Composer David Lyon: An Autobiography

1938-1950: Early Years

I was born in Walsall, Staffordshire on December 29th, 1938, and educated at the local Queen Mary's Grammar School. Although my parents were not particularly musical, my paternal grandmother possessed a rather nice piano, and from an early age I became fascinated with it, plonking away randomly on our regular Sunday afternoon visits. Eventually, probably when I was around 8 years old, my parents decided I needed a piano of my own, together with lessons from a recommended local teacher. The resulting instrument was not exactly of the highest quality, with a rather harsh, bright tone, but it was good enough for the purpose. My teacher, Mr Manton, gave me a thorough technical grounding, and I made steady progress towards a reasonably accomplished repertoire, with works such as Beethoven's *Pathétique* and the Chopin *A major Polonaise*. I was able to memorise the music as I worked through it bar-by-bar, which meant that I had no further need to refer to the score. Although this aroused a certain admiration from my teacher, it unfortunately meant I didn't learn a fluent sight-reading technique, which became a considerable handicap later on. I also discovered the ability to play 'by ear', especially popular songs and show tunes (which also impressed my teacher), and which, conversely, really did become an advantage as my career developed.

My other grandparents possessed an equally fascinating musical resource, a wind-up gramophone (this was the late 1940s), together with a selection of classical records which I eagerly explored on my occasional visits. The ones that I particularly remember were Jussi Björling singing *Nessun Dorma* and Wagner's *Tannhäuser Overture* (on a 12" 78rpm disc that needed to be turned at the end of the initial pilgrims' march, a routine which I have always since associated with the piece). Unfortunately, these delights came to an abrupt end when my over-enthusiastic operation of the rather elderly machine succeeded in breaking the spring.

1950-55: Discovering Repertoire - Record Collection - Early Compositions

As I approached my teens, I began to listen to orchestral concerts on the old BBC Third Programme, and began to assemble a record collection as my knowledge of the repertoire increased. These recordings covered a rather limited range, mostly from the standard orchestral repertoire, including Mozart *Horn Concertos*, a couple of Beethoven overtures, Brahms' *Haydn Variations*, Tchaikovsky symphonies, Debussy *La Mer*, Ravel *Rapsodie Espagnole*, Strauss *Don Juan* and *Till Eulenspiegel*, Elgar *Introduction and Allegro*, Walton *Portsmouth Point*, *Scapino* and *Crown Imperial*, Prokofiev *Classical Symphony*, Bartók *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta,* Arnold *English Dances* and *Tam O'Shanter*, Gershwin *American in Paris* - but no Early Music or Baroque, no vocal music of any sort, no chamber music (apart from a set of Beethoven Quartets), no Stravinsky, and especially no 'modern' music - although I eagerly listened to a much wider repertoire through radio broadcasts. I also began experiencing live concerts: each year the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra presented a schools' concert in Walsall, which invariably included Britten's Purcell Variations. It made an immediate impact, and in retrospect, would become an important influence on my compositional style. However, in those early teenage years, it was other composers - notably Sibelius, Walton and Arnold - whom I found most inspiring. I also attended CBSO concerts in Birmingham Town Hall - it was a great thrill to sit close behind the orchestra in the choir seats, feeling intimately involved with the performance. There were

also occasional concerts in Walsall Town Hall from other orchestras - I remember the Hallé performing *Don Juan* and Stravinsky's *Firebird* to rapturous applause - and also Wolverhampton's Civic Hall, where I heard the Czech Philharmonic, and Beecham conducting his Royal Philharmonic in Brahms' Second Symphony, at the climax of which the great showman let out a triumphant shout!

Around the age of 12 or 13, I began writing short piano miniatures, then gradually moved into more ambitious orchestral pieces in the style of Sibelius, whose music, particularly the 5th Symphony, evoked in me a uniquely emotional response. Most of this material survives only in rough sketches, but the debt to Sibelius, both in the character of the themes, and the way they are 'developed', is so obvious that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish mere pastiche from outright larceny! My most complete work was an overture for full orchestra called *'Coronation Banquet*', very obviously inspired by Walton's two coronation marches. I later changed this to *A Short Festival Overture,* which eventually became part of my submission to study composition at the RAM. [*Some years after leaving the Academy, I was told by a member of the interview panel that he had strongly argued my case on the strength of this piece, when other panel members were inclined to reject me because of my pathetic sight-reading powers!*] Later on, after gaining more experience of composition, I decided that the Overture was too derivative and formulaic to be worth further attention - though I have retained a fondness for its central Trio section, which I have occasionally considered rescuing from oblivion!

A Further Discovery

My other musical enthusiasm during my teenage years was jazz. In 1953, I and a couple of friends went to see *The Glenn Miller Story* at the Gaumont Cinema. In one scene, set in a New York night club, Louis Armstrong's All Stars begin playing *Basin Street Blues*, first as an ensemble ballad, then, after an energetic drum break, launching into an up-tempo, joyously improvised series of solos. We were electrified, and sat through the entire film again (presumably including the supporting 'B' feature, newsreel and adverts), just for that one scene. We then discovered that one of our number had an elder brother who played trumpet in a local traditional (or 'trad') jazz band, and had accumulated a large collection of vintage recordings dating back to the early days of New Orleans jazz. We then spent many happy hours listening to and learning about this (to me) hitherto undiscovered music. Obviously, the crude sound quality of these vintage recordings - some of them pre-electric - took a little while to get used to, but that added to their period authenticity and charm. I instinctively responded to the intoxicating sound of spontaneous improvisation, together with the indefinable quality of rhythmic 'swing' unique to jazz, and I soon learned the rudiments of jazz piano technique sufficient to occasionally 'sit in' with the local band. The only sight-reading required was the ability to follow elementary chord symbols rather than a written-out part, which in the case of 'trad' jazz (i.e. broadly following the style, instrumentation and repertoire of the New Orleans pioneers) was relatively straightforward. Within a short while, however, we started to listen to later, more musically sophisticated styles, as jazz progressed through the big-band 'Swing' era and 'Bop' revolution towards the cooler, chamber-music styles developing on America's West coast. My approach to improvisation began to be influenced by pianists such as Oscar Peterson and Dave Brubeck, and that is basically how my style has remained, though it wasn't until much later that I had sufficient opportunity to practise it regularly with other musicians. I should also mention my early enthusiasm for musicals, initially via Hollywood, which nurtured a vague ambition to write for the musical stage - finally realised some 20 or so years later, when I was given the opportunity to work on a project with a sympathetic librettist.

1955-59: Leaving School - A Military Musician

Although my school was (and still is) pretty successful academically, musical activity was then virtually non-existent - though I regularly enjoyed an after-school music appreciation session, when French teacher Mr Taylor introduced us to his classical record collection. I may have had the opportunity to study music at 'O' level, but I was only interested in it as a creative pastime rather than an academic subject; I certainly had no plans to pursue a musical career, either as a performer or (horrors!) a teacher. However, after a reasonable set of 'O' levels, I had to decide which 'A' levels to pursue. The school had three 6th form courses - Science, Humanities, or Art. As I had no interest in the sciences, nor in pursuing English Literature through A level to university, I chose 6th Art. I had studied the subject for 'O' level, was interested in architecture, and had found great satisfaction in oil painting. However, after one term in the 6th Form, I realised that there was little point in me pursuing any further art studies, as I could not imagine it leading to any worthwhile career. Music, in one form or another, was gradually becoming my main interest, so I decided to leave school, and work in my father's business for a year to see if it 'appealed' - it didn't. With National Service looming, I decided that three years as a military bandsman sounded like a good option, so as soon as I was 18 I joined the local South Staffordshire Regiment in 1956, where I learned the French horn, played the piano in the Dance Band, and spent most of the following three years with the regiment in Germany.

This experience was a real turning point, because it convinced me that I should pursue music seriously, though in what form I had yet to decide. Upon demob at the end of 1959, I briefly studied piano, horn and composition at Birmingham School of Music (now Conservatoire), and then decided to apply to the Royal Academy of Music to study composition and piano, abandoning the French horn. I was duly enrolled for a three-year course, and in the Autumn of 1960 drove down to London on the recently-opened M1 to begin my next big adventure.

1960-64: RAM: Student Compositions and Public Performances

The first task was to find somewhere to live, and I already had a very useful contact. During my stint in the army I had formed a friendship with a fellow bandsman who had gone on to study at the London School of Economics (LSE), so through his circle of college friends I was able to find shared digs in Dartrey Road, World's End (a district of Chelsea, since extensively redeveloped). I immediately acquired a piano, and swapped my elderly car for a more practical Vespa scooter (or perhaps it was a Lambretta - I owned both during my first year), so that I could whizz the couple of miles up to the Academy on Marylebone Road. At the end of my first year I had to vacate Dartrey Road, but through the same contacts I was offered the opportunity to move into shared digs in Marshall St, Soho, near Oxford Circus. My rent was £2 10s (£2.50) a week - but this was 1962, when Soho was Vice Central before it was transformed a few years later into the world capital of fashion (our landlady owned a grocer's shop round the corner on Carnaby St). I had a ground-floor bedsit, and a shared kitchen and bathroom with the basement lodger. Martin was part of the ex-LSE group, who from now on formed the core of my London social life - and through whom I eventually met my future wife, Kate. Martin and I became close friends, and we revelled in living in central London, taking full advantage of being within easy reach of the main theatres, cinemas and music venues. Additionally, Academy students were often provided with complimentary tickets to the Festival Hall, Wigmore Hall or Covent Garden. *[On one such occasion, at a performance of Walton's Troilus and Cressida, the singing students among*

our group decided to leave halfway through - they had obviously come to hear a particular singer, not the opera!]

Before my arrival at the Academy, my experience and knowledge of music had been relatively limited, but I soon realised that my fellow students, fresh from 'A' level music studies, and no doubt equipped with impressive instrumental grades, were on the whole much better equipped to meet the demands of the Academy than I believed myself to be. However, I at least had the advantage of having had three years living away from home in the 'real world', practising as a professional musician, so to speak, which must have given me the necessary confidence to quickly make friends and settle in. I soon encountered a whole range of unfamiliar and exciting music, both through live Academy concerts and through fellow students, and I also paid regular visits to Westminster Public Library, from which I borrowed from their extensive range of classical LPs. My first memorable introduction to Mahler was when my friend John played me a recording of the 1st Symphony. At this time, the early 1960s, Mahler's music was relatively unknown in this country, although over the next decade, largely through performances by the BBC, he rapidly became something of a cult figure - possibly because his music seemed to echo the anxieties of the period. John had been taught at his Manchester school by Peter Maxwell Davies, who had familiarised him with the work of the Continental serialists as well as much else outside the then standard concert fare. Although my musical tastes were, in the main, very different from John's, he and I got on very well together, and we remained friends until his untimely death a few years ago. .

