

This conversation between SCA member Rob Ellis and Joanna Macgregor (arguably the most innovative and exciting pianist today) took place after her concert at Sherborne School on 1st March 1997.

J.M: ...you know about this big new hall in Manchester, Bridgewater Hall - big, 2000 seater...and they came to me and said, they've got 3 visiting orchestras, lots of classical stuff going on, and they wanted someone to (sort of) put together something that wouldn't be just that, but something else...and would actually aim for a different audience, because, as you know, in general that audience is, (on average,) from an older generation, 55's and over...so anyway, I did a few experimental concerts, we've had Andy Sheppard, and John Harle with Elvis Costello...um...Courtney Pine last week which was sensational because he used D.J.'s on stage with him, and we've done some late night stuff aswell with Ensemble Bash, so it's kind of all happening...[←] anyway, I'm glad to hear you're a fan, that's very nice, but I'm interested in what you do, what is your interview for exactly?

R.E: ... it's for a new arts magazine that a bunch of us local artists are trying to get off the ground, in an area which needs it badly...

J.M: ... yeah, what happens in this area, what is going on?

R.E: ... [←] absolutely nothing...an event like tonight is a desperately needed rarity, so we're hoping to encourage more through this magazine...

J.M: ... and what are the venues like 'round here, I'm just trying to remember where I've played before, (you know) I remember playing in Street...
(2 dots instead)

R.E: .. you've played in Street!?

J.M: ..yeah, that was years ago, and Frome and Warminster, Westbury I think, Bristol, Bath...because I guess if there's a lack of performance opportunities it usually means that the venues are no good...

R.E: ...that's partly the problem...

J.M: ...what's Sherborne Arts centre like?...

R.E: ...um.. its.. early days...

J.M: ...Oh! I've played at Taunton Brewhouse...what's Yeovil Arts centre like?...

R.E: ..very poor, I mean for performance very poor, it's just a little detached townhouse really, fine for...

J.M: that's it, I mean today, where I played this evening isn't actually where one wants to play exactly...

R.E: ...were you having problems with the piano...

J.M: ...oh! dreadful piano...well it's sort of...I don't know, oh! you mean 'cos the guy went back on in the interval...you saw the tuner?

R.E: ..no

J.M: oh...well it's not a very good piano, a sort of strange rattling sound happening,

R.E: it was very brittle sounding in places...

J.M: yeah, yeah..it's one of those strange pianos where it doesn't give you very much, and you have to work really hard to get any sort of sound out of it at all, but, as you know, I've been in bed with flu all week, so I think I'm a bit depleted, and I was thinking it's really me rather than the piano, but it does seem to have some sound problems, and that's not what you want either...

R.E: ...no..no..

J.M: ...and also, you see, when there are quite a lot of people there suddenly, the acoustic turns very dry on you, as I'm sure you know, so you don't get anything from that, anyway...that's my complaint for the evening.....

R.E: ..well, the concert was very fine, regardless...

J.M: ..but you know, playing a school hall where you're on this very high stage, and you look down on rows of people who are all on the flat..!

R.E: ...it's funny because the very first gig I ever did, what, 18 years ago, was in that hall, and I hadn't been in there again untill tonight...

until

Drop the dot between R.E. & J.M. and try having two dots between them.

J.M: ...did it bring back good memories?...

R.E: ...um..well..you know, when you're a teenager...

* J.M: ...it's marvelously old fashioned, isn't it, backstage and everything...and the stage, there was all this paint on the floor!..

R.E: ...yeah..yeah..and on the drapes at the back..and the piano, some friends of mine said they were somewhat distracted by the fingermarks all over it, which stood out like a sore thumb when the house lights dimmed...

From * to
* cut?
J.M: (laughs)..well, you know, a real school gig.* Anyway, (well,) it's very nice to meet you, (looks at SCAM magazine) and see this, it looks good, where do you get the money to do this?

