friday I will be devoting most of my time to the Royal Opera House development session for Stephen McNeff's chamber opera on *Pedro Páramo*. So today I set forth prepared to be a gawking tourist in this great city of London, for as long as I could stay on my feet, or until the sun set, whichever came first.

Arriving at London Bridge on the train from where I'm staying, I walked up the Thames to Tower Bridge and crossed over to see the Tower itself. I suppose I'm quite idiosyncratic about being a tourist: more than once I've found that the standard attractions attract me not a bit, and that sometimes all I want to do is wander and soak up the feeling of various places. Often I prefer to do that wandering without benefit of tour guide, just with a guidebook and my own senses alert and listening to the place itself.

So today I just walked around most of the perimeter of the Tower without going in. I've been around buildings of that approximate age before, in France and Spain; and around buildings quite a lot older, in México. But there is something about seeing that "Traitor's" Gate, where supposedly both Anne Boleyn and Thomas More were brought into the Tower, which sends a shiver up my spine. The arrogance of power has something to do with that shiver, I suppose; and how power –and the fear of losing it– can erase all trace of human empathy and compassion from a human soul. Brrr.

Brr also because it is COLD down there by the River Tamesis, at least by comparison with what these now Mexicanized bones are used to. Never mind: I have my cozy sweater and hat and gloves and rebozo all piled on.

I cross back over the river and head back toward whence I came, to the Southwark Cathedral. Old, old; tho' not so old as the temples and observatories the Maya built. Still it is the oldest Gothic cathedral in England. In the oldest part there are various effigies. Interestingly with reference to the merchants –and artists– who were instrumental in the prospering of London, I see only one which is a knight. Among the others which I find interesting are one of a man who is almost-skeleton, flesh partly eaten away, ribs and other bones visible. All white. The sign is at pains to point out that, in the time when it was made –12th or 13th century– this was not considered a sign of disrespect. Rather, it was saying that death is part of life ... just as we believe in México. An interesting change of focus: for many northern Europeans in our times it is a little hard to wrap one's mind around the idea that to show a dead person as a corpse half-eaten by worms, by the earth, by time, might actually be respectful. I think about this particularly, in this moment, because of what I've been thinking I'll say to the ROH group tomorrow as I explain a little about the historical and cultural background of Juan Rulfo and of *Pedro Páramo*.

I was also struck by struck by the effigy of one John Gower, who died in 1408 and was Poet Laureate to Richard II and Henry IV. He was called "the first English poet" because he wrote in English –really the vulgate then– as well as in French and Latin. The head of the effigy rests on three books of his authorship: "*Vox Clamantis*" in Latin; "*Speculum Meditantis*" in French; and "*Confessio Amantis*", in English. I have a fanciful moment of wondering if the spiritual or religious thoughts seemed most appropriate in Latin, the philosophical reflections most fitting in French; but for enunciating the intimate confessions of the heart, only his real mother tongue would do.

From this beautiful cathedral I continue walking along the Thames to the Globe Theatre: the Globe Theatre as it was quite faithfully reproduced and rebuilt by Sam Wanamaker in a noble effort that apparently spanned some four decades. I spend ten pounds fifty on the half-hour tour because it's the only way you can get into the actual theatre, which I feel I must do. And it is certainly worth it. The space, as you might think, is astonishingly intimate – so much so that I was surprised to learn that it can accommodate up to three thousand spectators. I imagine experiencing Shakespeare here, in this space where he undoubtedly must have walked when it was just a tavern or a bear-baiting dive, where maybe he tried out lines of dialogue in his inner ear; and once again feel tears welling up. The excellent guide points out that the theatre was effectively the first place where different strata of society mixed, where a noble, a merchant, and a poor person might all be in the same place at the same time. Theatre as democratizer. www.shakespeares-globe.org

A striking parallel with modern times is how the Puritans dedicated considerable energy to crushing the theatre, feeling passionately that it was immoral and encouraged immoral behaviour. This was why it was only feasible to build the Rose and the Globe theatres on the South Bank of London, which in Shakespeare's time was outside the city walls. I've always felt that culture is dangerous – it certainly is for people of that repressive stripe, and they keep on proving how threatening they find it, all through history and throughout the world. Seeing Shakespeare LIVE at the Globe Theatre is one of the many reasons I want to return to London.

