

[ **HARDCOVER:** UK ]

# Musicians: from servants to superstars

Once the world's finest composers were  
hired hands of the very rich,  
today they are the very rich themselves

BY **STEVEN POOLE**  
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

What is the difference between Mozart and Elton John? Of the many possible answers, the one that interests historian Tim Blanning is the gulf in their social status during their respective lifetimes. Mozart, a hired hand of the archbishop of Salzburg, was seated with the valets and cooks at dinner. Elton, on the other hand, is hugely rich and hobnobs with the royal family. The process by which musicians climbed the respectability ladder — from servants to superstars — is the subject of this fascinating book.

At first, patronage meant exclusivity, harshly enforced if necessary. Bach was slung in jail for trying to leave the employment of the duke of Weimar in 1717. Haydn's contract with his master, Prince Esterhazy, determined that he would "be under permanent obligation to compose such pieces of music as his Serene Princely Highness may command, and neither to communicate such new compositions to anyone, nor to allow them to be copied, ... nor shall he compose for any other person without the knowledge and gracious permission of his Highness."

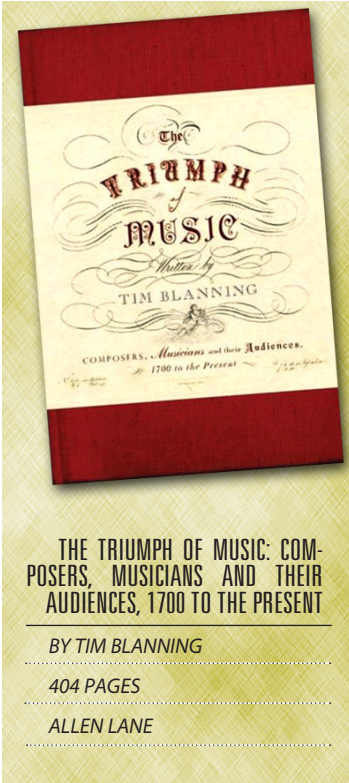
When Esterhazy died, Haydn moved to London, just as "a massive expansion of music printing and publishing" was under way. Handel was an encouraging model, having become what Blanning calls "the first composer and musical impresario who made a fortune from a paying public." But Haydn's new freedom also had artistic consequences. The financial drain of full-time salaries for the musicians in Esterhazy's exclusive employ had meant that Haydn composed symphonies for only 14 players. In London, there was a "much larger pool of professional musicians who could be hired by the season or even by the concert," and so he began to write for orchestras of 50 or 60.

On the other hand, there was a new necessity to please a paying public, which contrasted in Haydn's mind with his previous freedom to be "original." Such ambivalence towards the multiple and often fickle paymasters that composers faced is a recurring theme. Once the musician has evolved from salaried artisan to expressive Romantic genius, thanks to the examples of Beethoven, Paganini, Rossini and perhaps especially Liszt (who also benefited, Blanning points out, from the new art of lithography, which could disseminate his good looks far and wide), he is increasingly tempted to think of those who do not understand the latest extrusion of his genius as "philistines."

Blanning also traces the material developments that helped spread the influence of music and its practitioners. He observes the changes in musical architecture, from the first dedicated concert houses to the opulence of the Paris Opera (designed mainly around the huge staircase where the rich could show off their jewels and furs), which is contrasted with the austerity of Wagner's Bayreuth. (There is a beautiful interpolation here on John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*, which Blanning relates persuasively to the apotheosis of Wagnerian Romanticism in *Parsifal*.) On we hurry, to London music halls in the 19th century and then cinemas, with their Wurlitzer organs on which snatches of Wagner could be played to accompany a cavalry charge in a western.

Technology, of course, has an important place in the story, evoked in the euphonious chapter title From Stradivarius to Stratocaster. Before the advent of recording, the single most important technological innovation was probably the invention of the piano, which reproduced in middle-class homes like a virus. Also important was the invention of valves for brass instruments, as Blanning amusingly notes: "As anyone who has had the misfortune to

## Publication Notes



be drafted into a military band of bugles will know, although it is easy to extract a sound from a mouthpiece attached to a coil of brass ending in a bell shape, making that sound euphonious is a different matter."