R.E: Well, we're starting to get interest from local councils, who hopefully will help, but at the moment it's self-financed by the group; there's..what ..um..about 150 members, and we exhibit local fine art, mainly painting, photography, sculpture, but we hope to diversify into (maybe) more multimedia events, so it's based around that...

J.M: ..it's good...can I keep this?

R.E: ..sure, you can take that..it's two issues ago..~~it's not recent~~.. it's not the newest...

J.M: ..oh, don't worry.

R.E: ...um..I wrote out a list of questions...

J.M: ..and you lost it..

R.E: ..No, I have got it, but actually listening to you talk between pieces this evening...um..all the things i wanted to talk to you about, um...you referred to, by the by, as it were...particularly I really loved your story about Elliot Carter and Gershwin, I had no idea that happened (before she played the Gershwin songbook* this evening, Joanna Macgregor supplied us with a very interesting anecdote which recounted a conversation she had had with Elliot Carter, arguably the most highly regarded American composer today, and Pierre Boulez who you could say was Carter's European mirror image, where Carter told Boulez that he had attended the American premiere of Berg's Wozzeck in the 30's, and that he accompanied none other than George Gershwin himself, who you might be surprised to learn considered Berg to be his favourite composer..Boulez, who detests Gershwin, but adores Berg, was somewhat nonplussed).

referred

J.M. Yeah...brilliant isn't it...oh! this wonderful memory of Elliot Carter's...oh! it was just wonderful when he said that...but he was sitting next to Boulez, you know, because in fact it was at an Elliot Carter festival that Boulez was conducting, and at the mention of Gershwin, Boulez went "uhgh..huh..ohng"...amongst other mumbled French expletives,'cos he thinks it's rubbish, you know, he has no time for a composer like Gershwin at all, he just thinks it's all crap...he thinks Porgy and Bess is a terribly written piece...and I think it's a fantastic piece...

R.E: ...uhhuh...

J.M: ...so this is the other thing, and Elliot Carter with this amazing memory of him and Gershwin and Berg, (which I think is fantastic,) and next to him, Boulez saying 'oh, well I don't care for Gershwin', which is the other rather annoying thing, because I'm a big fan of Boulez...

R.E: ...the links between people are just fascinating, I think...

J.M: ...yeah, isn't that fantastic?...you know, I was trying to work out the ages, you see, between Elliot Carter and Gershwin, I suppose they might not have been that different in age, 'cos Carter is now 88 isn't he?...

R.E: ...um..something like that...

J.M: ...if Gershwin hadn't died, how old would he be, let's work this out...he died...um...he was born 'round about 1900 wasn't he or...

R.E: ...right... uh

J.M: ...he died in nineteen...

R.E: (thinking hard)...so ..he'd be...ninety something!...

J.M: Yes!...he'd be Elliot Carter's sort of age, so they must have gone to the opera virtually as contemporaries together..

R.E: ...right..yeah...

J.M: ...it's a great thing isn't it?...

~~R.E: ...oh..um..~~

J.M: ...I mean who knows how Gershwin would have turned out, ~~I~~ mean what kind of music would he have written in the last 50 years..

R.E: ..and there's the irony, I think, with Boulez, you know, Gershwin going to see Berg, and Ravel and Gershwin, that connection as well (Gershwin apparently asked Ravel if he would give him some music tuition, but Ravel, having found out how much Gershwin earned from music, told him that maybe it was he that should be taking lessons from Gershwin). you know, of course, Boulez conducts Ravel often...I'm fascinated by all this...and composer's deaths!...they seem to have the most unusual deaths...astonishing coincidences, odd ways of shuffling off the old...

J.M: ..well I mean the only kind of real composer's death I know of is Alkan, where a bookcase fell on him, but isn't there a composer who was savaged by a lion?

R.E: ...wasn't it Alkan who stabbed himself in the foot with his walking stick and died as a result...

J.M: ...no, thats Lully...

R.E: ...oh! yes..Lully...of course...

J.M: ...Lully, Lully..got gangrene...I wonder how Satie died..I mean I don't really know...

R.E:: ...neglect probably...