And onward: to the Tate Modern, barely a hop and a skip away. ¶The TATE MODERN!! www.tate.org.uk On Sunday when I was trying to decide what to do with my last day as a tourist, Stephen and Charlotte described the ground floor to me as a “cathedral-like” space; and Charlotte talked a bit about the Ay Wei-Wei installation –a commission– which is there through February. You can read more about this at the Tate internet site. Too much to talk about quickly here. My usual problem with blogging: most times I am not a knee-jerk responder and so it's hard for me to get stuff posted promptly. Half the time I end up chewing on it for weeks and then it never gets posted because other stuff comes along.

The Ay Wei-Wei installation was thought-provoking for me in a number of areas. It's millions –yes, MILLIONS– of sunflower seeds in an enormous space. Except that they are sunflower seeds made of porcelain, each one hand-made by Chinese ceramic artisans. This makes one think –me in particular, in México whose thousand-year artisan traditions are right now threatened by mass-manufactured Chinese goods. It makes me think about how the Chinese artisans themselves are threatened by their own country's mass-produced goods, as well as how the Chinese people are threatened by their own country's political choices ... and a bunch of other issues. Among them, the sheer mass of people in China: the vast extension of that field of sunflower seeds for me became a kind of representation of the vast extension of that country and of its people. “*Life is cheap in China*”, more than one person (mostly Western) has said to me; and the fragility and uniqueness of every one of these millions of sunflower seeds made me think about how much of a stereotype that expression surely must be, just as much as saying that Mexicans are constitutionally lazy or mendacious.

As I post this material to the REFLECTIONS part of my website in July 2011, I think of how just a couple of weeks ago Ai Wei-Wei was released after having been, basically, **disappeared** by the Chinese government during more than two months. Thank heavens it was only temporary ... but at the time there was no way to know that. The silence of some of the important art museums in the US was practically deafening. Yes, great art is dangerous. And repressive governments know it in their bones.

I cruised through only one more floor of the Tate Modern because eyes, brain, and emotions were starting to tire. I saw an expo of artists principally of the “*Arte Povera*” school, Italy post WWII when the idea took hold –perhaps a little like what happened in music– that it behoved visual artists to abandon the “fine arts” traditions and in their art make use of common and sometimes industrial materials, in recognition of the devastation left after the war. Piero Manzoni wanted, according to the blurb by one of his “*Achrome*”

paintings, to “*banish narrative content from painting*”; sought nothingness. So for this picture he soaked the canvas in kaolin (clay) and rid it of all colour. The blurb goes on to say that the weight of the clay, soaked into to canvas, caused it to sag.

My own take on this is that it IS a kind of narrative: the enormously subtle narrative of an infinitude of textures and lines formed by the canvas itself, not to mention the various ways the light hits it and causes it to respond. Like it or not, I think, we are a story-telling race, and it’s something integral to who we are. There’s no question that the rhythm and nature of our diverse stories come out of our multiplicity of cultures, but the love of story, I’ve come to feel, is something completely human.

Then there was Giuseppe Penone, who in a room full of pieces using industrial materials makes two sculptures (or maybe one composed of two parts, my notes are incomplete) out of TREE TRUNKS, good four metres’ worth of them. His process involved closely following and carving out around the knots in the wood, resulting in something which for me looked like a sort of skeleton of a tree, if you can imagine such a thing, with the very beginning of each knot like a branch but naked somehow, without bark or anything else to cover it, shield it. These two very tall sculptures had a terrible vulnerability about them but at the same time they were very comforting in a room full of wire and metal.

I had visions of an apocryphal lunch in a warm and comforting pub, but somehow it never happened. There was always one more thing to see, not to mention the damp chill which made me want to keep moving. So I never did really stop.

I end up walking back to London Bridge to the train station to go home. On the way there I bump into one of those small spaces whose intimacy is made far more intense by the size of its surroundings: a tiny park with a sweet and lovely alabaster fountain, all voluptuous curves with a base of river stones set together and the water washing gently over them. I look beyond to the building –a small chapel, Georgian perhaps– and in the near-dusk see that it is the Mission to Seafarers. As one who has various times sailed out of sight of shore, I salute this mission and those to whom it ministers. Then, as I turn around to keep walking, I see the sign with the name of the tiny park: Whittington Park. This is really the final touch: this lovely little space named after Richard Whittington, another who went bravely off in search of his destiny and –with the help of his cat, if you know the story– found both fame and fortune, among them becoming Lord Mayor of London. By all accounts he was a fine man.

THURSDAY 25 NOV

I have an unexpected Day Off: singers need time to work with McNeff and conductor Domenic Wheeler; stage director John Lloyd Davies and production assistant Matthias Janser need to make all ready for Friday afternoon’s concert.

I decide to do what I didn’t have time for on Monday: Tate Britain (the original Tate Museum), (www.tate.org.uk/britain) Westminster, whatever else there’s time for before meeting Stephen at the ROH-Covent Garden for a Rambert Dance concert.