If Mahler was my first big revelation, Britten was my second - especially his vocal music, in which words were matched to musical line in a way that I found utterly convincing. I had up to then been largely indifferent to 'formal' vocal music, as opposed to the much more 'naturalistic' style of jazz and popular song - this was what attracted me to musical theatre rather than opera, which I had previously regarded as rather contrived and artificial. However, Britten's example inspired me to attempt a similar approach to word setting, leading in due course to a song-cycle, *God's Grandeur,* of which more later. Britten's general idiom, which I would roughly describe as achieving intensity of expression through (comparative) simplicity of means, together with his compositional 'methodology', for want of a better word, has subsequently become the main influence on my approach to composition, in both instrumental as well as vocal works

My tutors at the Academy were John Gardner for composition and Marjorie Withers for piano. John, of course, was a distinguished composer, who was able to give me a great deal of advice and encouragement, and I found Marjorie an inspiring teacher. Although I was only a 'second study' pianist rather than a seriously ambitious one, she gave my technique thorough attention and considerably expanded my range - I remember her sessions with fond gratitude. (I have since learned that she was regarded as a brilliant teacher by many of her pupils who went on to successful careers). I soon realised that, by concentrating on writing small-scale chamber works, I stood a good chance of getting them performed at Academy recitals by fellow students. (*Luckily, I have been able to recall most of those performers, and these are detailed in the accompanying list of my compositions)*. My first attempt was a short Clarinet Sonata in two movements, the second of which had a distinctly Waltonian flavour. A second-year student called Richard Stoker (who became a distinguished composer, poet and actor) suggested I turn it into an orchestral overture, which, some years later, I did, with the title *Joie de Vivre.* I entered it into a competition run by the Light Music Society, in which it won third prize (and was subsequently published and broadcast). My second composition (or at least the second to be

performed, according to the concert programmes I have retained), a single-movement *Sonata for Viola and Piano,* was even more in debt to Walton, with its introductory thrumming piano arpeggios under a wide-spanning main theme climbing up across three octaves, and the central *Allegro Giocoso* recalling only too closely the figuration of Walton's *Viola Concerto.* Still, it received a good performance, and, despite being obvious pastiche, represented a real step forward. One of my friends said to me afterwards "David, I didn't know you wrote music like that" - and it wasn't meant unkindly! Several years later, when writing my overture *Burlesque*, I re-used the central *cantabile* melody from the *Allegro* section, as it seemed too good to waste.

As I have mentioned, the recital programmes that I have retained show that the *Viola Sonata* was performed in March 1962, whereas my *Three Miniatures for Flute and Piano* followed in May. However, I am pretty certain that the flute pieces were written first - it shows a much more likely progression as I became gradually more confident and ambitious - with their first performance being delayed until later. In any case, the *Miniatures* received an excellent performance by Atarah ben Tovim and Angela Brown (they followed it up with a BBC studio broadcast in 1965) and it was given a second Academy performance the following year. *[The pianist on this occasion was Michael Nyman, who had become one of my small circle of Academy friends. At that time his main interest appeared to be music of the Baroque era, which he went on to study with Thurston Dart at London University. It came as a considerable surprise to his friends when he suddenly emerged as a music critic and decidedly idiosyncratic - if controversial - composer, gaining widespread fame and fortune!]*. Following the BBC broadcast, the piece was published by Ascherberg.

Following on from the *Viola Sonata,* and inspired mainly by Britten's second string quartet, I decided to attempt one of my own. The viola soloist, John White, was a member of a recently formed student ensemble that they had named (or would shortly name) the Alberni Quartet, and I entertained the hope that they may be persuaded to give my effort its premiere. I gave the resulting work the rather presumptuous title *String Quartet 1962,* presumably expecting it to be followed up by more in the following years (though calling it *String Quartet No.1* would have raised similar expectations). As it turned out, it has remained my only effort in the genre, but only because my subsequent career has taken me in quite a different direction. I had taken the opportunity to record the work in rehearsal, which was subsequently a great help in assessing its effect. The performance went well, but afterwards I was approached by the Principal, Sir Thomas Armstrong, with the words "I enjoyed your quartet, but….." I'm afraid I've no recollection of the rest of his (no doubt helpful) remarks, but I don't recall being discouraged by them. I followed up the quartet with two vocal works. The first, *Three Spring Songs,* was a setting for SSAATTBB of poems by William Blake, Robert Browning and Gerard Manley Hopkins. This was again venturing into new territory, but the chance of obtaining a performance by a student ensemble was more difficult - or perhaps I just didn't try hard enough. Next, having discovered the Hopkins poem in a volume of his work, I turned to him again when I contemplated a song-cycle for tenor and piano. As I have mentioned, this was inspired by Britten's vocal works, especially his *Serenade for Tenor and Horn,* but there was no conscious decision either to deliberately copy Britten's mannerisms, or to avoid them. I had to rely on my own spontaneous response to the text, which, I had discovered when writing the choral songs, came surprisingly naturally. I decided on five poems linked to the theme of the natural world, and Hopkins's rapturous reactions to it: *God's Grandeur*, *Spring*, *The Sea and the Skylark*, *Pied Beauty* and *Hurrahing in Harvest.* I approached a singer a year or so above me, Philip Langridge, one of the most promising of the Academy's impressive group of young singers, and he immediately agreed to perform it. However, the

songs were not performed at an Academy concert, but at a separate event organised by (or for) music students from both the Academy and Royal College of Music (RCM), though at which venue I can't now recall. Philip's performance was greeted with considerable enthusiasm, with my friend John enthusiastically and vociferously applauding, and at the end two of John's *avant-garde* acquaintances, both composers at the RCM (and whom I had rather cruelly nicknamed 'the terrible twins' for some now-forgotten reason) came up to me and, amazingly, shook my hand in congratulation. Philip Langridge went on to enjoy a highly successful international career, and became one of Covent Garden's leading tenors. *[During the few weeks when I was composing these songs, John Gardner was away, so he had passed me over to his colleague Alan Bush, well-known for his support of communist East Germany. He showed great interest in my songs, giving me valuable advice and support. At one point he invited me to a political meeting at the local Town Hall, where he introduced me to Michael Tippett, who showed polite interest in my project. Bush also asked me to make a piano reduction of an opera he was writing for the Berlin Volksoper. Recently, when idly Googling my name, I was startled to discover, in an article about Bush, that my name appeared acknowledging my contribution to this piece!].*

Later on that year (1963) *God's Grandeur* was performed at a Macnaghten 'New Music' recital at the Arts Council in Pall Mall, with the tenor Kenneth Bowen accompanied by Colin Tilney. My parents travelled down from Walsall to hear my music 'live' for the first time. They must have been rather baffled by the event, so completely different to anything they could have experienced before. The event was covered by the leading music critics, with the songs receiving very encouraging reviews. The main criticism was that I had been over-ambitious attempting to match the poet's rhythmic, almost ''musical' style with my own - in effect, gilding the lily - although my musical skills were readily acknowledged. I rather took this criticism to heart at the time, because I was well aware that I had little knowledge of poetry in general and Gerard Manley Hopkins's 'sprung rhythms' in particular. On later reflection, however, I decided that, because the music represented my spontaneous response to the poems' imagery and emotions, it should be judged on those terms. In other words, would it succeed in convincingly conveying, in purely musical terms, my responses to the poems to a listener with no special knowledge of the poet's technique? I had come to realise that my approach to composition was essentially instinctual, rather than what might broadly be described as 'cerebral'; only in that way, I believed, could any personal style be evolved. Of course, I am talking in very general terms - after all, I have always been conscious of the need to create a logical formal structure, but with ideas developing naturally from, and related to, one another, particularly in my purely instrumental works. One of my earliest inspirations was Sibelius's technique of organic growth, and I have always been interested in the possibilities inherent in traditional sonata and variation forms. Needless to say, this was completely at odds with the predominant musical orthodoxy of the time, particularly strong in the BBC music department, which had accepted the twelve-note 'serialist' method as the only means by which a composer could hope to be taken seriously - which created a rather intimidating atmosphere for composers reliant on more traditional methods, me included.

Following these chamber works, I took the opportunity to turn to the orchestra. A yearly prize had been established at the Academy through the legacy of a former pupil, Eric Coates. This was for the composition of a piece of light music by an Academy pupil, with a prize of £100, a guaranteed broadcast, and the possibility of publication. I wrote a suite in four movements called *Divertimento for Small Orchestra*, in a variety of styles ranging from Prokofiev to Malcolm Arnold, and it won the 1963 competition. It was duly broadcast by the BBC Concert Orchestra, under Vilem Tauský, in

'Saturday Concert Hall' on February 29th, 1964, before a live audience. This was a pretty daunting occasion for me, as it was the first time I'd been able to experience a performance, not just of *Divertimento*, but of any of my previous orchestral efforts - and there was no way of making any alterations at this late stage if I'd made any drastic miscalculations. As it happened, the afternoon rehearsal proceeded without a substantial hitch, and I was relieved that the music sounded more or less as I had imagined it. There were a few grumbles from the orchestra - with Tauský having to remind them that it 'wasn't meant to sound like Johann Strauss'! - and the evening performance went well. After a few judicious cuts and other adjustments, the piece was eventually published a few years later.

