
Stop, Look, and Listen!

Musical Diversions and Commentary — by Rodney Flora



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Issue 04

What is this? Well, I suppose it's a bit of an experiment. Now that I am retired here in Castine, it serves as an outlet for the skills that I have developed during my career, and during the pandemic period of social isolation to open up a wider world of classical music to my readers, hopefully giving all of us something to focus on other than dreadful news and the tedium of isolation. Besides, music is itself a healthy preoccupation and a source of enjoyment and fulfillment. I hope this will make a small contribution to that.

Who am I? I've spent my 40+ year career as a professional classical music broadcaster, more than 15 of those years as Music Director for a Boston classical radio station and the last 10+ years as music director for a classical network that distributes programming to stations around the country. My role was very much a curatorial one, finding and evaluating music and recordings that fit our format and identity as a serious yet accessible source of classical music, and then creating appealing programs that showcased that music to best advantage.

"THE LAND WITHOUT MUSIC" - England 1695 - 1899

In 1904 the German critic Oscar Adolf Hermann Schmitz dismissed England as “das Land ohne Musik”—the land without music, and applied it with a broad brush to encompass virtually all of English musical life. In that sense he was certainly wrong. London was, in fact, one of the most vibrant centers of musical life in all of Europe. Public concerts abounded, there were pleasure gardens where the middle classes could promenade to live music, and see and be seen for a small admission fee. London was also a center of music publishing and instrument making. Musicians from all over Europe flocked to London and many of them established themselves there, including, of course, Handel, but also there were visits by Mozart* and by Haydn, who made an extended visit and composed a number of symphonies there. And, there were many others from all over Europe who would establish life-long careers there.

*(The always entertaining and delightful Lucy Worsley did a BBC program called "Mozart's London Odyssey"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RpVI3R_OFaE

which is enjoyable and informative, although in my opinion, makes a little too much of London's enduring influence on Mozart. But I suppose it's understandable and forgivable that every nation wants to claim Mozart as its own.)

However, Schmitz's words have been used, not entirely inaccurately, to highlight the fact that for nearly two hundred years, between the death of Henry Purcell in 1695 and the emergence of Edward Elgar in 1899, there were simply no native English composers that could stand alongside the likes of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, etc., etc., etc. A 200 years long "dry spell" as it were.

While it is true that Germany (and Austria) dominated European music pretty much throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, sharing that distinction with Italy in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, England was not entirely without homegrown talent, and there were reasons why the talent that did exist there faced something of a "glass ceiling" when it came to advancement and recognition.

There were the rather complex reasons of socio-economic class bias, as well as class and regional accent bias that affected this. There were other reasons as well, including an abiding fashion, a fad as it were, for wealthy employers to hire "exotic" foreign musicians as status symbols. In other words, employing some guy from a god-forsaken place "up North" that no one (at least none of your friends) had ever heard of, and who spoke in a funny "lower class" accent, wasn't going to give you any kind of "bragging rights", whereas someone from Italy who spoke in a foreign accent which contained no class "signals" for you or your friends, just seemed exotic and interesting. And since everyone was all agog about "The Italian Style" anyway, why not have an actual Italian working for you?

If you care to delve into this in greater detail there is an interesting book called *The Careers of British Musicians 1750 - 1850: A Profession of Artisans*, by Deborah Rohr. It is pretty dry and academic, and may well have had its origins in a PhD thesis, but the subject is an interesting one.

WHO (or what) IS AN ENGLISH COMPOSER?

You'd think the answer would be pretty obvious, and indeed, I have taken the easy way out on this one. All of the composers I am featuring here were born in England, received all or most of their training there, and pursued their musical careers there. Note also that I say England deliberately, not Britain or the British Isles. For the moment, I am not including Scottish, or Irish composers, although the distinctions can become blurred by mixed ancestry and geographical mobility.

Why is this even a question? Well, here's where it gets complicated. Remember up above where I said that London was one of the most vibrant centers of musical life in all of Europe, and many musicians from all over Europe established themselves there? George Frideric Handel was one of these. He arrived at a young age, began his career there and became the most important musical force in Britain during the remainder of his lifetime, and for some time thereafter. He effectively dominated English musical life for nearly a century. In terms of what we would now call national identity (although the concept didn't really exist in the same way then) Handel was German. He was born in Germany of German parents. He received his musical training in Germany (and Italy). He spoke only German when he arrived and when he did learn English he spoke with a heavy German accent. BUT, he quickly became the most influential musician in all of England, in effect becoming an English composer and the center of the musical universe there.