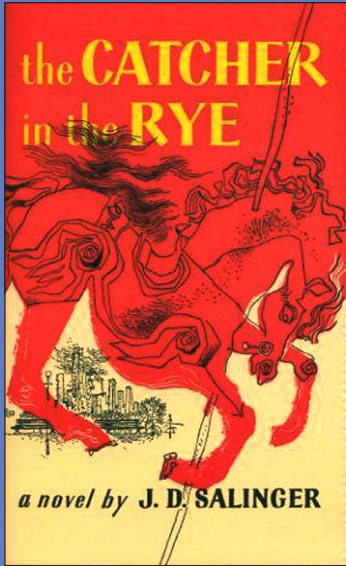
Acknowledging, too, Adolphe Sax's saxophones, Blanning moves on to gramophones, jukeboxes and Leo Fender's solid-body electric guitar: the Broadcaster, quickly renamed the Telecaster. "Anyone aspiring to emulate the popular music of the swing era needed a high degree of musical training and very expensive instruments," Blanning writes. "In the post-Fender era, a group could be assembled for little money and less expertise: three chords and they were in business."

In a late chapter on "liberation," he explores music's relationship with nationalism (*La Marseillaise*, *Rule Britannia*, Smetana's musical *Bohemia*, the Eurovision song contest), its place in the US civil rights movement and the fact that famous musicians quite often have a lot of sex. In a way, the theme of the book is now reversed: for most of the time, it has been an argument about the external factors that helped music's rise to dominance; here Blanning is instead discussing what music did for other realms, and his claims can be rather ambitious (one may doubt that the faux-gay girls of Russian pop group t.A.T.u. really advanced "the acceptability of lesbianism" in any serious way).

When Blanning reaches his conclusion, his subtle cultural demonstration of how music triumphed modulates, slightly unnervingly, into triumphalism, as he attempts to demonstrate that music now is superior to all other art forms, which are apparently in decline. Literature? Forget about it: "The gap between Charles Dickens and, say, Martin Amis is better described as a chasm." (Don't say Martin Amis, in that case.) Cinema? Well, "music can exist without the moving image, but the moving image cannot exist without music." Tell it to the Coen brothers, who used no music in the sound track to *No Country for Old Men*.

This is an unnecessarily combative finale to a very fine book. Blanning says, after all, that he does not intend to defend the quality of all the vast quantities of music in which the modern world is soaked, but simply to explain the form's cultural pre-eminence. In the same way, music as a whole does not need the sort of crabby defense offered it here, in which other media are casually denigrated by means of loaded historical comparisons. Prince is not engaged in a contest with Don DeLillo; J.M. Coetzee is not looking over his shoulder at John Taverne. Music is not in competition with other art forms. If it is true that the other arts constantly aspire to its condition, music need take no heed.

SUNDAY PROFILE



Left: The exterior of author J.D. Salinger's home in Cornish, New Hampshire, in a photograph taken last month. Salinger, who turned 90 on Thursday, hasn't granted an interview since 1980 and canceled the publication of a novella in book form a decade ago because it sparked too much publicity.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

# 'There's no more to Holden Caulfield'

Famously reclusive author J.D. Salinger still writes, but, much to  
the consternation of his legions of fans, also still refuses to publish his work

BY **JO BIDDLE**  
AFP, WASHINGTON

Reclusive author J.D. Salinger, whose seminal novel *The Catcher in the Rye* has lent voice to the angst and despair felt by generations of rebellious adolescents, turned 90 on Thursday.

But this new milestone in the life of one of America's most admired and influential writers passed without fanfare, in keeping with Salinger's jealously guarded privacy.

Despite the success of the 1951 novel and its laconic anti-hero Holden Caulfield, Salinger has not published anything since 1965 and has not been interviewed since 1980.

Mystery surrounds much of his life over the past five decades. Since being overwhelmed by his new fame Salinger withdrew from public life, retreating to his house perched on a tree-blanketed hill in the town of Cornish, New Hampshire.

Memoirs written by his daughter and a former lover affirm that Salinger still writes, but there has been no sign of any new book, even though it would be eagerly seized upon by his legions of fans.

Indeed in a rare interview with the *Boston Sunday Globe* in 1980, Salinger said: "I love to write, and I assure you I write regularly. But I write for myself and I want to be left absolutely alone to do it."