At the end of my third year, I applied to continue the course for a further year. This was agreed, and the local authority agreed to extend my grant (those were the days!). I had already embarked on a piano concerto, with an ambitious first movement eventually stretching to about 17 minutes. With a long, strongly contrasting development section and substantial solo cadenza, I eventually decided that it could stand alone, and the piece became *Piano Concerto in One Movement*, which I entered for a Royal Philharmonic Society prize in 1964. This brought me a further £100 award, and an offer from one of the judges, the distinguished pianist Phyllis Sellick, who offered to perform it should the opportunity arise. Sadly, this didn't materialize. The concerto was put aside to await some future reappraisal, while I got down to more urgent tasks. *[When I was interviewed by a music magazine regarding this win, I apparently said that my ambition was not to hear the Concerto played at the Festival Hall, but to write a hit West End musical. Not the wisest PR remark to make!]*

1964-72: First Publications and Broadcasts - Mainly Light Orchestral

Shortly after leaving the Academy in 1964, I won another prize, promoted by the Royal Amateur Orchestral Society, with a short piece called *Dance Prelude.* I haven't been able to trace any details of the actual event at which the piece was performed, but I have established that it was broadcast from the Festival Hall during the BBC Light Music Festival, 1966. At the beginning of that year it had been published by Mozart Edition (GB) Ltd, the British arm of a German publishing company. I had been contacted by the head of the British company, Joe Cohen, who had (I think) heard a broadcast of *Divertimento,* which had entered the BBC repertoire, and invited me round to his rather unprepossessing first-floor office in Wardour St, Soho. The operation appeared to be run solely by Joe and his secretary, Helen. Mozart Edition specialised in what was then called 'light music' (now often referred to under the umbrella term 'easy listening'), and had some well-known composers in its catalogue. Many of these - such as Ronald Binge, Peter Hope and Ernest Tomlinson - had established reputations in the genre, whereas others were more associated with (for want of a better term) more 'serious' music, who also produced a few lighter pieces suitable for Mozart Edition - I suppose I fell into this latter category. Joe agreed to publish both *Divertimento* and *Dance Prelude*, and duly produced beautiful hand-written scores. My career as a composer was taking an unexpected, but not entirely unwelcome, path, because (I had come to realise) I could concentrate on developing my own style of 'light classical' music without having to bother about it being judged by whatever standards were currently fashionable - and, what is more, establish a modest reputation through a supportive publisher and (hopefully) regular broadcasts.

Joe knew the business inside-out, and he also knew the main producers in what was then the BBC Light Music Department. His main aim was to publish music that would fit the requirements of this department, which was responsible for the BBC Concert Orchestra, the London Studio Strings, and a

number of similar regional ensembles. At that time, the BBC programmed a great deal of light orchestral music, and maintained a considerable number of orchestras to perform it. It also ran a Repertoire Rehearsal Scheme, whereby light orchestral pieces, submitted by publishers or composers, could be rehearsed and, if approved, accepted into the BBC repertoire. It was obviously one of Joe's main tasks to find suitable music for this purpose, and find and encourage composers to supply it. The benefit for both composer and publisher was that royalties from regular broadcasts would be much more rewarding than relying on any other source of income - but the downside for the composer was that rejection of a piece by the BBC meant no contract from Joe.

Fortunately, I possessed the necessary knack of writing attractive tunes out of which I was able to construct competently orchestrated miniatures. However, although I enjoyed writing in this genre (and hearing the end results well realised by professionals), I had always had a dislike of the term 'light music', associating it (perhaps unfairly) with schmaltzy multiple-divided strings and added-6th chords. I therefore tried to give my music more of a muscular and energetic character, with rhythms and counterpoint that might hopefully appeal to both the casual listener and one with perhaps a more discriminating ear. In addition, I decided that the best way to avoid being pigeon-holed as a 'light music composer' was to adopt an alias for my Mozart Edition output, 'Leo Norman', combining my old nickname with my middle one. This involved me in a lengthy, rather heated (if studiously polite) correspondence with Joe, who was trying to promote 'David Lyon', didn't want the confusion of a name change mid-stream, and thought the idea would be counterproductive anyway. However, I stuck to my guns, with the result that most of my pieces published by M.Ed. were by Leo Norman. I later had second thoughts: in 1978 my *Fairytale Suite* was published under David Lyon. By that time, Joe had sadly died, and the business was being managed by the very able Helen (Frankel). I subsequently managed to re-assign the rest of the 'Leo Norman' pieces to their "onlie begetter".

[*During this period Kate and I were married, and we rented a small top-floor flat on the corner of Petty France and Buckingham Gate, Westminster. Glamorous though that may sound, it was anything but - the bedroom looked out at a blank wall, and opening the window onto the well let in the strong odours from the extractor fan of the cafe on the ground floor. Still, it was conveniently placed, close to Kate's work, and I took a part-time job as a Lecturer in Liberal Studies at South East London Technical College in Lewisham - although I possessed no qualifications for the job at all. It entailed discussing, with the mostly part-time or day-release students, subjects like current affairs, politics, music, art and so on. I was left more-or-less to my own devices, and I found it interesting and rewarding (when I knew what I was talking about) and challenging and rather stressful (when I didn't). However, in 1966 Kate got a new job lecturing at the recently-opened Bath University, and we moved out of London into a completely different world, a small rural hamlet near Bath.]*

Between 1964 and 1966, while still living in London, I wrote a series of chamber works, including *Partita for Solo Horn* and *Little Suite for Brass Trio*, both of which were soon published. The *Partita* soon attracted the attention of Ifor James, a well-known and accomplished soloist, who began to include it in his recitals. It also became widely popular with horn players generally, and was recommended as an examination piece by the ABRSM. Ifor James particularly enjoyed playing the *Hornpipe* movement, which employed muted effects, turning it into a 'drunken sailor' dance. He then asked me to write a more ambitious piece for him, which I did with *Variations for Horn and Piano*. Sadly, I cannot find any details of his subsequent performances of the piece, though I have a distinct memory of a performance in about 1978 in Bath, which I assume must have been Ifor James,

accompanied by John McCabe. However, I do have details of a 1966 performance at an SPNM recital by John Bibson and Susan Bradshaw, which was well reviewed in the national press.

Once we had moved to Wiltshire, I concentrated mainly on writing pieces aimed at the requirements of Mozart Edition and the BBC. Joe gave me some general guidelines about what was required, bearing in mind the limited resources of the smaller regional orchestras, so I had to restrict my instrumentation to 2 Flutes, 1 Oboe, 2 Clarinets, 1 Bassoon, 2 Horns, 2 Trumpets, 2 Trombones; Timps, plus 1 or 2 extra percussion; and Strings. Any additional instruments must either be optional, or cued in on another instrument. I found that keeping within these limits, though certainly a necessary discipline, gradually became an irritating impediment, and on one occasion I took the chance (in my *Burlesque* overture) to deliberately use a large orchestra, with double woodwind, 4 horns, 3 trombones, tuba, extended percussion (including xylophone) and harp, knowing that at least the BBC Concert Orchestra could muster these forces (I must have submitted the piece directly, as I can't imagine Joe would have agreed to!). In the event, they agreed to rehearse it, which they did well enough. I was pleased on the whole, though it needed a few modifications. However, it was subsequently rejected, on curiously unconvincing grounds - or so it seemed to me at the time. It remains one of the works that I then put aside, awaiting possible re-evaluation. Similarly, a *Concertino for Strings* and another work for string orchestra, a three-movement *Pot Pourri*, were rehearsed, but not accepted. However, the second movement, *Intermezzo*, was later re-submitted, and published. *[At this time, as a necessary addition to my income from royalties and commissions, I took on a lot of music copying work - an utterly tedious occupation, but one I could easily undertake at home combined with my composing duties. Also, in the early '70s, I joined a small Bath jazz-cum-dance outfit, playing regularly at weddings and general social occasions. A little later, I also became a regular member of a rather curious group run by the trumpeter Bob Mickleburgh, who had much earlier been a member of the Temperance Seven and run his own band called The Bobcats. Like these groups, his present band was a hybrid mix of traditional jazz and a carefully artificial pastiche of 1920s dance music, a style that, at the time, had become widely popular. It was all rather fun, and we performed regularly at a pub in Bath, The Bell in Walcot Street, to an appreciative young audience.*

Most of the remaining light music miniatures written between 1967 to 1972 entered the BBC repertoire (and Mozart Edition catalogue), including *Overture to a Comic Opera*, *Rondoletta*, *Country Lanes*, *Short Suite for Strings*, *Adagio Serioso* and the overture *Joie de Vivre*, the latter winning a Light Music Society prize. The main exception was *Waltz for Woodwind* which, though written for orchestra, laid particular emphasis on the wind section. This was rehearsed, but rejected, mainly on the grounds that the title was misleading (Joe felt the same!). Some years later I arranged it for wind-band under the title (suggested by Philip Lane) of *The Waltzing Marionette* - which later still became re-arranged for orchestra and (eventually) published - and recorded - by Mozart Edition. Another, more substantial, piece from those years was *Three Dances for Orchestra.* There were originally four dances, all thematically inter-related, but the fourth (and longest) was the most obviously derived from the first. I have no record (or memory) of whether these ever received a BBC rehearsal, and they have remained unpublished. However, some years later I decided that the fourth movement should be treated as a separate piece, but its title and final form were not finally decided until a few years later, when it eventually became *Ballet for Orchestra.* This was included on my 1998 Marco Polo disc, and a few years later the *Three Dances* were recorded for a compilation CD, conducted by Barry Wordsworth.

1974-75: Changing Direction with a Youth Opera - ABRSM Commission

Eventually, with BBC cost-cutting, the Repertoire Rehearsal Scheme was discontinued, and a number of regional orchestras and ensembles, which had been the main outlets for light classical music, were disbanded. It meant I needed to briefly turn my attention away from purely orchestral music and concentrate on other genres, initially returning to chamber music with a *Trio Violin, Horn and Piano,* written in response to an International Composers' Competition promoted by the Stroud Music Festival. Although not performed, it was a highly commended runner-up. This was followed, however, by an important and significant step in a new direction. In 1974 I received a call from David Lord, who had been a fellow student at the Academy, and who was building a notable reputation as a composer. David had been approached by the Coventry Schools' Music Association for a youth opera, but he was busily engaged on another project. Would I be interested in taking on the commission? I naturally welcomed this new opportunity, and luckily Coventry readily agreed. My first task was to come up with a suitable subject, then find a librettist who could turn it into a viable project. I happened to mention this to a fellow musician, Ted Haycroft, who was head of a local primary school. He immediately came up with the idea of adapting the medieval Mystery Play *Everyman* for contemporary audiences. Furthermore, he offered to provide a libretto.

We agreed that the specifically Christian emphasis of the original should be replaced by a more general moral message, without discarding the religious imagery of Heaven and Hell - one's ultimate fate depending on moral choices made during one's lifetime. Ted produced an outline of the plot, together with a sample of lyrics, which convinced me that we could successfully work together. The result was a semi-operatic musical, employing a large cast of singer/dancers and around eight principals, plus youth orchestra, lasting about an hour without an interval. It was presented over three nights in Coventry in 1975 to enthusiastic local press reviews. The performers apparently loved the piece, and it was well sung and produced - my only reservation being the tendency towards occasional self-indulgence by some of the cast, distorting the characterisation, but that didn't seem to mar the audience's enjoyment. For me, the experience was confirmation that I could produce dramatically effective music working in collaboration with a sympathetic librettist - and, what is more, successfully engage an audience. This conviction would be further strengthened in future projects.