To complicate things still further, the King (George I) was a German too. Not only that, but he had been Handel's employer back in Germany, he didn't speak a word of English, and unlike Handel, the King didn't really like England very much and spent as much of his time as possible "back home" on his German estates.

How George I became King is a story in itself. Suffice it to say that in order to ensure a Protestant succession after the childless death of Queen Anne in 1714, fifty-six closer relatives were passed over before they got to George the Elector of Hanover. Look him up here if you want to know more.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_I_of_Great_Britain

So if you think the British monarchy has been a story of one smooth transition after another, generation by generation, father to son or daughter, you are in for a shock. There have been many twists and turns, and this has been one heck of a complicated family history for nearly a thousand years, and probably longer.

So, was Handel a German composer or an English composer? Probably both and neither. Such is the problem too with many other foreign born movers and shakers in the musical life of Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries:

Pieter Hellendahl

Johann Baptist Kramer (John Baptist Cramer)

William (Wilhelm) Herschel

Carl Friedrich Abel

Johann Christian Bach (aka The London Bach)

Muzio Clementi, et al.

But enough about all that. Let's move on to more positive (and musical) things.

There is a BBC series called *The Birth of British Music*. Trouble is, only one of the four composers featured is actually British: Henry Purcell. The others are Handel, Haydn, and Mendelssohn who were, of course, tremendously influential on the development of music in Britain. Here is a link to the Purcell episode, and from there you can find the others.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AsZTaBe4fRw&list=PLFN-3lk61YMyLsrWeqSj-CCzp3gl2TqEL&index=1>

DISCOVERING ENGLISH COMPOSERS - 18th Century

So here finally, (trumpet fanfare), is our roster of under-appreciated Englishmen, (yes, this time they are all men) in chronological order by birth year. I will not go into much biographical information on all of them, but it is easily accessible on line from Wikipedia and other sources, although not much is known about some of them.

As usual, I've given you too many choices. Remember this is a resource, not an assignment. If you try something and it doesn't engage you in the first few minutes, move on to something else. Think of this as the five pound box of chocolates. You don't have to eat them all at once, in fact it's better if you don't.

William Corbett (c.1675 - 1748)



Bizarrie Universali is a collection of 35 concertos published in London in 1728 which purported to represent the many different concerto styles Corbett encountered throughout Europe, or as he put it on the title page "on all the new Gusto's in his travels thro' Italy." As you can see of these nine, two of them are not Italian at all but are respectively "Alla Spagniola" (in the Spanish style) and "Al' Irlandese" (in the Irish style!?). Truth to tell, I didn't actually know there was an "Irish style" of baroque concerto, but live and learn.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJi4WJRojQ&list=OLAK5uy_mVj6KlnAlhwAxbnr6ycvA2OUE_nTJi6mk&index=1

Robert Woodcock (1690 - 1728)

Musician, composer, marine painter. Clearly a man of many talents.

As a performer his principal instruments were the oboe and the flute. According to Wikipedia, "Woodcock's only surviving compositions are a set of twelve concertos published in London circa 1727." There has been some controversy as to whether or not Woodcock actually wrote them. They have been variously ascribed to Jean-Baptiste Loeillet, and even Handel. However, more recent scholarship supports Woodcock's authorship.



Here are two lovely oboe concertos by Woodcock, one in E-flat major

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxkJNnjSvA&t=312s>

and one in E minor

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQYsi2qXBDe>

Maurice Greene (1696 - 1755)



Born in London, the son of a clergyman, Greene became a choirboy at St Paul's Cathedral under Jeremiah Clarke. He studied the organ under Richard Brind, and, after Brind died, Greene became organist at St Paul's.

With the death of William Croft in 1727, Greene became organist at the Chapel Royal, and in 1730 he became Professor of Music at Cambridge University. In 1735 he was appointed Master of the King's Musick. At his death, Greene was working on the compilation *Cathedral Music*, which his student and successor as Master of the King's Musick, William Boyce, was to complete. Many items from that collection are still used in Anglican services today.

