

# Walk With Me

*Volker Brendel:* There are a variety of communication channels, some of which are lost in electronic transmission. We cannot quite see each other in the same way as when we are in the same room. Certainly, we cannot smell each other. Perception of body language is limited. But then again this is not all that different from any form of communication. Ultimately, we always have to make do with what we have. We use words, gestures, body language, and so forth to convey something of our own experience. And then those we are communicating with perceive this and necessarily filter this through their own associations, related to their own experience. The best we can hope for is to convey with some accuracy what our experience is and that this translates for those with whom we wish to communicate. In that sense, technology doesn't change too much; it just introduces more factors in the chain of communication that we have to consider.

Last week I had a chance to visit the Indiana University campus again. It is my place of work, but during the pandemic we are encouraged to work from home as much as possible. Because last week was after Thanksgiving and most of the students had been sent home, campus was very quiet. We have a particularly beautiful campus, and we are marking the 200-year celebration of the existence of the institution. What rightly should be a very cheerful celebration is quite subdued. The beautiful green spaces are almost empty, as seems to be the case with the buildings. Instead of cheerful students jogging or walking from classes to classes, it is eerily quiet. I felt somewhat sad about this. There is something wonderful about a place of study, a place of scholarship, a place of artistic expression and scientific endeavor. There is something wonderful about learning, the energy of study, the energy of young people aspiring to knowledge and making their mark in the world.

So, today I would like to simulate as best as we can you taking a walk with me, walking with me in my daily world, a world of art and science and scholarship. First, we'll walk past the musical arts center. We will listen to a beautiful piece of classical music. Now, because we do all this remotely, we are free to improvise a bit. Please listen to the following recording of

[Daniil Trifonov playing Rachmaninov's piano concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 18 - 2. Adagio sostenuto](#)

(thanks to [Deutsche Grammophone](#) and [YouTube](#)).

I trust you will have enjoyed this. Classical music may not be everybody's taste, but isn't this just superbly beautiful? In fact, here we have in evidence a blueprint for divine expression. There is the spiritual concept of "the Word made flesh," in biblical language; or more simply, the divine expressed in form, in our experience, in our doing. That is what we are after. Sometimes we use words, sometimes we use music, sometimes other kinds of expression; but in each case, we translate a spiritual impulse into our own experience and expression.

There is much to acknowledge and celebrate when we see this principle at work. The arts and sciences can be fields of endeavor for this kind of expression. So, let us continue our walk on campus. We will leave the music hall behind us and walk a little further, past the fountain and on to the museum of art. Let's enter the museum! We'll improvise again and switch virtual places, teleporting ourselves from the Bloomington campus to New York and taking a walk in the [Guggenheim Museum](#). What comes to our aid is a beautifully produced audio guide:

[Minds Eye: A Sensory Guide to the Guggenheim New York](#)

(for a selection, click on Suspension, Light, and Scale).

I hope you also enjoyed the museum tour! We also have a beautiful museum on campus here, and in non-pandemic times I sometimes walk from my office to the museum for a bit of time out, to see some pieces of human creativity that have stood the test of time: paintings from hundreds of years ago, still in bright colors; or pottery or sculptures from a couple of thousand years ago. These exhibits instill a sense of perspective relative to the dealings of the of the day!

We could continue our walk to the library and enjoy almost uncountable volumes of writing. Or we could enter any of the science buildings, for another avenue of inspiration. Maybe you have followed the news about the [Hayabusa-2 Project](#)—a Japanese space probe that travelled to a "nearby" asteroid for several years and has now returned a capsule with asteroid materials (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hayabusa2>). How cool is that?

There is much to complain about human nature. But should we not also celebrate human ingenuity and effort in the arts and sciences and other fields that bring the stars and heaven a little closer?

There is a famous joke told in physics circles in one way or another. Roughly speaking it goes like this: A renowned physicist gives the public lecture to explain the mysteries of the universe, starting from the Big Bang to current theories of the expansion of the universe,

including the formation of our solar system. Eventually somebody in the audience speaks up and tells the speaker that his theories are nothing but fancy because we all know that the earth sits on the back of a turtle. The lecturer is quite taken aback and replies diplomatically that this may be so but then what would hold the turtle in space? The audience member has a ready answer: Of course, that turtle is sitting on the back of another, bigger turtle. The physicist reiterates his point, but the listener replies: “Hold your breath. It’s turtles all the way down.”

So, here are alternative views of cosmology. Unfortunately, sometimes these days, little difference is made between views of substance, backed up by a lot of thought and data, and other views with very little substance behind. There are those who think that the earth is about 5,000 years old, and there are those that think the earth is flat. Personally, I have absolutely no problem with that. If that is a cosmology that works for you, so be it. In other words, I’m really not interested in concepts, be they scientific or religious or completely made up; unless such concepts cause harm to others or to yourself.

What is of real importance is what we factually deeply know. Find ways of expressing that, and that will speak to me louder than any concepts, no matter how eloquently articulated. Thus, it comes back to “the Word made flesh,” to spirit expressed in form. There are many ways to contribute. Particularly in these days when people might feel isolated and limited, let’s celebrate all efforts by anyone, anywhere to contribute to their highest vision, in whatever form is available to them. We recognize the spirit of love and truth in expression. That is what counts.

*December 6, 2020*

**Volker Brendel:** 4419 S. Inverness Crest, Bloomington, IN 47401

Note: All live performances at Indiana University are paused. However, you can enjoy a recording of last year’s [The Nutcracker](#) performance following the link, to continue our celebration of the arts with this timeless piece.

### **Pre-Service Music**

*1. Simple Gifts & 2. Lord of All Hopefulness*

Performed by Will James, Kate James & Malcolm Archer