I don’t make an early start. Tuesday late afternoon a Cold Wave arrived: suddenly, around 5PM, it was clear that we were in some New and Brutal Weather System. Until then, the climate had been more or less normal for London at this time of year, and I was

quite comfy in my second-hand Patagonia fleece jacket with thick cotton turtleneck underneath; with hat, gloves, and rebozo. But from that point onwards, the highs during the day were some three degrees Centigrade, and the lows something like minus six or seven. Ouch! The air was an assault on one's skin!

Wednesday night I'd stayed up way too late reading Harry Potter (which I've just been discovering - of this more later) and so it was not hard to have a leisurely morning with coffee and email and laundry, and the adorable McNeff family cats, Bea and Lupin. So I took a bus -YES!, a double-decker, and of course I rode on top! - just across the Vauxhall Bridge and walked a bit along the Thames to the Tate Britain.

I went, of course, to see Turner. It would have been wonderful to see Muybridge - goodness, it would have been wonderful to see the Diaghilev expo at the Victoria & Albert! - but there was only so much time. And I fervently hate the kind of tourism that says you must cram impossible amounts of experience into very small time spans. I seem to have a rather low threshold for museums and such: after a while I am just looking and not really SEEING, and it becomes exhausting and empty.

So here goes ... In the Tate Britain they have mounted a new exhibition titled *Romantics* which is Turner together with Blake, Constable, and others: to give context to the work of all of them. I am a great lover of context so this was really fascinating for me. Highlights: Constable wrote, "painting is another word for feeling". I actually LIKE Constable, I have friends who don't. What do I know (this is only my first ever visit to England!), but somehow Constable for me does conjure up a sort of peculiarly ENGLISH countryside together with the activities that went on in it; as distinct from a Spanish or French (or Irish!) countryside, I mean. I actually don't see Constable only as an avatar of some illusionary and quintessentially pre-Industrial Revolution English countryside ... although from today's perspective it's hard to NOT see his work that way, even if only as some sort of historical record. I was tempted to write, "a romanticized view" but this exhibition made me remember that we really have to re-examine what Romanticism was, and not loosely throw around those adjectives.

This is clearly yet another of those things about which I need to write more extensively: for now, suffice it to say that I think we sometimes forget that Romanticism also had profoundly to do with issues of social justice and with the importance of the individual and what he (and at that time, increasingly she) has to offer. I think these are ideas which have surfaced and gained traction at various times through our chequered human history: hard to point to any one moment in which they surfaced to triumph once and for all. ("Chequered", OK, I was writing this, or at least experiencing it, in England ... so British Spelling Prevails!!)

Two earlier paintings of Turner which captivated my eyes and soul: *Waterloo*, which is not the triumphal battle painting one might expect but no, something more like my very personal picture of the sixth Brahms Intermezzo Opus 118. It is the battlefield at night: relatives of soldiers have come to seek them among the fallen and scavengers to do their grisly work of seeking booty. Haunting and terrible. Then there is "War", one of a group of paintings about war and peace, if I remember correctly. It is Napoleon on Elba and its subtitle is "The exile and the Rock Limpet". Indeed it is an almost ghostly figure which

seems to be contemplating the small creature (the rock limpet) a little to his foreground. A few metres to his rear is his guard. The light of the setting sun makes it seem as though the entire scene is bathed in blood.

As all great art can do, it gives us the opportunity to feel horror –and, redemptively, compassion. Or the reverse ... We feel –how can we not? – pity for the lone figure lost in contemplation. If we think about it, we realize that few if any of his activities go unobserved. He seems so terribly lonely. At the same time, we are aware that this same lonely figure caused terrible bloodshed. As is the case with Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, who is as you can imagine much on my mind as I see these paintings with my soul alive and vibrating.

In another room close to the end of the *Romantics* exhibition, an inspired small collection of works by CONTEMPORARY British photographers. They are related to the Romantics because many of them are about landscape. I find them all haunting and thought-provoking in one way or another:

- Raymond Moore: small B/W, particularly "Pothguin" (I jot down "boy on bike") and "Maryport".
- Keith Arnatt: Also B/W; landscapes like those which Constable and Turner painted but with modern elements -- like garbage, mostly, and telephone cables and such. His work makes me think about what we think is garbage, and what garbage might there have been in Turner's or Blake's or Constable's epoch – or would they even have included it? Hmm. No time to go back and search for garbage in their paintings, I'm starving.
- Jem Southam: color, larger photographs, in that sense more like paintings but clearly photos. Remind me a bit of Canadian Joh Bladen Bentley's work.
- John Riddy: ditto Southam but very abstract-looking and quite dark.