He wrote very competent music in the Georgian style, particularly long Verse Anthems. His acknowledged masterpiece, *Lord, Let Me Know Mine End*, is a representative example.

So, mostly vocal and choral music, both sacred and secular, but also these lively overtures. Pretty snappy dresser, too, judging from the picture.

Six Overtures in Seven Parts by Maurice Greene:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jILtnS6ryqQ&list=OLAK5uy_mj1_lb5ollpkSwSBhdmRsvuqXdTB49XtU&index=1

Michael Christian Festing (1705 - 1752)

Festing first studied violin with Richard Jones and then later became a pupil of Francesco Geminiani. He made his professional debut in London in March 1723. Not too long after that, Festing met a young Thomas Arne. Upon befriending Festing, Arne became his pupil, studying violin for the first time and music composition. Festing, who was only four and a half years older, also broadened the young Arne's knowledge by taking him to numerous concerts, operas, and other performances. It is largely due to Festing's influence that Arne's father allowed him to pursue a career in music, instead of becoming a lawyer.

Six Violin Sonatas.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7V3A-h2vdQ&list=OLAK5uy_ITOIr_R_tETXXWvDWtUqVI5KsScMGAAwQ

William Hayes (1708 - 1777)

William Hayes was an enthusiastic Handelian, and one of the most active conductors of his oratorios and other large-scale works outside London. His wide knowledge of Handel left a strong impression on his own music, but by no means dominated it. As a composer, he tended towards genres largely ignored by Handel.

Here is William Hayes's Symphony in D minor

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVqM809Tn5Q>

and his Organ Concerto in G major

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qm4qaYE-GvU>



Charles Avison (1709 - 1770)

Italian style Trio Sonatas and Concerti Grossi are the principal products of this son of Newcastle in the Northeast of England. (About the only thing most of us know about Newcastle is the expression "carrying coals to Newcastle".) But Newcastle, or more accurately the Durham-Newcastle area, perhaps partly because of its distance from London (nearly 300 miles by road), developed and nurtured its own cultural life. As you read the brief biographical sketches you will may notice that several of these composers had strong connections there.

Avison's most famous pieces are a set of orchestrations of Scarlatti harpsichord sonatas. He also produced a set of Concerti Grossi which are orchestrations of Geminiani Violin Sonatas. His work was much influenced by Geminiani, who was in turn influenced by Corelli.

Avison was known as a bold and controversial author. He is said to have had no fear in expressing his strong ideas with elaborate language, an incredible understanding of music, and a sense of humor. One of the ideas which received much criticism was his preference for Geminiani and Marcello and his lack of preference for Handel. Although he did praise Handel for his genius, he also was not afraid to criticize him.

In recent times, a group called The Avison Ensemble has been the principal advocate, performer, and recorder of his works, with considerable success, it must be said. They are fine musicians and present his music beautifully. There is also a book about Avison and the Newcastle music "scene" in the eighteenth century which I reference below.

Here are six trio sonatas by Avison:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_mzIERwsq7AyCcqB0fwXjgHPJE_Nvixzy4

He wrote at least six sets of Concerti Grossi amounting to more than 50 concertos altogether. Here's a sample. This is his Concerto Grosso in B-flat major, Op. 3 No. 4:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jr_vjhWDPug

If that was to your liking, here is a nice selection of Six Concerti from his Opus 9:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9H5PIG7jBY&list=OLAK5uy_mAXn_CTyqtZWb7d2TPk5zyUvlzeWyoFsg&index=1

And finally, 12 Sonatas for Harpsichord with accompaniment, Op. 5 and Op. 7:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfLgnhA0aOI&list=OLAK5uy_nolwlErqvo_JOY5KTNhqDt5w3azzEk5qE&index=1



Thomas Augustine Arne (1710-1787)

Primarily a composer of stage works, many of his instrumental compositions were originally overtures or interludes performed during performances of the stage works. Well known for "Rule Britannia", by far his most famous piece, perhaps qualifying him, from the perspective of 200 years on, for the dubious monicker of "One Hit Wonder".