Also around that time I received a commission from the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music for ten short pieces - two, each of different grades, for oboe, clarinet, horn, trumpet and trombone - to be included in their 'New Music for Wind' catalogue. I duly submitted the pieces, of which eight were selected for publication. One of those, *Almost a Waltz* for clarinet (so called because of the occasional insertion of a 2/4 bar interrupting the regular waltz rhythm) became a widely popular Grade 5 piece, and among clarinettists my name apparently became synonymous with it! Like *Partita for Solo Horn* it is still in print, and performances of both regularly pop up on YouTube.

I then ventured (again) into the light orchestral world, with *Fantasia on a Nursery Song,* a set of variations on Nick Nack Padiwack. Each variation, or link between them, contained allusions to a diverse range of composers, from Rossini, through Brahms, Arthur Benjamin, Mahler, Nielsen, Richard Strauss and Brahms to Bartók and Stravinsky - some of which (such as Nielsen and Mahler) are brief and pretty obscure. In fact, the piece is rather self-indulgent, if effective! It was broadcast several times, won an Ivor Novello award in 1976, and was eventually published by Goodmusic.

1976-78: Milton Keynes Prize and Resultant Commissions - Back to Academia

1976 marked an even more significant development. Milton Keynes Development Corporation announced a competition for a piece for junior choirs and orchestra, with wind soloists. Although I had written nothing of this nature before, I had the idea of setting Edward Lear's *The Dong with the Luminous Nose*. It seemed to offer ample opportunity for employing, and contrasting, the various forces involved, and the result seemed to impress the judges for the same reason: I won the award. At the performance in 1977 I met the director of Milton Keynes February Festival, Teresa Collard, and the conductor Hilary Davan Wetton, who had also been one of the competition judges. Both Teresa and Hilary were to play important roles in the next stage of my career.

Before that, however, I was involved in two projects with the children of Ted Haycroft's school, Colerne Primary, in Wiltshire. The children had adapted Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Quee*n as a play, for which they had written a series of song lyrics, and they asked me to set these to music. This proved a very rewarding exercise, as the sometimes irregular metre of the verses required a flexible approach to the melodic lines. I used a small instrumental group, with myself on piano, and the venture was a great success. In the same year (1976) I entered another competition, this time for the National School Brass Band Association Festival, with a piece called *Rhapsodic Prelude,* with which I won third prize. At the performance in Central Hall, Westminster, I met one of the other finalists, Philip Lane, who became a great friend. He was building a notable reputation as a (mainly) light music composer and arranger - and later an important record producer. (It was in this capacity that, some twenty years later, he supervised the recording of my *Short Suite for Strings* - the first of many such collaborations). *Rhapsodic Prelude* was subsequently published by R.Smith (now Chester), and was one of the test pieces for the 1984 National Brass Band Finals at the Albert Hall.

During 1976 we moved some 20 miles north to Wotton under Edge, a small town on the western edge of the Cotswolds, which marked the start of a particularly busy period. In 1977 I wrote a *Suite for Percussion* for the Cheltenham-based Diggory Seacombe Ensemble, and a further collaboration with Colerne Primary School for their production of *The Fish and the Ring.* A further school commission came from Crondall School in Hampshire, who were planning a musical to celebrate their centenary. A script and song lyrics had been written by my friend (and Crondall parent) Michael Carver, for which I provided the music, and *Centenary Gold* was produced with great success. There were also two further, more substantial, orchestral commissions. As a result of the success of *The Dong*, the Milton Keynes February Festival asked me to write a piece for horn and string orchestra for the 1978 festival. The *Concerto for Horn and Strings* was premiered by the Milton Keynes Chamber Orchestra under their conductor Hilary Davan Wetton, with the soloist Peter Clack. (A few years later it received a repeat performance, this time with Richard Watkins as soloist). The second major commission was from Bath College of Higher Education (which later became Bath Spa University). The resultant *Variations for Orchestra* was the most ambitious large-scale work I had yet produced, and it was based on a twelve-tone row (actually a theme using all 12 semitones - there was nothing remotely 'atonal' about the piece!). The performance, by the College Orchestra in Bath Abbey, was not a great success, for a number of reasons. Quite apart from any shortcomings on my part, I realised that the piece probably required a more virtuosic ensemble to bring it off. It is also possible that the stylistically rather conservative nature of the piece may not have aroused much sympathy with the youthful performers - though I do not intend that as a criticism in any way. I can't remember what the audience reaction was, but they may have been puzzled by the programme notes, which had ascribed my careful

analysis of the piece to the following work, Elgar's *Enigma Variations*! Whatever the reason, I have not attempted to revive the work - so far!

Later that year, I was put in touch with a local poet, Wes Magee. I had been looking for someone with whom I could work to enter a piece for a BBC competition. This required (as I recall) a piece for junior choir, narrator and small ensemble, suitable for their schools' broadcasts. Wes came up with the idea of adapting a local folk legend, associated with (I think) Cam Long Down, giving it the title *Simon's Magic Mountain*. He produced seven lyrics, interspersed with narration, which I set to music with an instrumental prelude. I thought the piece couldn't fail to win - it ticked all the boxes, with an ingenious story, lovely lyrics and catchy and memorable tunes (or so I thought). But it was not to be. However, it was performed by the Wessex Junior Choir under Michael Dawney in 1981, and has since received successful performances, in an alternative semi-dramatised version, in a number of local schools.

In 1978 I decided to make an orchestral arrangement of the music I had written for *The Snow Queen.* I fashioned six of the songs into a *Fairytale Suite,* one of my most successful light orchestral works, which was published, received several broadcasts, and, in time, a fine recording. I followed that with a short chamber music piece, commissioned by the local Berkeley Wind Quintet, though unfortunately I have no record of any subsequent performance. Finally in that year, a second commission arrived from Teresa Collard for the Milton Keynes Festival. She and Hilary Davan Wetton wanted a piece for orchestra with opportunities for audience participation, to present in their series of schools' concerts. These were intended to have an educational basis through introducing children to live orchestral music in an entertaining, rather than didactic, manner, with the young audience playing an active role - and it was left up to me to devise a way of doing this. I hit on the idea of dividing the audience into two imaginary teams of football supporters 'Rovers' and 'United', and providing them with individual team 'chants', which they would learn in a preliminary rehearsal. These chants took a basic melodic form, and formed the basis for a series of energetic variations representing the teams in action. At the climax of each variation, a cymbal crash and football rattle marked the scoring of a goal, followed by the chant of the appropriate scoring team, in which the 'supporters' enthusiastically joined. I gave it the title *Game: Football Variations for Audience and Orchestra,* and it proved enormously effective at engaging the children, but I was faced with the problem of how to end the match - whether in a draw, or a winning team. There were differences of opinion among the production team as to whether providing a winner would cause too much disappointment to the losing team, whereas having a draw would just be an anti-climax all round. I can't now remember how that first performance was resolved, but over the course of the next few years, during which the piece received several more performances, a variety of solutions were experimented with - mainly how the winning team would be determined. Eventually, it was decided to end with the final whistle, followed by a 'penalty shoot-out': the two teams would first sing their chants, followed by the final goal. The conductor, having decided which team had won by how well they had sung, would then play their chant, before a vigorous Coda. This seemed to satisfy all concerned, and the piece was thereafter performed many times. It was also taken up by the Classical Road Show, based in Guildford, of which Hilary Davan Wetton, was also music director. It was (and still is) run by Carol Leighton with a specifically educational purpose, specialising in audience-participation events. It also attracted the attention of Alasdair Malloy, the chief percussionist of the BBC Concert Orchestra, who also presented a series of concerts for children under a variety of themes, including sport. *Game* suited this theme perfectly, so it featured regularly in his concerts, which were presented all over the country involving most of the well-known symphony

orchestras. At one point, he took his venture to the far east, with *Game* being performed in China, Hong Kong and Malaysia.

[Having, rather unwisely, avoided sitting any formal qualifications, such as LRAM, when I was at the Academy, having reckoned they would be of little use to me (I saw my future as a composer or jazz pianist, and certainly not a teacher), I gradually came to realise that this presented a serious obstacle. I developed an interest in adult education, not in a seriously academic role, but rather in a missionary sense, 'spreading the good word' about the joys of music among those willing and interested to learn more. I also felt - probably quite unnecessarily - that I lacked certain technical skills necessary for the efficient and professional execution of my craft. I therefore decided to enrol, as a mature student, on a three-year music degree course at Bristol University. At the end of my first year, in 1979, Kate and I divorced, and I bought a small terraced house in Totterdown, which was then a rather down-market (but now fashionable) district, conveniently near Bristol city centre].

1979-81: An English Mass - Battle of Trafalgar

Soon after my move to Bristol in 1979, my next commission arrived from the Milton Keynes Festival, this time for an *English Mass,* for Chorus, Soloists, Organ and Percussion. This was a big step in a completely new and (for me) unfamiliar direction, but I found the project an exciting challenge. I acquired the necessary text, and found myself unexpectedly inspired by the poetic imagery. I received enormous help from one of my university tutors, Nigel Davison, who carefully annotated the organ part. The piece was premiered at Dunstable Priory, as part of the 1980 Milton Keynes February Festival, by the Danesborough Chorus and Soloists under Ian Smith. Although the chorus found it a challenging piece (particularly the elaborately fugal Credo), they enjoyed singing it, and a few years later gave a repeat performance. In the meantime, I'd simplified the fugue somewhat, and since then I've made further amendments, and hope that further opportunities for performances will arise. Also, in 1980, I was busy preparing for my degree finals. This required a dissertation (I chose *The Symphonies and Concertos of Franz Berwald,* whose music had long interested me), plus three original compositions. For a chamber work I wrote *Duologue for Violin and Piano*, a single movement roughly in sonata form, which was performed before the assembled music students, who I suspect found its idiom quaintly old-fashioned, plus a short instantly-forgettable piece for female chorus. For an orchestral piece, I took the opportunity for a comprehensive reassessment, re-orchestration and lengthening of the 1972 piece mentioned earlier, which I finally called *Ballet for Orchestra.* My other university tutor was the composer Derek Bourgeois, who was also the conductor of the Bristol-based Stanshawe brass band. He offered to rehearse *Rhapsodic Prelude* with the band, and went on to include it in a BBC broadcast, together with his own *Concerto Grosso*. It was an excellent performance, and included an important and very effective cut, which I have always rather regretted not including in the published score.