News in 1997 that his last published work *Hapworth 16: 1924*, which appeared in the *New Yorker* magazine, was about to be reissued in hard print sparked excitement in the literary world. But the publication date has been frequently postponed, with no reason given.

Jerome David Salinger was born on New Year's Day 1919 in Manhattan, the son of an Irish mother and Jewish father with Polish roots.

As a teenager he began writing stories. And in 1940, his debut story *The Young Ones* about several aimless youths was published in *Story* magazine.

Then came America's entry into the war, and the young Salinger was drafted in 1942. He took part in the D-Day stormings of the Normandy beaches, and his wartime experiences are said to have marked him for life.

He married a German woman after the war, but the marriage fell apart after just a few months, and Salinger renewed his writings with a passion.

In 1948 he published the short story *A Perfect Day for Bananafish* in the *New Yorker*, bringing him acclaim and introducing the Glass family and its seven rambunctious children Seymour,

Buddy, Boo Boo, Walt, Waker, Zooey and Franny, who were to populate several of his short stories.

But it was *The Catcher in the Rye* published three years later sealed his reputation. The book was an instant success, and even today remains recommended reading at many schools, selling around 250,000 copies a year.

Sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield's adventures and musings as he makes his way home after being kicked out of school touched a raw nerve and have fascinated generations of disaffected youngsters.

Yet the novel was also sharply criticized for its liberal use of swear words and open references to sex, and was banned in some countries.

Always a private person, Salinger found his new fame oppressive, and in 1953 he moved to sleepy Cornish, in the hope of staying out of the limelight.

Other collections of short stories or novellas followed, such as *Franny and Zooey*, until his last published work *Hapworth 16: 1924* appeared in the *New Yorker* in 1965.

"There is a marvelous peace in not publishing. It's peaceful," Salinger said in 1974, when he broke more than 20 years of silence in a phone interview with the

*New York Times*.

"Publishing is a terrible invasion of my privacy. I like to write. I love to write. But I write just for myself and my own pleasure."

In 1955 he married a young student, Claire Douglas, and they had two children, Margaret and Matt. In Margaret's memoirs *The Dream Catcher* she reflects on an often painful childhood, describing her father as an autocratic man who kept her mother as a "virtual prisoner."

They divorced in 1967, and in 1972 Salinger began a year-long relationship with 18-year-old Joyce Maynard, with whom he had been exchanging letters.

In a sign of the lingering interest in Salinger, some letters he wrote to Maynard sold for more than US\$150,000 at auction in 1999.

Salinger has remained to this day in his Cornish home, and has been married to Collen O'Neill since the 1980s. He has fiercely guarded his privacy, even turning to the courts to stop publication of his letters. And he has refused all offers to sell the screen rights to *Catcher*.

"There's no more to Holden Caulfield. Read the book again. It's all there. Holden Caulfield is only a frozen moment in time," he told the *Boston Globe*.

[ **SOFTCOVER:** UK ]

# Nobody's serious when they're 15

Booker Prize finalist Tim Winton explores risk-taking and addiction to excitement in a coming-of-age tale

BY **BRADLEY WINTERTON**  
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Surfing, drugs and sex are all central concerns of this novel, though none of them is at its heart. Its essence instead is youth, and the thrill of danger, something the author presents as central to youth's particular take on the world.

Tim Winton is one of Australia's most successful novelists. He gets reviewed in prestigious publications, and yet at the same time is popular and accessible. He's been short-listed for the UK's Man-Booker prize twice, and this new novel demonstrates why he would attract the judges, while also suggesting why they might finally decide to give their prize to somebody else.

It's narrated by a man in his late 40s remembering his life as a teen. Unwilling to follow his parents' directives, he teams up with an even more rebellious adolescent and together they teach themselves to surf. Soon they come under the influence of the 30-something Sando, a loner on the beach who turns out to be an international surfing celebrity.

Sando introduces the boys to three spectacular surfing locations. First is a remote beach where the waves are long and regular and their activities are overlooked by a lone great white shark. Next comes a peninsula where, when the weather is right, huge waves break up against jagged cliffs. Finally the three go out to a terrifying offshore site where a barely submerged rock platform causes the waves to rear up in near-vertical configurations.