A bit of possibly not-so-trivial trivia about *Rule Britannia*: Over time, a subtle change to the words as usually sung have not so subtly changed the meaning. It has come to be sung as "Britannia Rules the Waves!" a declaration, if you will, a statement of fact. Whereas the original wording was "Britannia, Rule the Waves" as in "Go forth and rule the waves", in other words, an admonition, not a declaration, a goal not a fact.

Here you will hear it correctly sung (by the soloist anyway; the audience has an unfortunate tendency to fall into the modern habit and sing "rules" instead of "rule"...) but the showmanship and spectacle is not to be missed!



Arne - Rule Britannia - Proms 2009

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rB5Nbp_gmgQ



Of course two hundred years ago that wasn't his only hit, he wrote many then popular stage works. However Arne's instrumental works which generally originated as overtures or interludes during his stage works, are quite worthwhile and enjoyable on their own.

Here are some of Arne's instrumental works which have survived, been recorded, and are quite enjoyable to hear.

Trio Sonatas:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNiOfIVKZ0E>

Four Symphonies:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBbCEOwom-k>

Overtures:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUOWZRdrItQ&list=PLGA7IZDGlulLakr0p_1COugPMrWEy8ZYi&index=1

Harpsichord Suites:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOpYjuTLWkA>



William Boyce (1711 - 1779)

Late Baroque/Early Classical period. Prolific composer, especially of vocal works, in almost every form of the period and for almost every sort of venue be it sacred, secular or theatrical.

Quite possibly my favorite composer of this entire bunch, or at least the one I've known the longest. If his music sounds rather Handelian that is no accident. As I've said Handel's influence was pervasive. But Boyce was no mere imitator and he wrote lots of good and original stuff for which he deserves full credit.

In this portrait he looks well fed but not particularly jolly. At least one reference describes him as "A very popular figure of whom everyone spoke well." so perhaps he was more affable than he appears here. His music is easy to like.

Here is his very fine Symphony No. 1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhAwb_47igE

And his rather more grand Symphony No. 5

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMFvA3NpyBA>

Here is his Concerto Grosso in B-flat major

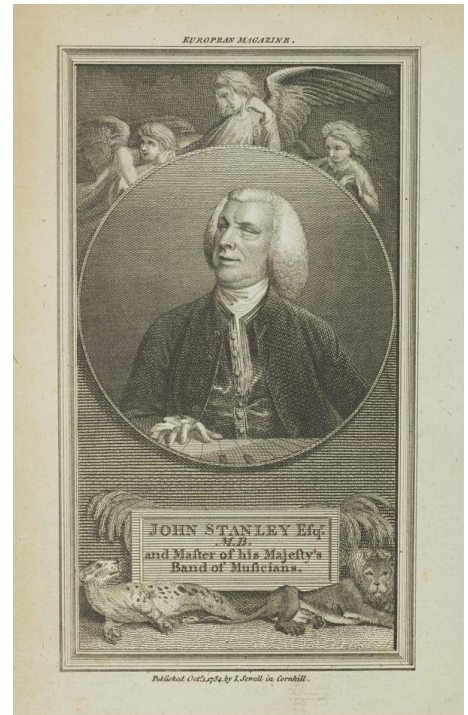
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZdhdOaBGB4>



John Stanley (1712 - 1786)

He is undoubtedly best known for this Trumpet Tune featured as processional at many a wedding.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2A6Fn-AKJk0>



His Opus 10 harpsichord concertos are also quite nice.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqVjbozWVq4&list=OLAK5uy_mN7XM9JUfQ5rduBLLeLZAhmOb7VsZeCPMw&index=1

Richard Mudge (1718 - 1763)

His name makes one think of a character from a Dickens novel.

Here's his Concerto No. 1 in D major featuring solo trumpet

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZNBvUovAf8&list=PL4bxWaf_0I4ckBNAYVthZloYKvutCBvZL

And Concerto No. 2 in B-flat major for 2 violins

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArikCX9zWNk&list=PL4bxWaf_0I4ckBNAYVthZloYKvutCBvZL&index=2

John Garth (1721- 1810)

John Garth of Durham was probably one of the first pupils of Charles Avison of Newcastle.

