

Dear Tony,

Where to begin? There is so much to say, I could write a book about you. Perhaps I will.

What energy, passion, kindness and generosity of spirit! What a force of nature! What a ride you gave us!

It was half a lifetime ago. A small string orchestra, you were conducting, I was playing. You said things and did things that I had never heard or seen before. You opened my eyes and my ears to things inside myself I didn't know existed. But then that was what you were so good at: bringing out the best in other people. Your energy was of course infectious, your musicianship truly inspiring. I cannot imagine how my life would have been without you – except to say it would have been infinitely less interesting. Your understanding of music was so acute you were, quite frankly, in a different league and yet you always treated me as your equal. And you never came down to my level – you lifted me up to yours.

I think, for you, music and life were indistinguishable. Two sides of the same coin. You approached both at break-neck speed, and it was an extraordinary sight to behold. Inspirational for many, overwhelming for some, and, for the lucky ones of us who were able to hold on for the whole journey, it was life-changing. My goodness, when you entered a room, you filled it! Not loudly, not at the expense of others, not because you wanted to – you just did. I don't think you really had an ego. Indeed, I think that's one of the reasons you didn't get to conduct the orchestras you deserved. Or should I say, they deserved. But don't worry, my friend, you have left a lasting legacy. Your remarkable Grieg project with Sigurd, your collaborations with Tom, your recordings with Geoff, these I know are at the top of your list. With your Grieg project you have at last thrown your own pebble into the pond. It has already made some ripples. The larger waves are still to come – the rest of the world just needs to catch up with you; as was so often the case.

Sometimes Tony the musician obscured Tony the man. But Tony the man is what most of my book would be about. You loved people unconditionally. A limitless supply for your friends, for your family, for Karina and your boys – as with everything you did, it was with everything you had. I know, because you told me, that Karina was the making of you, the completing of you, your reason to be.

At the moment it feels like the world will now be a darker place. But you left enough of your light in the hearts and minds of the people you touched that I think it will be all right. If I can reflect one tenth of your light into the world I will have done well. If I can find one tenth of your courage, I will be a brave man.

Well, my dear friend, I finally got a word in edgeways.

Tony, I am so proud to have been your friend; your brother-in-arms; your wingman. It is time to say goodbye. I will miss you every second of every day. I hope there are some Spitfires up there for you to fly. You will enjoy that. I can see it now.

With all my love,

Your dear friend,

Stephen