



## 6 Finchcocks Musical Museum, Goudhurst

I'm not sure why walking in the garden of this Georgian Manor House just outside Tunbridge Wells feels as if you have stepped into another time.

Perhaps it's because every wall seems to have a doorway you go through to find something unexpected on the other side: two geese and a duck, a tumble of white roses, a wooden case of a green-painted piano with a stool inviting you to sit down, a sign to the 'Enchanted Compost Heap'. And then round every corner, I stumbled on something from the past: an abandoned grass roller, a pink and purple sedan chair, apple boxes.

Maybe it is because the whole garden feels as if it is just on the cusp of falling over into abandonment, albeit in the best possible way because I should point out these thirteen acres have been fully restored. However, the romance remains, a very different feeling from the more formal gardens I visited.

It's said about violins that certain vibrations made over years can make microscopic changes in the wood. The instrument therefore remembers its players, and the garden at Finchcocks gives the feeling of remembering its gardeners. I wouldn't have been surprised to come across gardeners from the past tying up the white climbing roses or sitting having a cup of tea. Perhaps even the hum of an old song in the air, as I noticed a clump of foxgloves with their mouths open wide as if about to burst into song.

I had a sudden memory of the time my father took me – as a child – to hear Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* in London. I've never forgotten how much he laughed when I jumped during the summer thunderstorm. In fact, he laughed so hard he was asked to hush by someone in the row behind us. A fact that went a little way to making up for my own humiliation.

It's certainly true that there is a musical theme going on here. Not surprising because the house is a musical museum with a famous collection of instruments you can visit. In fact, they are almost celebrities in their own right, with instruments featuring in films such as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Vanity Fair*, amongst many others. There are regular recitals at Finchcocks every Sunday, where for the price of your entry ticket, you can combine your garden visit with listening to world-class musicians play to you in rooms that make you feel you are in your own Jane Austen novel.

One instrument in the collection I can't stop thinking about is the harpsichord, which has been specially built so the music can only be heard by the person playing it.

I took this thought with me into the garden afterwards as I sat on a bench against one of the ivy coloured walls and watched the light making silent songs with shadows on the grass.



One of the many 'magic' doorways at Finchcocks

### **My Father Always Liked Loud Noises**

I should have known something was up  
when the trip was first announced –  
*A classical concert, us?*  
I sat shredding the frills  
on my new stiff petticoat,  
running my nails the wrong way  
across red velvet seats –  
*stop fidgeting* – until  
musicians filed on stage, one by one,  
how many could there be? – *stop yawning* –  
then a conductor summoned images like magic,  
his baton swaying wand-like and I was cut  
in half, made whole, half, whole,  
pulled from a dozen top hats,  
a coloured dove flying high,  
five hundred silk scarves floating free,  
icy rain and hot sun,  
until my father took my hand in his,  
I squeezed back – *thank you* – until  
BOOM –  
I turned to see his shoulders shaking  
*'you jumped!'* but the truth was  
I'd been wound up like spring  
since the very first note.