

# Day and night, night and day

The Radio 3 anchors on the values of silence and patience

**T**HOUSANDS of people around the UK and well beyond, especially over the past year, derive pleasure, comfort and stimulation every weekday from the top-and-tailing on BBC Radio 3 of the morning *Breakfast* programme and the evening *In Tune*. The regular presenters for these live broadcast slots are Petroc Trelawny and Sean Rafferty, one a Cornishman, one an Irishman, colleagues and friends who joined the station within months of each other in 1997/98. Both have vivid memories of occupying offices in a remote offshoot of Broadcasting House with sloping garret roofs and 'a very useful fridge'.

**‘It’s like being part of a huge family, but without the rows’**

The two programmes share a strong sense of community with their audiences. 'It's like being part of a large family,' says Mr Trelawny, 'but without the rows.' *Breakfast* is shaped by listeners, who contact the programme with suggestions; he relishes the quirkier items and the chance to include his own favourites—trains and railway routes are frequently mentioned, as is anything Cornish. 'Radio is an intimate medium,' observes Mr Rafferty, 'people are touched by it, their imagination can float. I've banned the C(ovid) word on *In Tune*, which is not avoiding

reality, but providing people with a place of safety, an antidote to dark times.'

During winter, they both broadcast in the dark. Mr Trelawny has been one of very few people presenting from the studio, cycling in from north London and dutifully disinfecting before he leaves; Mr Rafferty has been in his sitting room, with a street view of sometimes vocal local foxes. 'I've always tried to make the studio more like home. I rather overdid it once when I thought I'd improve on the hideous lighting by distributing a few uplighters about the place. Unnoticed by me, a page of my script fell on one and caught fire when Catriona Young was reading the news. She carried on grimly as charred bits of paper drifted down on her. Now I'm at home, of course, I'd infinitely rather be in the studio.'

Mr Rafferty was a familiar face on television in Northern Ireland for many years, as well as presenting current affairs and news programmes on the radio. Mr Trelawny read the news for BBC Radio in Devon and Plymouth, followed by stints with British Forces Radio in Hong Kong and at Classic FM. Neither is a professional musician—Mr Trelawny played the piano 'very badly' and Mr Rafferty the violin 'also very badly'—but they both love music and musicians. The latter was a member of an excellent amateur madrigal group in Ireland: 'It was a way of getting inside really beautiful country houses. I used to bludgeon the owners into inviting us to come and sing, so every weekend or so we'd find ourselves in another slightly dusty Palladian hall.'



'There must be time for music to resonate,' says Petroc Trelawny

Both share qualities of warmth—of personality and of voice—plus innate understanding of the value of silence. *In Tune* has live guest interviews and performances—currently distanced—and Mr Rafferty is a past master at waiting exactly the right amount of time for someone who may have

lost their thread or be searching for the right word in a second language. He knows that jumping in too soon, or putting words into their mouths, can be disruptive and confusing. 'Music is not a commodity or for the background. It's something deserving of respect, an essential reason for





Sean Rafferty admits he used to play the violin 'very badly'

being.' Mr Trelawny has a finely tuned sense of timing, allowing a pause for contemplation on Holocaust Memorial Day after Anne Sofie von Otter sang a lullaby composed in Terezin concentration camp. 'Silence is important,' he says. 'There must be time for the music to resonate, to sink in.'

For the Irishman: 'Interviews should not be didactic or hectoring—they're conversations. And the listener is part of that conversation.' His counterpart adds: 'The conversation, the connection with the listener, has become more immediate. I remember the postman coming to our garret

## On the record

*Breakfast with Petroc* Trelawny is 6.30am–9am and *In Tune* with Sean Rafferty is 5pm–7.30pm

**Where is your favourite place?** The shores of Lough Swilly, Co Donegal (Sean); beside the Helford River, Cornwall (Petroc)

**What is your favourite building?** King's College Chapel, Cambridge; Manchester Town Hall

**Book?** Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*; Miklós Bánffy's *The Transylvanian Trilogy*

**Food?** Pheasant en crouete,

as served at Snaffles in Dublin; potted shrimps

**Alternative career?** Wine merchant; Royal Navy officer

**Who is your hero?** The scientists who invented the vaccine and all NHS staff (Sean); absolutely, ditto (Petroc)

**Ideal dinner guest?** Well it would be rude not to invite you! (Petroc); wouldn't it be marvellous if the three of us could go out for a long boozy meal after this interview? (Sean)

with sacks of mail—the only way of getting in touch. It was a huge thrill when I had to say for the first time on air that phrase I'd heard all my young years: "Write to us at BBC Broadcasting House..." We played everything on vinyl or CDs that we had to order up from the record library. Now, an enormous range of recordings is available and we can respond to requests within minutes.'

violinists? They have god-given skills that are then honed to a degree of excellence. Nobody should be ashamed of that and I'm extremely proud of the fact that we've been able to promote burgeoning talent through the BBC New Generation Artists.'

Mr Trelawny has a list of all those artists on the wall of his studio, from pianists Paul Lewis and Steven Osborne to baritone James Newby, mezzo Ema Niko-lovska and jazz guitarist Rob Luft. 'It's a wonderful scheme,' he explains. 'They're given a safe space for two years, during which they record, feature regularly on air, get a Proms performance and are produced gently, not commercially. They become part of an extended family.' Mr Rafferty recalls: 'The soprano Ailish Tynan, a great favourite of both of ours, came in after the first lockdown to perform live on *In Tune*, with the pianist James Baillieu. They did Schubert's *Du bist die Ruh* and at the first note it was as if time just stopped; it was the penetration of live music into a space after so long. We were all in pieces.'

## Radio is an intimate medium. The imagination can float

Their strength lies, perhaps, in the fact that they are themselves super-fans, informed enthusiasts, as are 99% of their audience. 'People know when something's good,' says Mr Rafferty. 'It's about recognising excellence—nobody wants the second-rate. Somehow, in the context of the Arts, it's viewed as bad to talk about an elite. We think it's good to talk about elite athletes, so why shouldn't the same apply for singers and

'We all miss that so badly,' says Mr Trelawny. 'Audiences and artists. We do what we can, but music needs to be shared.'

Henrietta Bredin