Here are really wonderful cello concertos, published in 1760. I recommend them highly!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJFsFJxC_Uw&list=OLAK5uy_ntrMjenROzTDRZ2_eqG5iPSnDkE9Klas8&index=1

The Jones boys: Very little is known about John and Richard Jones. I don't even know if they were in any way related. As the liner notes for the CD of his Eight Sets of Lessons for the Harpsichord say "John Jones is a name that almost begs for obscurity", Jones being the second most common surname (after Smith) in England." The other ones given name of Richard wouldn't seem to provide any significant advantage.



John Jones (1728 - 1796)

Flying fingers (and plectra) on the harpsichord!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcGtMbLtfho&list=OLAK5uy_nBdZT34r1w2M4f6Z3Uc99RNTv1nBMyp6Y&index=1

Richard Jones: (???? - 1744)

More harpsichord lessons, this time by Richard Jones.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lrhE2J0qcc&list=PLMzQh8DVWbR5P-z6-So1JvB26-pYTYXsI&index=1>

And for a bit of variety, accompanied violin sonatas (Baroque trio sonatas) for violin, 'cello, and harpsichord.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mgJPUCKQZw&list=OLAK5uy_kRcfbed7BcPYm06DwA3ca6_TF815GIY_s&index=1

Philip Hayes (1738 - 1797)

He was the son of the aforementioned William Hayes.

"As a conductor, he was one of the first English musicians to use a roll of paper with which to beat time but he was best known for his difficult personality and corpulence. His frequent trips to London in a post chaise did not go unnoticed by the Oxford wags who had little difficulty in punning a nickname from 'Phil Hayes' – thus he was fondly known as 'Fill Chaise'. " [from Wikipedia]

This, arguably, is the world's first piano concerto dating from 1769:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrUr4WL3ecg>



William Shield (1748 - 1829)

Shield was born in County Durham. He was first taught music by his father, but after both his parents died while he was still a child, he was apprenticed to a shipbuilder, continuing however to study music with Charles Avison in Newcastle upon Tyne.

He became a noted violinist in Newcastle's subscription concerts before moving to Scarborough. Shield also worked as a composer for Covent Garden and, in that capacity, he met Joseph Haydn. In 1817, he was appointed Master of the King's Musick. Like Haydn, not to mention several other composers of his time, Shield was a great plunderer of folk tunes (in his case mostly from his native Northumbria). Shield's compositions include a large number of operas and other stage works as well as instrumental music.

William Shield died on 25 January 1829 at his house in London. His will left his worldly goods and a glowing testimonial "to my beloved partner, Ann, Mrs. Shield". But when the will was proved on 6 March 1829 the estate was claimed by, "Ann Stokes, alias Shield, Spinster, belonging to Marleybone." His favorite violin was given to King George IV, who insisted that the full value be given to Ann. Within six months she also sold his library of music, but nothing more is known of her, lending a bit of mystery to the life of William Shield.

Here are his Seven String Trios:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1LYe2WI0Ck&list=OLAK5uy_mdaGoAY2x0GFI89u39h326JrjDUDbpk2w&index=1

Samuel Wesley (1766 - 1837)



Although Samuel Wesley lived well into the nineteenth century these are late classical works written in the last quarter of the eighteenth. If the name seems somehow vaguely familiar he was the son of the well known Methodist and hymnodist, Charles Wesley, and the nephew of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Samuel must have been something of a renegade within the family however as he converted to Roman Catholicism, much to the consternation of his father and his uncle.

He was something of a child prodigy hence sometimes called "The English Mozart." There was also a "Spanish Mozart" (Juan Chrisostomo Arriaga). Presumably "The Austrian Mozart" was just Mozart himself. He certainly wasn't called "The Austrian Wesley".

Here are a couple of Samuel Wesley's somewhat "Mozart-y" symphonies dating from the 1780's.