Fascinating for me to see through modern eyes those same rural or seaside landscapes which so engaged Blake, Constable, Turner. These "seeings" seem to me to be all quite affectionate, not critical as such of the work that went before -- if anything, critical rather of how things are now, although perhaps that is reading something into the work. I suppose in a sense this is like Constable, if we choose to see Constable that way: a kind of record of what is or was happening.

In spite of growling stomach I go finally to the room where there are some ten of Turner's last paintings: indeed, some of them are unfinished canvasses. I saved this for last because I knew it would spoil me for anything else. This is rhapsodic, ecstatic work so completely sure of its own compelling voice and vision that it's impossible to confuse them with any other.

Is it firmly of its own time? At that stage of the game, as Turner is close to leaving this world and, I get the feeling, is aware of it, maybe art transcends time and that category of stuff becomes close to meaningless. Whatever the case, I feel this late work of Turner's dances on the bridge to Impressionism as CPE Bach does on the one to Romanticism. Visionary. As always, and increasingly, makes me question those labels which are so handy for Music (and Art) Appreciation classes, record labels, and the like. Again, more

on this elsewhere (look in my new THOUGHTS ON MUSIC AND INTERPRETATION theme) ... Meanwhile, I do think yet again that it's small wonder that Turner is so often associated with Debussy, although Turner's dates are 1775 to 1851 and Debussy's 1862-1918.

I jot in my notebook "passion and precision". For years I've felt it's a combination that characterises great music -- although they're often conceived of as mutually exclusive. So silly, that confusion! The greatest passion practically dictates precision, exactly because it is so clear about what it wants. Arrau said it very well: "*Es un error asociar la velocidad con la passion*" ("It is a mistake to associate velocity with passion"). Velocity so often implies imprecision. Is this perhaps why we feel so exhilarated when we listen to someone play at dazzling speed with complete coherence?

I have lunch at the Tate Britain. I know they charge rather a lot by some standards; but what the heck, it's too effing cold outside to wander about in search of that apocryphal warm pub with its Ploughman's Lunch or Shepherd's Pie, so I gladly pay the money for a very tasty salmon cake with mesclun salad attached, some bread with more of that simply amazing British butter, and jiminy, I think I even had an espresso to finish up.

Warmed by good food, I walk along the Thames -towards, I hope with my geographically-challenged mind- Trafalgar Square. Houses of Parliament with Rodin *Burghers of Calais*. Big Ben: indeed quite imposing. Westminster with monument to Women of WWII. This I found extraordinarily moving. There it is in the middle of a busy street. It is, effectively, a bunch of empty uniforms hung on a base. The fact that they are empty makes them somehow universal. They're hung any which way, some of them crumpled as though the wearer had barely enough energy to hang up her uniform before crashing into too few hours' sleep; others neater-looking. For some reason -perhaps the resonance with those two war paintings of JMW Turner in the Tate - I practically start weeping right there on Westminster Avenue or whatever it is. It seems very noble to me to have such a monument, right in a very public space.

And by jiminy, here I am at Trafalgar Square, bless that map! It's not getting late but it IS getting dark: I am still unaccustomed to these latitudes. I have time to stop by the British Council in Spring Garden and leave some CDs for the person there with whom I was hoping to meet; but oh well, business is business and that person is not available even for a quick *saludo*: I'm in a different culture here.

So I go to the National Gallery for more nourishment. I have afternoon coffee and spend a couple of hours in the the 16th and 17th-century exhibition. Why did I never know about RUBENS' landscape painting? So wonderful to see this after my time with Turner and Constable at the Tate Britain. Then, just as the National Gallery closes, it's time to saunter over to Covent Garden for the Rambert Dance concert.

Which is wonderful. Seems Rambert have been doing this for several years now: a special concert in which Company dancers present their own choreography. Surely this is a way to attract and keep dancers. AND they have Live Music (hard not to use ALL CAPS here ...)!! Not only that, they are commissioning music from composers! How cool is that? I am so impressed that just before the second half I comment to Stephen about how

wonderful I find this. He responds, with only the slightest touch of irony and sounding very British, "This IS the Royal Opera House, after all". I am so happy that Rambert have commissioned a piece from Stephen for 2011-2012. Dammit, he is such a fine and adventurous composer, he deserves all the best, sympathetic collaborators and interpreters and everything.

Tomorrow the concert, the ROH presentation: the fruit of these four days of concentrated work at the development session of Stephen's opera.