[After my move to Bristol in 1979, I set about establishing myself on the local jazz scene. I soon found plenty of opportunities, ranging from solo and trio gigs (piano, bass and drums), to working in a wide variety of trad, mainstream and modern jazz groups. I also found regular work as a solo pianist in various restaurants and hotels. Eventually, I formed my own piano trio, working with a very talented local singer, Sue Kibbey, which turned out to be the most satisfying creative collaboration in my relatively short jazz career.]

In 1980 the second audience-participation piece was required by Milton Keynes for their 1981 Festival, this time a musical game called *Treasure Hunt,* devised by Teresa Collard. It was the first of a number of similar 'Audience Adventures' on which we collaborated. As far as I can recall, it consisted of a large board on which were displayed various locations around the borough, for which Teresa had supplied suitable songs. The audience, in two teams, had to compete with each other in a race to land on a secret 'treasure', with a narrated commentary. I supplied the required orchestral score, and our narrator was Richard Baker, who was then not only a BBC newsreader, but a well-known classical music enthusiast. I can't recall exactly how the game worked, but the enthusiastic response was enough to convince us that the format was worth developing for future events. That was followed by another Milton Keynes commission (it felt as if I was becoming their 'in-house' composer!) for a semi-dramatised re-enactment of *The Battle of Trafalgar* for Narrator, Orchestra and Audience, plus a small cast including Hardy and other lesser speaking parts, chorus, dancers, and assorted sailors. Devised and written by Teresa, who had become something of an authority on Nelson, it contained a mixture of traditional and original sea songs (learnt in advance by the school audience, who were divided into two 'ships' crews), with a fairly elaborate orchestral accompaniment. It was presented in February 1982, with the opera singer Forbes Robinson as Narrator/Nelson. As usual, the Milton Keynes Chamber Orchestra was conducted by Hilary, and Teresa directed the show. It was a great success, with the final scene, Nelson's coffin slowly paraded round the hall to funereal music, reducing Forbes Robinson to tears! It proved to be the most enduring of my Milton Keynes collaborations, with the Classical Road Show also staging it a number of times over the following years. It was also televised by Anglia TV shortly afterwards, filmed in Nelson's parish church, Burnham Thorpe in Norfolk, with Brian Cant as Nelson. In 2005, to mark the bicentenary of Nelson's death at Trafalgar, Classical Road Show arranged productions at the Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Royal Naval College in Greenwich, with David Leonard as Nelson (David has taken the part to heart, and has been our reliable Nelson now for many years). Like every such work, it has been subject over subsequent productions to many refinements, with a number of adjustments to ease the flow of the dramatic action. With regard to the music, the Milton Keynes productions have involved the resident chamber orchestra, the Classical Road Show used the Guildford Philharmonic, and in more recent years, with productions moved to the Cadogan Hall in London, they have employed the Royal Philharmonic, all under the direction of Hilary. The 1982 February Festival also featured the first public performance of *Ballet for Orchestra,* with the BBC Concert Orchestra conducted by Lionel Friend.

1981-84: A New Challenge / Further Commissions and a Competition

In 1981 I had also received a very different commission, this time from the Chamber Music for Schools Competition Trust. They required a set of variations on a theme from Handel's 'St Cecilia Ode' for mixed chamber ensembles, as an optional test-piece for the nationwide competition. This turned out to be the most challenging task yet - not because of any problem with composing the music, but with the very specific conditions imposed on the instrumentation. There were three basic chamber groupings, String Quartet, Piano Trio and Wind Quintet, from which schools could choose to enter the competition, though they could choose more than one. However, the initial Overture had to be scored so that it could be played by each group separately, before their allotted set of variations, and the Finale was to be scored for a full ensemble, plus optional brass and percussion. In addition, the Piano Trio needed to be scored so that the Violin part could alternatively be played by the flute, oboe or clarinet, and the Cello part by the bassoon. Similarly, the Wind Quintet had options for the Oboe part of flute or clarinet, and for the Horn part, clarinet or bassoon. All these conditions seriously hampered

my creative imagination - though in theory they should perhaps have stimulated it. When I attended the finals in 1982 at St John's, Smith Square, those groups who had chosen the Variations seemed to prefer the Piano Trio (in various scorings), which I felt was the least satisfactory, and I was disappointed not to hear a Quartet or Quintet. I sat on the judging panel surrounded by distinguished musicians who obviously knew the chamber repertoire far better than I did, and for the first time felt like an amateur among professionals. One reads all the time about well-respected and experienced actors or performers who have a residual fear of being eventually 'found out' or exposed as some sort of impostor. That was exactly how I felt on that panel! The piece continued to be used by the competition organisers for several years before being dropped, and I have not bothered with the piece since - though it might be interesting to look again at some of the material.

[After gaining my degree in 1981, I obtained a part-time post in Bristol University's Extra Mural Department, lecturing on various topics such as History of Jazz *and* The American Symphony, *which I also briefly delivered for the Workers Education Association. However*, *researching and preparing the tapes took a great deal of time, and although I enjoyed the lectures, the financial rewards were hardly commensurate. After a few years, I decided that my time could be more profitably spent.]*

After the Chamber Music competition, it was a relief to turn to another very different commission, this time for the 1983 Farnham Festival. This was a piece for junior string orchestra, which I should have approached with extreme caution. Not having learnt a string instrument, or having any experience of young string players, I tried to use my judgment as to what was technically appropriate and what was not. I set about writing *A Farnham Suite* with a simple theme over a repetitive accompaniment, but the trick was to keep that relative simplicity throughout while maintaining musical interest. I made the fatal mistake of allowing the music to stray down more adventurous paths, both technically and harmonically - in other words, following my natural creative impulses rather than reining them in. A further four movements followed, each one moving further away from what I should have realised to be the capabilities of a junior orchestra. The actual performance made things worse. I hadn't attended any rehearsal, which would at least have given me the chance to advise on tempo, and in the event the conductor (as I hazily remember) raced away with the first movement at least fifty per cent faster than the marked tempo, with the result that the movement quickly descended into incoherence - the only saving grace being that they bravely kept going and finished together! The remaining four movements managed the same feat - all praise be to the young performers, but the piece received a less than enthusiastic reception. However, I was surprised to read a review in the local paper, which praised the performers for rising to the challenges of the piece, 'rich with melody'. This made me realise how difficult it can be to judge the impression a new piece can make on an objective listener, whether surprisingly positive or frustratingly negative. When some 15 years later I was preparing to record the piece (having dropped the 'for junior strings' appellation), I reduced it to four movements, though at the session the orchestra had time only to record three. However, they kindly did a quick run-through of the fourth movement, which was taped separately. Hearing it played by a professional orchestra, I soon realised my folly at having expected such a comparatively complex work to be suitable for junior strings, however accomplished. One lives, as they say, and learns.

In 1983, a competition was launched for a new piece for the St Paul's Schools' Chamber Orchestra (pupils from both the boys' and girls' schools), for which I wrote a *Concerto for Chamber Orchestra*. The first movement, with its pounding rhythms and terse thematic material, was strongly influenced

by Tippett's 2nd Symphony, and the more leisurely and lyrical second movement had echoes of Mahler. It won joint 1st Prize, together with a work by Rory Boyle, and both pieces were premiered at Mercers' Hall, in the City of London, conducted by Hilary Davan Wetton, who by that time had become the Director of Music at St Paul's Girls' School. Rory's piece was in a much more contemporary idiom than mine, and received, I thought, a much more assured performance. Mine was perhaps in a more allusive style, particularly the second movement, which the performers may have found difficult to capture. The pieces received a further performance at St John's, Smith Square. I didn't come across any press reviews, and I really had no idea how the Concerto came across. It has remained one of that growing number of my works on the 'worth taking another look' list.

1984-85

The following year proved rather busy, with a further four commissions. A new audience-participation 'Adventure' was required for the 1985 M.K. February Festival, an elaboration by Teresa of *Treasure Hunt.* This time it would be called *Land's End to John O'Groats,* with the audience, divided as before into two teams, engaged in a race across the country, via a variety of towns and locations suitable for an appropriate song - either traditional or original. A large board of numbered squares had been prepared, and a 'dice' was thrown, with team 'counters' moving round the board, alighting on various venues as they worked their way up to the finish. Exactly how this worked I can't now recall, but it worked like a charm. Johnny Morris was engaged as Narrator, and the M.K. Chamber Orchestra under HDW would accompany. I was asked to visit Johnny at his home near Hungerford in Berkshire, to go through the script and explain the set-up. When Johnny discovered that Bristol was one of the venues, he immediately suggested a song about Brunel, spontaneously improvising both lyric and music: 'Isam, Isam, Isam Brunel / Isam, Isam isn't very well / Isam in his railway Kingdom / Isambard Kingdom Brunel'. I immediately incorporated this ingenious (if rather random) little ditty into the score. *[Johnny had become a well-known radio personality in the '50s and '60s, with his rather whimsical travel monologues. He later became a household name with a children's TV show called Animal Magic, in which film was shown of various animals at Bristol Zoo for which he provided humorous 'voices'. When I met him, the programme had been scrapped, the BBC apparently having tired of this kind of 'anthropomorphism' - as he told me with some disgust!]* Around the same time, I wrote a short piece for brass band called *God's Wonderful Railway,* celebrating the 150th Anniversary of Brunel's Great Western Railway - our first house in Wiltshire had been close to the famous Box tunnel. It received a few performances by the Aldbourne Band in Swindon, and was published by Fulcrum.

I was also commissioned to provide a theme tune for a children's music quiz on BBC South West, called *Melody Makers*. I arranged it in four different versions for each of four episodes, each featuring distinguished soloists: Guitar (Carlos Bonell), Harp (Sioned Williams), Flute (Richard McNicol) and Violin (Ralph Holmes), the flute and violin being accompanied on piano by David Cawthra. I later adapted the melody for the third movement of my *Recorder Concertino.* During that year I was also contacted (presumably in response to a demo I had submitted) to provide - somewhat bizarrely - a special arrangement of Andrew Lloyd Webber's well-known theme music for LWT's South Bank Show, for it's annual Arts Review. This was to be played 'live' by the London Sinfonietta in my own 'interpretation' of Lloyd Webber's Paganini variations. I was provided with the usual instructions, though I wasn't told that the opening bars of my piece would need to be heard against audience applause. I had begun with a quiet fugato passage on the lower strings, with the cameras focused on the cellos, but unfortunately (on the broadcast) this was completely inaudible. Only after the rest of

the band had joined in did my arrangement emerge, and I've always wondered what Lloyd Webber (who was in the studio audience) thought of this curious treatment of his music. However, the producer was apparently pleased with the result, and he asked me to provide some atmospheric 'spooky' music for use by a music library. It was to be scored for a small chamber ensemble, and was given the title *The Ice Dungeon.* It was soon apparent that it had found favour with Japanese television, from whom royalties have sporadically appeared ever since.