J.M:: ...yes...

R.E: I had no idea you wrote that play ("Memoirs of an amnesiac remembered" a play for radio based on the life of Satie), I recorded that when it was broadcast...

J.M: ..did you?!..

R.E: ..yeah..

J.M: ..are you sure?..with me playing in the background?

R.E: ..yeah..yeah..

J.M: ..God, yeah...I did all that, yes, I mean (it's kind of)...I'm sure I'd do it differently now, but, (I mean) to call it a play is a bit grand, I mean it was a terribly nice way of stitching together all his writings and imaginings...

R.E: ...yes, it was lovely...really good..

J.M: ..thankyou..

R.E: ...well, I'm a big fan of Satie...

J.M: ..are you?..

R.E: you played my favourite piece of his tonight (1st Gnessinienne), and one of my favourite Ravel (Oiseaux Tristes), and Thelonious Monk ('Round Midnight)...

J.M: ...I nearly didn't do that Thelonious Monk you know, but it's a wonderful piece, and I think actually, a gig like that is quite good to play 'Round Midnight because they come away thinking they've heard something rather unusual, (you know, rather than)..but it is, as you know, one of the most famous jazz pieces ever written...it's about as famous as Eine Kleine Nachtmusic or something...

R.E: ...sure..

J.M: ...but...musically, you play 'Round Midnight and they go "ooh!"...some of those older members of the audience...

R.E: ...actually I did notice a slight shuffling of feet towards the end of the Gershwin, people were sort of a little bit restless...trying to throw off the cobwebs, but not succeeding...it's a little bit stuffy 'round here, even Gershwin causes feathers to be ruffled...

J.M: Gershwin!..my God!... ~~←~~ actually, my programme tonight, for me...I mean, ~~that's a very sort of...um~~ that's what I call a real bog-standard programme...

correct spelling!

Eine kleine (lower case K) Nachtmusic NB-3

R.E: ...right...

J.M: ~~...it's virtually sort of, you know...I mean~~ they really got away with...I mean I didn't get to play inside the piano, or play with my elbows, or do any of my party tricks or...

R.E: ..oh!..that would have been...I wish you had...

J.M: ...well I almost came on and played a piece by Frederick Rzewski which you play inside the piano, and in fact actually I changed the programme for here because originally, in the 2nd half, I offered them Rzewski, a Thelonious Monk set of pieces and Gershwin, and they said it was gonna be too jazzy for them..

R.E: ...right...I did actually want to ask how you came by the choice of programme for tonight (3 Sonatti scarlattas, 1st Gnessinienne & Gymnopedie, Parade & Three flabby preludes by Satie, Beethoven sonata no.26 in E-flat, Interval-wine and soft drinks will be available in the Library Undercroft, 3 Miroirs by Ravel, Songbook by Gershwin and 'Round Midnight by Thelonious Monk) was it tailored to this particular audience?

J.M: ...it was, because I had two messages...one was that my original choice was too wild and jazzy for them, and the second was that there would be some kids from the school, so it had to be sort of all-encompassing...they wanted a bit of classical, you know...a bit of Beethoven...and I think Scarlatti's quite good because it's very classical, but it's not something you come across when you're very young particularly....

R.E: ...sure..

J.M: ...Satie I would have played anyway, but I really wanted to play the Rzewski...but it didn't do...play more classical music...I think Ravel & Gershwin go together very well..they're very similar...

R.E: ..yeah..yeah..and then Satie...the connection there..that they knew eachother and admired eachother's work. Another thing I (was going) to ask (you) was, what do you think these 6 composers would have found in common had they met...of course Satie and Ravel did meet...but Beethoven, Scarlatti and the others..what common ground would they have discovered as composers?...

Justly yes?