Symphony No. 5 in E-flat major

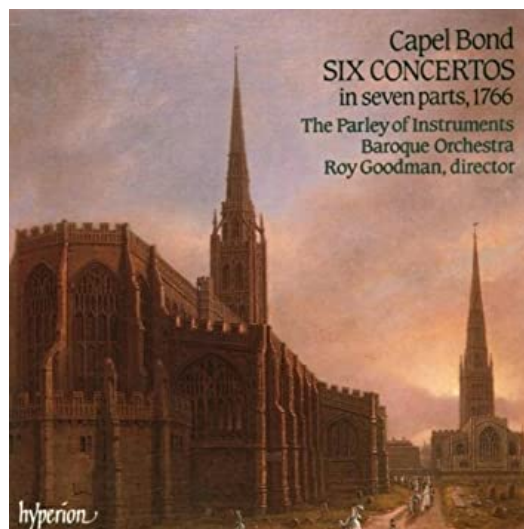
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7ihaYUdtYI>

Symphony No. 6 in B-flat major

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkPJ4o7FyDo&t=188s>

Capel Bond (1730 - 1790)

There are others I haven't mentioned here, including Capel Bond. His *Six Concertos in Seven Parts*, from 1766, are available on CD, but no one has yet posted them on YouTube so I can't provide a link to them.



RECOMMENDED READING

I wish there were something outstanding I could recommend on this topic, but I'm afraid all I can do is cite these two. In all honesty, I can't exactly recommend either of these; I merely mention them in case anyone is interested in pursuing the subject in greater depth. One of them is not especially readable, and they are both rather pricey when available.

The first is *The Careers of British Musicians 1750 - 1850, A Profession of Artisans* by Deborah Rohr, from Cambridge University Press. It is quite an in-depth study of the sociological and economic pressures on British musicians during the century the book encompasses.

The other one is *The Ingenious Mr Avison - Making Music and Money in Eighteenth-Century Newcastle*. Although the publisher is Tyne Bridge Publishing, it's actually a product of the City of Newcastle upon Tyne through the Newcastle Libraries. It's a handsome book, well written and well researched, too.

OFF-TOPIC - Vicarious Travel

Although some have begun to travel (cautiously, I hope), many of us are still waiting to see how things continue to unfold. So this remains a non-traveling year for many of us. Thus, one of the things I look for during my YouTube explorations besides classical music videos is travel videos. Many of us have places in mind that we hope to visit (or visit again), bucket-list destinations, or even places we are unlikely to go, but that we're still curious about.

Given that this issue is all about English composers, I thought I should stick to the theme and give you some places in England to explore.

In *The Cotswold Explorer* videos Robin Shuckburgh and his lovely dog Widget take a leisurely look at the beautiful and tranquil country villages of the region known as the Cotswolds.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=746HVVW1IEDg&list=PLP6Er6D5oF2aX3BWgu-abOtg5WnpTad42&index=1&t=6s>

Another older series that is fun to watch is Penelope Keith's *Hidden Villages*. Not all episodes are available, but several are. The video quality unfortunately is not great. This one covers the region of Cumbria:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ds6f1RLLLCa>

And this one explores Wessex:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtKhjbiXzs0>

A Few Words about YouTube

As far as I know, (and I'm no expert) you can watch YouTube on any device that enables access to the Internet. Almost any device will do for listening, because, even if the speaker isn't awfully good, you can always listen with headphones for a much higher quality sound. There are also "Bluetooth" wireless headphones and even Bluetooth wireless speakers. I have a pair of speakers that I like very much and I can stream audio to them from my iPad. If you want to watch video in high quality and in a large format, your choices are many, but it usually involves purchasing another device unless you already have a "smart TV", Apple TV, Roku, or any number of other devices that enable streaming YouTube to your TV.

It's hard not to have a complicated relationship with YouTube. As I often say, it is both a goldmine and a minefield. Everything you could want is there, all mixed up with everything you most definitely don't want. It is simultaneously appealing and appalling.

YouTube will bombard you with advertising. It makes you cringe (at the very least). It comes at you without warning, at high volume, and often (it seems) smack in the middle of a piece of music. We don't subscribe to cable TV and we do watch YouTube a lot, so it made sense for us to pay and subscribe to ad-free "YouTube Premium" for \$12.99 a month. We are satisfied with it, but it is a personal cost/benefit decision. I have no relationship with YouTube other than as a user/subscriber.

Please send me your opinions and reactions to this newsletter and its contents. Also please share your own discoveries. You can reach me at

enigmavars1899@gmail.com

Note that any reply you might receive from my gmail account will say it's from Edward Elgar, but that's really me.

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