The fourth commission was again very different, this time from Guildford Choral Society, for an ambitious 'Adventure' for Narrator/Singer, Chorus, Audience and Orchestra. The project was specifically meant to appeal to a young audience, who would learn certain songs beforehand and join in with the performance. The original story, called *Fleetfoot the Fox,* was written by a local school teacher, Ruth Milan, who also provided the charming lyrics. It told of a young fox who gradually learnt to avoid being caught by the hunt, and by 'out-foxing' the hounds became the hero of the forest. Hilary conducted the performance (in February 1985 at Guildford Civic Hall) with the M.K. Chamber Orchestra, with Peter Purves, of 'Blue Peter' fame, as Narrator. The piece was so successful it was repeated at the society's next Christmas concert.

[1984 saw me married for the second time, to Liz, who was head of music in a local school. We moved to Bishopston in Bristol, where we raised our two children. I did a small amount of instrumental teaching, and for a couple of years was 'Head of Choral Music' at a small independent girls' school, which was an interesting experience. For a time we also ran a small business from home, which continued until Liz's career took us out of Bristol in 1993]

Soon after the *Fleetfoot the Fox* performances, I heard again from Teresa Collard. She suggested that we modify *Land's End to John O'Groats* and turn it into a straightforward *Snakes and Ladders* game, with a proper painted S and L board, a modified list of towns, and a smaller instrumental ensemble. This would make it a much more practical and appealing project to present to event promoters in different locations. It was performed at the MK Festival in February 1986, with great success. Johnny Morris proved ideal as Narrator, and when the Classical Road Show also presented the show, they too made use of Johnny's skills. In 1987 we took both *Battle of Trafalgar* and *Snakes and Ladders* to the Bristol Children's Festival, where they were presented in tandem at three schools, plus the Victoria Rooms (where *Trafalgar* was performed twice). All the shows were narrated by Bristol's pantomime stalwart Chris Harris, who also played Nelson.

1988-91: Thurrock - Northampton - The Final Milton Keynes 'Adventure'

In 1988 a commission arrived from the Thurrock Armada Initiative. They required a short piece for children's choir and brass band, to a rousing text provided by Brian Buttle, celebrating the tercentenary of the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. The children worked hard at mastering my rather tricky musical setting, but unfortunately on the great day things didn't quite go to plan. It took place in the open air, but the choir, in competition with the brass band, was not provided with amplification, and their brave efforts went largely to waste. In addition, the band missed their entry cue. However, I later received a charming letter from the choir's conductor, apologising for the general disappointment over the performance, but assuring me that when the rehearsal had been broadcast on local radio, the choir sounded fine. Apparently the children were also prevented from singing their other carefully prepared pieces because of a mix-up with the schedule. The good news was that they

planned to perform all the Pageant music again in a special (indoor!) concert, so I hope that all went well in the end.

My next commission, in 1989, was much more substantial, to celebrate the 800th anniversary of Northampton's Royal Charter. This large-scale, semi-dramatised piece, for Narrator/Singer, Chorus, Soloists, Audience and Ensemble, had a text by Teresa Collard and lyrics by Ed Baines, and was called *Town and County - a Charter Extravaganza.* Our Narrator was our regular 'Lord Nelson', David Leonard, and the County Music School Ensemble was conducted by Malcolm Tyler. The performance, at Derngate, Northampton, was so successful that it was repeated (in a slightly abridged form) at the Albert Hall in 1992. The elaborate production used a choir of 700 children from local schools, with Fiona Palmer as soprano soloists. As with our previous similar works, the audience learnt the songs in advance at school, and rehearsed them in the hall prior to the performance. Ed Baines, who at that time was head teacher at Montagu School, Kettering, subsequently asked me to write two part-songs for his school choir, for which he supplied the words. I set *A Dream* and *Song of the Travellers* for SSAA and piano, which, though I didn't get the opportunity to hear them, received successful performances by the choir. Around this time I also wrote an 'ecological anthem' called *We Are One*, for SA or SATB, to my own text. As with Paul McCartney's *Yesterday,* the first bars of the melody and accompanying lyric arrived simultaneously in a dream. Liz was teaching at a Bristol girls' school at the time, and she gave the piece a very successful (and rather emotional) performance with the school choir at a concert marking the school's closure.

1991 marked my final collaboration with Teresa Collard and the Milton Keynes organisation. Like the Northampton *Charter Extravaganza*, it was a large-scale celebratory piece called *Milton Keynes in Music,* commissioned by Milton Keynes Development Corporation and M.K. Foundation, featuring Narrators, Chorus, Audience and Ensemble, with libretto by Teresa (who also produced) and lyrics again by Ed Baines. This time it called for two Narrators (David Leonard and Ben Hennessey), Langlands School Choir and M.K. Chamber Ensemble conducted by Hilary Davan Wetton. Strangely enough, although this was the most recent show of this type, when I was compiling a chronological list of my compositions I could remember almost nothing of this one - apart from the title. I had to search among my archive boxes in the attic for the score, just to remind myself of the music, although the subject - a history of M.K. and the surrounding area through music - was pretty self-evident. However, the first number that I came across had a melody virtually identical to one in *Town and County*, though whether this larceny was deliberate or not I can't be certain. Perhaps I was just running out of ideas, and didn't want the (rather good) Northampton one to go to waste. That is the drawback with many of these 'community' works written for specific occasions - repeat performances are rare, and they are often unsuitable for wider use. This is less likely to apply to purely instrumental or choral works, of course, especially if they are of high quality. If the melodic material is suitably attractive, a composer can always extend its life by adapting it for other purposes, as I did by turning children's songs into an orchestral *Fairytale Suite,* or re-purposing an old TV theme tune for my *Recorder Concertino.*

1993-99: Assorted Vocal Music - Albert's Bridge - 60th Birthday CD

After *Milton Keynes in Music,* I started to move away from children's 'Adventures'. In 1993 I won First Prize in a competition promoted by the English Poetry and Song Society for the bicentenary of the poet John Clare. I entered a setting of Clare's *Sunrise in Summer*, which was duly performed at Bristol Music Club by the baritone Niall Hosking with Paul Hancock on piano. This was my first such piece

since *God's Grandeur* written thirty years previously, and once again I was surprised that, given what I have always thought of as my fairly indifferent reaction to much of poetry, I could be sufficiently inspired to produce what was obviously a convincing and respected musical setting.

[In 1993 we moved out of Bristol to Shaftesbury in Dorset, where Liz had secured a new job. I continued some instrumental teaching, but jazz work became less frequent as I had moved further away from regular work in Bristol. Instead I concentrated on solo work in hotels and restaurants, eventually securing regular engagements at Longleat Centre Parcs. However, there was growing competition from younger musicians with a more up-to-date repertoire, and as I approached 70 I decided to retire from live gigs.]

In 1996 I wrote a short piece for organ for one of Liz's colleagues. It was an adaptation of the *Threnod*y from *A Farnham Suite,* which I called *Cortege,* and was performed by Stephen Binnington in a lunchtime recital at the Grosvenor Chapel, Mayfair, in September 1996. Around the same time I began a brief collaboration with the poet Paul Wigmore, as a result of which I set two of his carols, *Baby Boy* and *When Mary gathered summer's yield,* for SA or SATB. I followed these with two further carols, this time supplying my own texts, *At Christmastime* and *Listen to the Bells,* both of which were subsequently published by Studio Music. Further work with Paul Wigmore led to a more substantial piece, *Music, Zest of Celebration* for SATB, which we wrote as a competition entry - it got nowhere!

Also in 1996, I was contacted by Philip Lane, who was establishing himself as a record producer. He was planning to record a CD of English string music, and, being already familiar with my work from broadcasts, suggested including my *Short Suite for Strings*. He had engaged the Royal Ballet Sinfonia and the conductor David Lloyd-Jones. I jumped at the offer, and arranged with Mozart Edition to provide the material. It was recorded in St Paul's Church, New Southgate, London and issued on the Naxos label. Shortly after this, I mentioned to Philip that I was considering marking my 60th birthday with a CD of my orchestral works, and he advised me to compile a suitable list and he would have some thoughts about costs. Finding these (just about) affordable, I asked him to go ahead with the arrangements. He again engaged David Lloyd-Jones and the RBS, and I asked Michael Thompson to be the soloist in my *Horn Concerto.* The recording was fixed for July 1997 in All Hallows' Church, Gospel Oak, and I then spent a pretty frantic few months preparing the material. David L-J came down to Dorset to go through all the scores, and made some valuable suggestions about scoring etc. The result was a highly successful production which secured some notably favourable coverage in the musical press. Although the CD was, from commercial necessity, issued on the Marco Polo label in their 'British Light Music' series, several of the pieces, particularly the *Horn Concerto* and *Ballet for Orchestra*, sat rather uncomfortably under that description. Still, I had a splendid recording, which has been broadcast by radio stations around the world.

After the CD was issued, in 1998, I received the news that I had been elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music, a generous and wholly unexpected additional birthday present.