J.M: ...yes, it's very difficult...I think Scarlatti goes very well with Satie and Ravel...that's a pianistic thing, because I think something about the type of pianism that you have to use...it was harder tonight because of the piano...um..composers like Scarlatti, Satie & Ravel require the best of pianos to bring out the music to it's full...the pianism is similar in that it's a kind of fantastically literary technique you need...with real glitter, and a real sense of the sound and the touch...very precise touch, and so that's how I make sense of including Scarlatti amongst these others, because, you know, he's 18th century but he's not like Bach, none of that Germanic sound...he's a much more fizzy, champagne type of composer I think..(you know) his sonatas are like little explosions...some of them are quite irrational actually...they're in this kind of binary form, but they just don't do what you expect at all, although I think the ones I played tonight kind of develop in a slightly more normal way, but I've recorded some which are just wild...they start in one key and fly off somewhere else...so I think this makes sense of fitting in with Ravel...but I must say, putting Beethoven in the mix is a bit...I mean, how can I rationalise that?

R.E: ...during the interval, I was wondering how can I ask you this question now, simply because of Beethoven...but maybe late Beethoven...I thought, because it's a little bit twisted, you might justify it...

J.M: ...yes, but that sonata is really middle Beethoven, you know, before you get onto the really knotty Beethoven...no, that piece is still quite taut and muscular and rather upfront...

R.E: ...I can't imagine Beethoven and Satie having much to say to each other really...

J.M: ...no, neither can I, but I wonder if we're being rather unfair to them both...I mean, you imagine that they are the antithesis of each other...other than they were both rather difficult characters...I mean you look at their lifestyles...these people had to forge their own way, 'cos nobody could really make head or tail of them...so there's that aspect to them which is similar...

R.E: ...sure...

J.M: ...I mean the thing that's rather extraordinary about Satie is...he appears as though he didn't need any acceptance, (do you know what I mean?..)he appeared to have it all sussed...the way he'd turn up in cafes, then disappear again, and make these marvelously witty statements (e.g.having attended the premiere of Debussy's new orchestral work "La Mer", the 1st movement of which is entitled "From dawn to midday on the sea", Satie said to him:'Ah, my dear friend, there's one particular moment between half past ten and quarter to eleven that I found stunning!')...and then underneath there was just a human being like everybody else...he must have had needs...and then that's when it becomes dangerous, 'cos then you start to feel sorry for him, and I think that's wrong aswell...just because somebody's so different...am I making sense?...

R.E: ...no..no..yes...

J.M: ...because I often find with Satie, (that people).and I think this is relevant to Beethoven aswell...because of their lifestyles, people feel sorry for them...you know, *oh, poor old Satie, he was so lonely and he never got married, didn't have any affairs, didn't have any children* ...and this is completely the wrong attitude towards Satie...he was a marvellous person...he was terribly stylish and very imaginative and powerful...but he obviously hurt Ravel enormously...and a very interesting relationship with Debussy...do you know Adrian Mitchell's play about Satie called "Satie Day/Night"?

R.E: ...no...

J.M: ...which you'd be really interested in, as you're so into Satie...it's just been published actually..(it's been around for about 10 years,) there's a lot in it about his relationship with Debussy which is very interesting...but going back to the Beethoven thing, I think similarly, this grizzled, grumpy person...loner...I think composers usually are loners, I mean how else can you do it?...at least all the living composers I've worked with have had that element...

R.E: ...which leads me onto another thing...you compose yourself don't you?...

J.M: ...yeah..a little bit...

R.E: ...I want to ask, how is your own composition affected by constantly performing other people's work...is that a hinderance or a benefit?...

J.M: ...well, I started off wanting to be a composer, but I had a real crisis of confidence...I did all this composition as a teenager...then to university, which was not a good thing actually...I became a bit overawed by what I didn't know...so I shyed away from composing...and I think the reason I play a lot of new music is obviously a subliminal thing, in that I never made it as a composer, so I'm very interested, and have a very analytical approach and great sympathy towards people who write stuff...why they do it...how does it work...how it's put together etc...but to claim that I do a lot of writing now would be wrong...I've written a lot of theatre music and arrangements, and I'm always keeping my hand in...so maybe, one day, I'll actually take some time off and do some composing...I'd really like to do that, because I think that writing music is probably the best thing of all really...there are less compromises involved...being a performer, you have to be terribly pragmatic, I mean tonight was a marvelous example of

