

## Ron Pretty

### Vibrato

Sand between the toes, she remembers  
or the peace in Vienna when it snows.  
Raised on Sydney beaches,  
she spends her days in the northern reaches  
of Europe. Her flat in Hilfenstrasse,  
is as small as her needs: a narrow bed  
against the wall, a tiny kitchen  
just room enough for her music stand  
and violin – her loom each day, where  
she weaves her magic. Bach and Corelli,  
the carpet of sound that carries her  
through dark days to the fire that sets  
her strings alight, charmed old Odneposoff,  
her mentor and guide, and gave her  
a passport back to childhood. She comes home,  
not as a neophyte wondering if nimble fingers  
could ever open a deeper music, but as an elder  
who digs her feet in the sands of Manly  
or Maloolabah, knowing her pizzicato,  
her vibrato are sure as the tides,  
calm as the moon. It sustains her – the illusions  
it hides in the sounding board, the fragile ply.

### Out of the table, endlessly rocking.

I write at an unsteady table  
so my words, rough and ready  
spill across the page like static  
each word, each phrase a jolt  
that almost spills my wine.

Images float into being without  
much control. As the table rocks,  
so black ink spills on the white, & I  
am mute before its flow. Ideas  
are the last thing I entertain

after I've watched them form on  
the page. Some of them I fear, are  
almost accessible, even to me. No matter.  
I write for friends, not cognoscenti.

## *Peacocks*

When the rain came that afternoon, I  
put on the Emperor. At first I thought  
it was the peacock strutting on the roof  
scrabbling around, but no, the downpour  
was flooding the damp ground. I had  
seen them earlier, the peacocks, head to head,  
cock to hen in what appeared to be avian  
affection. Washed away, I shouldn't doubt,  
in the downpour that followed. Lovers  
caught in the rain often find passion  
drying with the return of the sun. I doubt  
I'll see those birds so affectionate again.

Perhaps it was the rain souring my mood,  
or perhaps just the slow movement  
of the concerto feathering my melancholy.  
Ludwig had no plumage. He found in his notes  
a deeper brilliance than any peacock blue,  
but his lady students found him dull,  
perhaps a bit of a troll. Each of those  
beautiful untalented girls declined his affection,  
went looking for glossier birds. By then  
he could not hear the rain, but saw  
the tone in their faces, fed it into  
the slow movement of the Emperor  
while winter washed the streets of Vienna.

**Ron Pretty** is an Australian poet, publisher and teacher. For a twenty-year period he ran Five Islands Press publishing some 230 books of poetry and mentored many Australian poets. He edited the magazines *Scarp: New Arts and Writing* and *Blue Dog: Australian Poetry* for a number of years. Ron was instrumental in establishing the Poetry Australia Foundation. He was awarded the NSW Premier's Award for Poetry and was made a Member of the Order of Australia for services to Australian literature.