While living in Bristol, I had met a well-known local novelist and playwright, ACH (Anthony) Smith, to see if he might be interested in a re-working of my youth opera, *The Reckoning*. He politely declined, but expressed an interest in a future collaboration should an opportunity arise. After our move to Shaftesbury, I attended a performance of Sondheim's *Into the Wood*s by Shaftesbury Community Theatre, which re-kindled my interest in the possibilities of music theatre - though I had already been

enthused by a television broadcast of *Sweeney Todd* some years earlier. I asked Anthony whether he had any ideas for a musical that we might be able to persuade the Shaftesbury ensemble to stage, and he suggested adapting a play that he had co-written with his friend Tom Stoppard called *Albert's Bridge Extended* (based on an earlier one-act radio play by Stoppard, *Albert's Bridge*), which had been performed at the Edinburgh Festival some years previously. I read through the script and immediately saw the possibilities of a musical treatment, and Anthony contacted Stoppard for his permission. Tom gave us his blessing to treat the material however we liked, and I approached David Grierson, the music director of the Shaftesbury company, with our plans. David showed great interest, and we worked on the piece, to be called simply *Albert's Bridge*, during 1998-9, with a production duly scheduled for November 1999. We were very lucky (by some process which I cannot now recall) to obtain the services of several members of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra to form the core of the small band, which helped to give a professional polish to the proceedings. The company added their acting and singing skills with committed enthusiasm, though the transverse staging (in a former chapel converted into an Arts Centre) running through the middle of the audience, didn't always help coordination with the musicians, seated in a gallery at the far end. The production received some very good reviews - and Stoppard himself came to the opening night. This gave rise to a rather hilarious incident when, arriving early and unrecognised, he was requested to help direct traffic in the car park! Also in the audience was Kate Edgar, an experienced composer and arranger, whose work I had seen and admired. She wrote me a charming letter saying how much she had enjoyed our 'fabulous piece of music theatre', and offered to help me promote it. However, I realised that there were certain elements that didn't work as intended, and I remained unconvinced that the ending, although borrowed from the original stage play, was far from satisfactory. A lot of the music needed pruning, and there were too many passages of sung dialogue, which created unnecessary difficulties for the cast. However, there was sufficient material that really did work to encourage me in my belief that I possessed a natural feel for the medium, and I resolved to explore it further. I received welcome encouragement with a letter from the Bournemouth musicians saying how much they had enjoyed the experience, hoping we could work together again.

1999-2003: Recorder Concertino - A Wiltshire Elegy - Blackbird

In 1999, while working on *Albert's Bridge,* I received a call from Philip requesting a piece for recorder and strings, for inclusion on a CD he was compiling in association with the recorder virtuoso John Turner. No commission fee would be forthcoming, but equally there would be no costs involved! I had always disliked the recorder, considering its meagre tone a poor substitute for the flute's mellifluous beauty, but I wasn't going to let that put me off. I set to work and produced a three-movement *Concertino for Recorder and Strings*, utilizing two waltz themes from *Albert's Bridge* for the second movement, and my 1984 *Melody Makers* TV theme for the third. The result turned out to be surprisingly effective - John Turner added it to his concert repertoire, and it was published ('for Recorder or Flute') together with a piano reduction by Forsyth, and the Olympia recording was eventually acquired by Naxos, guaranteeing a wider market. I followed this with an orchestral *Albert's Bridge Suite* for a local orchestra, the Dorset Philharmonic, who performed it under their conductor David John. The orchestra also had a brave stab at my early *Piano Concerto,* which I had recently retrieved from the archive and given a quick makeover. The performance, with Kenneth van Barthold, went down pretty well with the local audience, but as it was performed at (for me) an unbearably slow, and consequently lifeless, speed, the experience was less than rewarding, and I was unable to

judge whether the revival had been worthwhile or not. It would be a further fourteen years before I heard the piece again, this time in a fully revised version for the 2015 recording, of which more later.

In 2002 I was commissioned to write a piece for the Salisbury Sinfonia's 10th Anniversary. The commissioner, Ben Kerwood, was one of the orchestra's flautists, and was also a member of the Dorset Philharmonic - obviously the *Piano Concerto* hadn't damaged his faith in me! I decided to base the piece on Wiltshire folk melodies, and chose seven, around which I constructed a fanciful narrative suggested by the fact that one of these, *Turmut Hoeing*, became the Wiltshire regimental march. I linked this to the 1914-18 war, which I presented as symbolising the dying of the rural folk music tradition and its replacement by an urban, commercialised culture. The piece therefore took on an elegiac tone, and I gave it the title *A Wiltshire Elegy.* Not only was it the only time I have ever employed folk themes, but it remains my sole piece of 'programme' music, based on an imaginary narrative. Whether it succeeds or not is difficult to say, as it depends to some extent on the listener reading the narrative to understand what it's all about - but, on the other hand, one doesn't need to follow the detailed narrative behind, say, Richard Strauss's tone poems to be enthralled by them.

The following year, 2003, I had a call from Juliet Alderdice, the co-founder of Southwark Playhouse. She had heard a broadcast of my *Fairytale Suite,* and wondered if I would be interested in supplying music for a new production, *Blackbird*, by Claire Luckham *(not to be confused with the contemporaneous West End play of the same name).* As well as the text, Clair would provide song lyrics for me to set, and I would also provide incidental music for a small instrumental ensemble. As I had plenty of experience setting words in a wide variety of styles and contexts, I had no qualms about this new challenge, but Claire's lyrics were of a very different nature. Instead of a regular, structured rhythm, to which a melodic line can usually be attached with relative ease, Claire's poetic imagery and irregular, unpredictable phrasing demanded music of an equal complexity, which predictably led to difficulties for the singers. I'm not sure what Juliet was expecting, but this was very different from the easy lyricism of *Fairytale Suite!* However, the cast soon overcame this hurdle, and the result garnered some excellent reviews. The *Guardian's* Michael Billington was particularly complimentary about my score, writing that the songs *'allow us a glimpse of the characters' inner lives'*, transforming the play into *'a challenging piece of music theatre'* and elevates it into *'a beguiling chamber-opera'.* Barbara Lewis in *The Stage* reckoned the music *'masterly'*, praising the *'very nearly organic blend of words and music'*, and Sam Marlowe in *The Times* felt that the songs' *'haunting cadences and rhythmic quirkiness…..make compelling, uneasy listening'*. I was naturally very pleased with these reactions, especially when reflecting how successful my musical treatment of Claire's lyrics had obviously been in contributing to the dramatic effect. It was further confirmation that I should perhaps have concentrated on music theatre at a much earlier stage - but of course one has to take what opportunities are presented when they arise.

2007-10: Doctor Love

As it happens, the next project that presented itself was also music theatre. Following the success of *Albert's Bridge*, I was approached by a local businessman offering to commission a one-act opera for the Shaftesbury theatre. I contacted Anthony, and he suggested translating and adapting a short piece by Molière, *L'amour Médecin* as a comic opera. After receiving our benefactor's agreement, we set to work. I began the first scene with a lengthy opera-style recitative as 'Molière' himself addresses the audience, displaying comic disgust with his band of players cavorting behind him. Anthony's inventive

translation gave me plenty of scope for musical effect, and I was confident that, by following our stage directions and with the right vocal treatment, this opening scene would create the kind of intimate, conspiratorial connection with the audience that I knew would be crucial to the whole enterprise.

After a short while, our would-be commissioner dropped out, and we were left with an opening fragment of a piece to which we had both become committed. We decided to press on regardless with what gradually developed, not into a one-act comic opera, but a two-act hybrid opera-cum-musical farce, complete with chorus, dancers, arias and recitatives, for which we then had to find a stage. Eventually, we managed to gain the interest of Bristol's Tobacco Factory arts centre, which had an experienced theatre management team and a semi-resident drama ensemble. Anthony had established a reputation in Bristol with a successful series of large-scale dramatic productions, and we also had the success of *Albert* to boost our joint credentials. We engaged a professional chamber ensemble and music director, and an experienced theatre director with an established local reputation, and the piece, now called *Doctor Love*, went into rehearsal with an enthusiastic cast.

Unfortunately, it soon became apparent that, by calling the piece a 'musical farce', we had given both the director and most of the cast a misleading impression of the difficulties that lay ahead. A number of performers found my vocal writing rather too challenging, which resulted in several scenes having to be modified or cut altogether. On the other hand, several of the more accomplished singers coped admirably, but unfortunately their splendid efforts were not enough to rescue the production, which had (in my eyes) already got off to an ominous start. Although we had provided detailed stage instructions, Molière's angrily sarcastic and witty address to the audience, designed to grab their attention and draw them into his confidence, was undermined in a scene of carefully choreographed whimsy. I hadn't attended the first rehearsals, and by the time I did it was too late to change anything. Although I respect a director's special creative skills, and in spite of being reminded that, by and large, they should be allowed the space to apply these skills without any unnecessary interference, I do think there are occasions, especially when it involves the first performance of a new piece by an unfamiliar author, when the director has a responsibility to ascertain the author's particular intentions. After all, the audience will be presented with a production that they will assume reflects the author's vision, or a director's reliable interpretation of it. However, I must emphasise that I am certainly not blameless in all this. I realised early on that I had miscalculated the balance of the instrumentation by deliberately omitting a double bass, hoping that a strong enough bass line could be supplied by the cello and second keyboard. This led to a less than clear harmonic support for the singers at certain points, which only became more obvious in the actual performance. Lesson learnt, but too late!

Various friends of Anthony soon made him aware of their (less than favourable) reactions. Although I could quite understand their general disappointment, it was obvious that some of them were expecting a conventionally structured 'musical', full of hummable tunes and dance routines, which was far from our concept. They were therefore nonplussed to be faced with a largely sung-through comedy in semi-operatic style. Others complained about the lack of melody, when in fact there was plenty, even if some of it was 'melodic line' rather than 'tune'. I found much of this criticism (when it wasn't just ridiculous) was the result of confounded expectations, combined with the performance problems outlined above, and I resolved not to be affected by it - I knew that, in the right circumstances, the piece could be made to work. It had none of the structural drawbacks of *Albert*, and (for me) it was a much more satisfying piece.

With the next couple of works I returned to a much simpler format. 2008 brought a commission for a Christmas Anthem for SATB and organ, a setting of *Hear, Ye Proud and Famous Men*, by the poet Charles Williams. The gentleman who commissioned the piece intended it for his local church choir, but I have never discovered whether it received a performance. In 2010 I was asked to provide a short piece for Soprano, Recorder and Piano as an 80th birthday tribute to my friend, the composer Peter Hope. I chose a Chinese poem on the subject of retiring to the pleasures of the countryside, called *Returning to the Fields,* and was performed at the Beaminster Festival by the soprano Lesley-Jane Rogers, with John Turner on recorder and the pianist Stephen Bettaney.