pragmatism...you know, I've had this terrible journey...I mean at Basingstoke I very nearly turned round and went home again (the rail service from London to Sherborne had been partially converted into a standing room only bus trip)...you know, with the flu, and the piano's not great, and a car alarm goes off while you're playing, and all that kind of thing...and then you think, well, I'm being paid to give a concert, and all of that has to be put aside...but (I think) when you compose music, you can obviously be less compromised, because you don't have those outside constraints...

italics? -

R.E: ...so, if you sat down and wrote some music, you'd be able to clear your mind completely, and write?...

J.M: ...no, I don't think anybody does that...

R.E: ...I guess not...

J.M: ...I don't think it's possible...I think everybody, for better or worse, carries in their heads the knowledge of music that they've heard...hopefully it doesn't destroy anything, but it's extraordinary what you carry in your head, and the influences you absorb without ever knowing about it...what I've noticed with composers I've worked with, (and I think this is relevant) is that, once they become quite established, it's very noticeable that they will only listen to certain types of music...that they censor music very quickly...the music that they don't like from the music that they do (like), and they hone for themselves a very particular kind of musical taste...and I think they're doing it, so that, when they sit down to compose, they don't have a lot of rubbish going round their heads...

R.E: ...I guess there's either that way of doing it, or you allow yourself to absorb everything, and then act as a filter when composing, letting your personality transform your influences, sort of subconsciously...

J.M: ...yes..well I think that a composer like Philip Glass say, probably could handle listening to everything, because he has such a strong sense of what he's going to write anyway, but a composer like Birtwistle for example, is extraordinarily censorious about what he listens to...and quite rightly...he has an extremely measured taste in music...

R.E: ...yes...right...um...so...maybe we ought to quit this little chat and give you a chance to recover after your...

J.M: ...no, don't worry...this is quite a nice way for me to unwind...

R.E: ...okay..I'd like to ask...a recording allows the listener to have a more intimate relationship with the music, as compared to the distractions of a live concert...and especially in very contemplative music, such as Satie's Gymnopedies... when you're performing such music in front of a large audience, who are you playing to?...where is the music directed?...where is the balance struck between intimacy and public presentation?...

J.M: ...I think that's a very interesting question...it's actually relevant to all the music one chooses to play in public, but obviously particularly relevant to Satie, because, as you say, it is so meditative...which is something I clocked very early on, I mean there is an almost Zen-like quality to making it work...and the Gymnopedies, which are so hackneyed and so famous, are really terribly difficult to play because of this complete purity and simplicity..(I mean I think there's two different things really)..the thing is you have to start by playing it for yourself, trying to find that still centre, and that could take years of practise, then ofcourse you just clock into that when in front of an audience, because you've practised being that serene...

R.E: ...sure... *business*

J.M: ...so the *business* of playing in front of an audience is less of a problem, the real work is done in advance...

R.E: ...right...

J.M: ...I made that Satie recording quite a long time ago, probably 8 years ago or so, and I found it very hard...some of his music...because although it seems that the notes are quite simple, this ~~business~~ of getting the slow pulse, and this complete serenity is very hard...and I came to the conclusion that it was just like meditation really...that was the only way you could think of it...and I think John Cage is like this...there's a sort of level that you have to go in on it, and it's not actually to do with playing the piano, it's about something else, which makes it so interesting, because it's almost anti-music...or at least anti-performance certainly...that's why Satie is such an interesting composer, because he's so against all the normal conventions which are to do with performance, you know, where you come on stage in your smart suit and give a big performance to a big audience...emoting over the footlights, (as expected,) but actually a lot of performance isn't like that...it is, in fact, the audience eavesdropping, (I mean there they are sitting there,) (and) you have to bring them to you, you have to make them eavesdrop...Satie & Cage are not alone in having this quality...I think some Bach is like this...I've been playing "The Art of Fugue" recently, and I think that is a very similar case in point, I mean, as a piece it has a very private quality...