The time is the 1970s, and Sando lives in post-hippie splendor in a spacious open-plan house in the bush near the coast. With him is Eve, a former skiing phenomenon who has wrecked her knee and limps around in tight-lipped

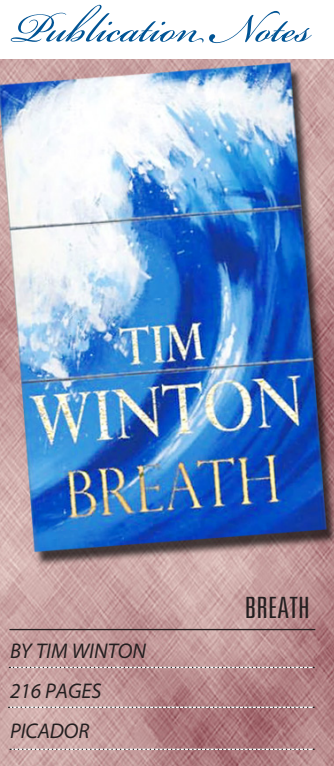
frustration. After Sando and the second boy have successfully surfed all three locations (the narrator has dared not confront the last), the two depart for Bali, leaving the abandoned boy to seek consolation with the equally abandoned-feeling Eve, and possibly fathering a child with her.

This is in essence an extrovert, out-doors, risk-taking world being described by an introverted, thoughtful and cautious literary artist. The novel at the start has the feeling of a vigorous narrative aimed, perhaps, at older teenagers. It's only as you progress into it that you begin to be aware of its complexities and ambiguities, and eventually come to realize that in fact they characterize the work.

That the target-readership can't really be adolescents at all is demonstrated by the sexual relationship between Eve and the boy including the dangerous practice of erotic asphyxiation — she produces a pink cellophane bag, complete with strap and sliding brass ring, and asks him to all-but throttle her. The experience allows the boy, when a paramedic in adult life, to diagnose a supposed suicide-by-hanging as in reality no such thing. But this subject matter effectively removes the book from any teenage-reading category, leaving it in a limbo somewhere between an exciting adventure and a darker speculation on human motivation and need.

Winton is clearly pushing the boundaries of the dangerous sports genre to include, despite the everywhere laconic style, some questioning thoughts. His conclusions are usually ambivalent, and indeed ambiguity characterizes his attitudes in other spheres as well.

The book appears at first to be taking a homoerotic direction, especially when Sando and the second boy leave on their



protracted Indonesian jaunt. The author goes to the trouble of pointing out that the novel takes place in an innocent era when such friendships would have raised few eyebrows. Yet no such development takes place, and instead the pair become involved in narcotics, resulting in the boy meeting an early death in a Mexican bar in a drug-dealing arrangement that goes wrong.

So — pro or anti teenage lethal situations? Pro or anti teenage drug use? Pro or anti the outer reaches of sexual experimentation? Winton offers a sphinx-like stare, and his final position on all these issues remains a fascinating, but to the last undivulged, secret.

The novel's style similarly occupies a position mid-way between extremes. It's both literary and colloquial, lovingly evocative of gaudily colored Australian landscapes, but ever on the lookout for possible verbal indulgence, and often terse and clipped as a result.

Maybe all this is a result of Winton the writer being what his narrator is in his fiction — a middle-aged man describing the carefree indulgence of youth. Naturally the thrills of risk-taking courted by the two boys and their perennially youthful mentor are going to be viewed more skeptically at 45 than at 14. But also seeing many sides of any question, as Winton appears to do, has long been an admired characteristic of the novelist. A doctrinaire intransigence is something best left to proselytizing missionaries, and Winton is a very different kind of person.

The title, *Breath*, refers to many things — the two boys' experiments in hyperventilation before diving into a river and holding on to a tree root until their lungs almost burst, and Eve's preferred sexual technique, but also youth and life itself — a series of breaths between dark and dark which, if we're lucky, we can do with what we please, except prolong them indefinitely.

This novel is in essence serious holiday reading. This may sound like a paradox, but the book itself is nothing less than paradoxical. There's more to Winton than meets the eye, though possibly less than he would like you to think there is as well. He may court sensation, but he's also a neat and efficient craftsman. These two qualities combine better at some times than at others, but either way they allow here for the production of an engaging exercise in the always problematic art of novel-writing.