R.E: ...some Debussy, I'm thinking also...he actually said that he preferred that some of his music be listened to by one person, alone with the music...I mean, I'm sure he was right, that music does work best like that, I'm thinking particularly of a piece like "Des pas sur la neige" for example...

J.M: ...yes.. but it's true for an awful lot of music...and it seems to me that there are 2 ways of getting around it, you either say I can't play this music, which is a perfectly reasonable option, or, I think, more productively, you say, I will find a way of playing this music (in public,) without becoming operatic...

R.E: ...I think it's actually important to play it, because otherwise people will only play to the gallery...showpieces...

J.M: ...yeah, you end up playing Liszt all the time or something...

R.E: ...but I can understand how difficult it is not to do that...

J.M: ...it is hard, but I think it's important to allow the audience to be present at a performance which isn't just about fireworks, you know, a concert should be about more than that...

R.E: ...music...

J.M: ...yeah, there should be a little bit of that, certainly!...you know, I'm reminded about why Glenn Gould stopped playing in public...he thought that he always ended up playing to the gallery...he said it was impossible to walk on stage and not do that, because that's the way it's weighted...he felt that he was mangling the music...I mean, I suspect that there were other reasons, to do with the sheer discomfort of travelling and performing and so on...

R.E: ...he was renowned for being rather eccentric and obsessive...

J.M. R.E: ...sure, but I think he was quite a sensitive person...very vulnerable...the thing about playing and travelling is that you have to be quite tough...you have to put up with a lot of hassle...

R.E: ...sure...so why, ultimately, do you do this?...

J.M: ... (laughs) Oh God!... I don't know... (R.E) ...why do you create and perform music?...actually, I asked a colleague of mine, who is also a well known performer and writer, what question she most enjoyed being asked by interviewers, with regard to this interview, and she said it was probably that...why do you do it?...

J.M: ...what does she say?...

R.E: ...I've no idea, she didn't tell me...

J.M: ...pity...I could have cribbed her...well, I guess it's a pretty complicated answer for me, because, I found very early on, that actually playing in a rather conventional mould wasn't going to be very good for

me...and I think it's more creative to put together a more interesting performance...and talking to the audience is a little bit part of that...I don't always talk to the audience, but sometimes you feel it'll help...but I think that what I've found is that, hand in hand...although I start with playing the piano...that's the thing I do everyday, it's something I have to do, even if I don't play well, I must do it...but I've found, more and more, that working with composers and musicians, and collaborating with them, and promoting other people's work, has become very important for me...if it was just a matter of playing dead composers in public all the time, then I think I'd give it up tomorrow...because I think that's a very stultifying, self-negating thing to do...you know, I'm so pleased you were excited by the Carter, Berg and Gershwin thing, because that's the kind of thing which keeps me alive... you know, you come across these extraordinary historical crossroads...that's what I find most interesting...which is what I try and do in my programmes...to juxtapose surprisingly, but actually in a completely obvious way...

R.E: ...yes...I don't think performers do it enough...

J.M: ...I don't think they do it at all...I don't understand it, it's very strange...

R.E: ...they don't...and I think it's unique the way you do that, it should happen more often...

J.M: ...I think, really, it's the only way to build a programme...I feel a bit guilty saying that, because, you know, tonight's programme was so bog-standard, but...I'll tell you about a recent juxtaposition I made which I found really exciting...I did try it out on a couple of audiences, and it seemed to work...which is, William Byrd and George Crumb!...now...seemingly, a strange combination, but I'll tell you how it works...I got into playing this fantastic William Byrd...variations...a really exciting piece, written in 1592, or thereabouts, and I was looking for something to go with it...then I remembered that there was this piece by George Crumb called "A Little Suite for Christmas", and in the middle of the music...it's all played inside the piano, on the strings...he quotes a carol dating from 1591, a marvelous arrangement...and so this works quite well, one thing bounced off the other, you know...there's William Byrd, 16th century...mixed in with cutting edge, 20th century music...so that's the kind of thing that really excites me...I'm working on a programme with Ensemble Bash...do you know them?...

R.E: ...know of them, but not heard them...

J.M: ...a very fine percussion quartet, I've known them for quite a while...put them on at various festivals and so on...and we've started playing together...actually I was a bit saucy & went to them and said 'hey, listen, do you want to play with a pianist', and they went 'yeah'...but, of course, there's no repertoire, so we got Django Bates to write us something, and we're going to play at the Proms this year, so we need more material...and I've been thinking about the John Cage sonatas for prepared piano (the music is played on a piano whose strings are interfered with by crocodile clips, nails, erasers etc.) you know, that level of prepared piano transforms it into a percussion instrument, it's a Gamelan orchestra at your fingertips...so that's a very exciting prospect...

R.E: ...what other plans do you have for the future?...

J.M: ...well...there's the continuing series of concerts at Bridgewater Hall, which is getting wilder & wilder...so we're looking for more good ideas for future concerts...you know, running that series is getting more, & more interesting...it's taking up quite a lot of my time...we're bringing over Ensemble Modern from Germany to play Mark-Anthony Turnage's "Blood on the floor"...and I want to invent a John Cage event as well, which hopefully will involve performers & audience...I'm sure

it can be done somehow, this audience participation...

R.E: ...how about that time John Cage organised a piano relay to play Satie's "Vexations"...maybe you could get the audience to pre-learn it, and invite them on stage to play in turn...

J.M: ...it's funny you mention that...I've just been asked to take part in a performance of "Vexations" in Brighton, which is for an Amnesty event, so I'm hoping I'll be able to do that...it takes about 8 hours to perform, doesn't it?...

R.E: ...I thought it was more like 24, or something ridiculous...

J.M: ...well, it depends on whether you play the full cycle I suppose...and going back to John Cage, there's a piece I'd very much like to do which is for 12 radios...do you know about it?...^(it's)a big score for radios, which are tuned in permanently...(and) he gives you the bandwaves...and what's great is that the bandwaves remain the same, but depending on where you perform it geographically, you get completely different things...I last saw it down in Dartington, so of course you had a bit of World service, Radio 4, Radio Totnes and so on...I'd like to do that in Manchester...

R.E: ...maybe you should have played "4 minutes & 33 seconds" this evening so that we could really concentrate on the car alarm (this is a piece by John Cage which asks the performer to make no sound, thereby allowing the audience to enjoy the incidental sounds of the environment in which it takes place)...

J.M: ...Yes!...

R.E: ...a perfect Satie/Cage moment...

J.M: ...actually, while that was going on, I was thinking 'if they don't switch it off soon I'll have to do something', like maybe play that Rzewski piece...which is very loud, so you wouldn't hear the car alarm anyway...but they finally sorted it out, so I didn't need to...

R.E: ...um..I think the tape's running out...

J.M: ...is it?...is it still going?...

R.E: ...yes, I think it's.....

Letter to Valentine Hugo;

August 1918

Che're Valentine,

This is too much suffering. I feel damned. This beggar's life disgusts me.

I'm really looking for a job - however small. I shit on art; it's brought me too many problems. An artist's is a bummer of a life, if I may so express myself.

Forgive me these true descriptions - but they are true.

I'm writing to everybody. No one replies, not even a friendly word. Heavens!

You, my dear Valentine, have always been good to your old friend. Please, I beg you, would it be possible to try and find a place for him to earn his living?

I don't mind where. The most menial tasks would not be below me, I promise you.

See what you can do as soon as possible; I'm at the end of my tether and can't wait any longer.

Art? It's a month now and more since I was able to write a note.

I no longer have any ideas, and don't want to have. So?

Your old friend,

Erik SATIE

Elsewhere in the magazine - anyone spotting the deliberate mistake (Sonata scavallatta) wins, what's J.M. like in bed?