2013-15: Two Further Recordings

I then spent the next few years preparing for two new recordings. In 2013 Mozart Edition ("M.Ed") got in touch to tell me that they planned to produce a CD of my music on their own label. It would obviously be music already in their catalogue, but I had to inform them that most of my M.Ed music had already been recorded (at my expense!), but I had several unpublished pieces that I really would like to see on CD. These included *A Wiltshire Elegy* and a re-orchestration of *The Waltzing Marionette.* I was also keen for a new recording of *Divertimento,* which existed in an early 1970s recording made in Germany by M.Ed for limited distribution (so I understood) among broadcasting organisations. Since then it has been available on a CD compilation, but the recording quality now sounds rather dated, though the performance itself was fine. M.Ed readily agreed to all this, but those pieces would only fill less than half the projected CD. I dug out an early orchestral suite, revised it, and called it *Three Countryside Sketches,* and looked again at an even earlier three-movement *Serenade for Strings* that seemed worth reviving. I extensively rewrote it and called it *Serenata for Strings,* and filled up the remaining CD with two short pieces written years earlier, *Polonesque* (culled from *Pot Pourr*i), and *Gavottina.* As a final cheeky filler, I also included the *Aria* from *Short Suite for Strings*, which had become quite popular. The CD was recorded in 2014 at Angel Studios, London, with Gavin Sutherland and the RBS, and subsequently published by M.Ed.

The resulting CD was (for me) rather disappointing, not helped by a rather disconcerting misprint on the CD cover, entirely due to my faulty proof-reading, with the list of movements in *Divertimento* being printed in the wrong order. There was nothing wrong with the performances, but there were a few miscalculations in my scoring that rather took the shine off the enterprise. In addition, the central *Romance* of the *Serenata for Strings* turned out to be even more lugubrious than I had feared, and the movement's construction was so obviously Mahlerian that I'm surprised I thought I could get away with it. My only excuse is that, with a looming deadline, I took the easy route and followed the material along predictable paths, rather than taking more time and exercising my imagination.

A year later, I again disinterred my 50-year-old piano concerto, and approached Philip with the idea of arranging a recording. He was planning a CD of British music, for which the concerto would be well-suited, and mentioned a possible soloist. The recording would be in the RTE studios in Dublin, with the RTE Concert Orchestra conducted by Gavin. The soloist was booked, and I got down to work preparing the score and parts. However, I feared the venture would fall through at the last minute when the soloist pulled out, and we were left with very little time to find a replacement. I think it was Philip who suggested I contact Philip Fowke, who looked at the score and recommended one of his former pupils, Alisdair Hogarth. Alisdair played through the score and immediately expressed an

interest, so disaster was averted. The result was a splendid recording that more than realised the concerto's potential.

After the recording came out, Alisdair said he would like to make a few suggestions about amending some of the piano part, and we agreed we should meet up at some point. However, I heard nothing more for several years, until I recently contacted him with an unrelated query. He immediately replied, expressing an interest in a possible live performance, after conferring on possible amendments. I replied that arranging a performance with a professional orchestra was likely to be difficult, but approaching an amateur orchestra, of which there are many excellent ones, would be more likely to succeed. At the time of writing I am in the process of making preliminary enquiries.

2016-21

I have not written any new music recently, having been engaged in revising any of my old works that I feel deserve a reassessment, a first/further performance, or at least a transfer from hand-written score to computer. This at least gives them the dignity of a professional appearance, and also allows me to listen to at least an approximation of a performance. If a piece still comes across with a certain vitality and conviction - if, whatever its style, it has a coherently argued structure to make it 'work' on its own terms - it is worth further consideration. I started the process with my student *String Quartet 1962,* and was surprised and encouraged to discover how well it has retained its youthful vigour and inventiveness, with only one short section that needed to be completely re-written. I have changed the rather optimistic title (which implies the first of a series - it remains the only one!), to *Prelude, Variations and Finale,* and remain hopeful about a further airing. I am repeating the process with the *Three Spring Songs,* and will then continue on this fascinating voyage of rediscovery.

Main Influences

As I have mentioned, Sibelius's music made a deep impression on me as a young teenager, particularly the *5th Symphony*, but also the first three and seventh - but I have never got to grips with numbers 4 or 6. I must also admit that, apart from the *Karelia Suite* and the *Violin Concerto,* I can happily live without most of his other music. I also developed an early enthusiasm for Walton, particularly his *First Symphony,* the overtures *Portsmouth Point* and *Scapino,* and the *Viola* and *Cello Concertos*. His influence on my style is most obvious in my *Joie de Vivre* overture, though by the time I wrote it in 1972 (developed from my student *Clarinet Sonata* of 1961) my music was already moving in a different direction. I had also largely lost interest in Walton's subsequent output, which struck me as an uninspired and rather predictable re-hashing of his earlier work. I had also developed an early enthusiasm for the energetic and brilliantly orchestrated music of Malcolm Arnold, who had introduced a refreshingly bracing informality into the rather staid classical-music world. However, while his *English Dances,* for instance, still (for me) retain that spirit, I quickly tired of his repetitive clichés and lost interest in his later music - and have been baffled by the more recent critical enthusiasm for his work.

Although not a noticeably direct influence on my style, the music of Mahler has held me in its grip ever since my student days. This I find rather paradoxical, because its enormously complex texture and grandiose style are in stark contrast to my own approach to composition, which, as I have already

remarked, has been largely inspired by Britten's music. However, I know that Britten was also a great admirer of Mahler, and I experience the same kind of elation listening to the final part of Britten's *Purcell Variations* (when the main theme finally makes a majestically stately reappearance against the headlong rush of the surrounding fugue) as I do during the very similar passage at the end of Mahler's *5th Symphony* - though I can't, of course, draw any meaningful conclusions from that. I find all of Mahler's symphonies endlessly fascinating, with the sole exception of number 8 - though that's possibly coloured by the fact that I had to sing in the chorus when it was performed at university, which I found an exhausting and unrewarding experience - but I have never enjoyed singing, anyway, and have never understood (though rather envy) the pleasure that so many derive from it.

As I have already remarked, Britten's approach to composition has been my main inspiration, though I find it rather difficult to describe exactly what that is, apart from his ability to transform simple material, through a process of gradual elaboration, into a much more complex and expressive structure. Of course, that is more-or-less the same process that drew me to Sibelius, but I could obviously respond more directly to Britten's contemporary language. In a similar, if much broader sense, my approach to composition has its basis in Beethoven - not, of course, in direct style, but in his approach to structure, thematic extension and development, and general expansion of the classical sonata form. These qualities make the *Eroica*, for me, his greatest symphony, though having said that I might find myself tomorrow championing the Choral instead! I love all the symphonies (especially 3, 7, 8 and 9) and concertos (though I find the finale of the Emperor less than satisfactory), but I get more pleasure from playing the piano sonatas than listening to them - but of course, it depends on who the performer is (I have never had *consistent* preferences for one artist over any other - I am always finding myself confounded by a sensational and definitive performance by someone I've never heard of!), though when it comes to singers I find it much more pleasurable to listen to certain kinds of vocal delivery, or timbre, than others. Anyway, in regard to my remarks about Beethoven, I also find similar qualities in Brahms, a much maligned and unfashionable figure, whose music I find embodies the perfect balance between classical formal procedures and romantic expression. There is something about his noble, restrained-yet-passionate style that I find deeply affecting. I have always been greatly puzzled by Britten's aversion to him, apparently playing through his works once a year to reaffirm his conviction that Brahms wasn't even a proper composer, not merely a bad one. Was Britten listening to the same music as I was? Not that it matters - I'm sure that there are enough musicians in the world of serious music who would reassure me that my high regard for Brahms is quite widely shared, to say the least!

Of the key figures in the revolutionary development of post-Romantic 'modern music', only Stravinsky has had any notable influence on my style. I regard him as the musical equivalent of Picasso - the greatest and most influential composer of our time, with *The Rite of Spring* the key work of the 20th Century. However, because of the nature of much of my output, only a few works, such as *Ballet for Orchestra* and *Concerto for Chamber Orchestra,* employ the terse musical language, insistent rhythms and ostinati that betray any obvious signs of his influence. Of course, one doesn't operate in a vacuum, and there are many other composers whose styles have crept (knowingly or not) into my music, including Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Richard Strauss, Tippett, Bartók, Ravel and Copland. In particular, my *Piano Concerto* was directly inspired by Shostakovich, and both the *Ballet* and *Concerto for Chamber Orchestra* contain elements of Tippett.

I suppose that my general aim when constructing any piece of music is that every element, large or small, should in some way relate to, or derive from, everything else - in other words, there should be no superfluous material. Put that way, it suggests that I might have been attracted to a version of serialism, in which the interrelationship of the material is an integral element, but I have never been tempted down that path - melody must always be the key component, rather than abstract musical patterns (effective though these can often be).

I must not forget to mention, not a direct influence, but a central figure in my love affair with music in general, and the symphony orchestra in particular - Edward Elgar. My response to his music is similar to the way I respond to that of Mahler, Richard Strauss, or Brahms - but it is a different kind of emotional response. I don't think it involves anything mystically 'English' in his music - he is, after all, in the German Late-Romantic tradition, in direct contrast to the obviously 'English' style of Vaughan Williams. One only has to listen to his overture *In the South*, for instance, to hear the direct influence of Richard Strauss's heroic style. Neither is his appeal anything to do with a supposed flag-waving nationalistic jingoism, although his music does convey an elusive nostalgia. His irresistible appeal lies in his peerless melodic invention, his masterly orchestration, and his exhilaratingly muscular energy, coupled with sheer beauty and tenderness of expression, in for example the *Violin Concerto*.

As a postscript, I should also add Hector Berlioz, whose music has long fascinated me, partly because of its unique sound, wonderful (if highly idiosyncratic) melodies, and because of its sheer originality and daring. I am fond of playing extracts from the *Symphonie Fantastique* to someone unfamiliar with the composer, and asking them to guess a date when it was written. They are usually astonished when I tell them "Three years after the death of Beethoven". I would recommend Berlioz's *Memoirs* to anybody interested in the musical world of the first half of the 19th Century.

Essential Music

It has been suggested that I compile a sort of 'Desert Island Discs' of favourite music. Apart from my early days, I have never really been an avid collector of recordings, nor of either performances or performers, although a few of the recordings among my youthful collection have stayed in my memory as a kind of 'gold standard' against which to measure all subsequent performances - though I'm sure that is a very common experience. I think of Karajan's 1950s recordings of Tchaikovsky's *4th* and *6th Symphonies* with the Philharmonia, for instance, and Anthony Collins's recording of Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro.* Also Walton's *Portsmouth Point* and *Scapino* conducted by Adrian Boult. However, I shall have to be content with a tentative list of 10 essential works for my Desert Island, though like most music-lovers I could compile an almost infinite number of such lists. So, in no particular chronological order:

1. Elgar: First Symphony
2. Beethoven: *Eroica* (Symphony no 3)
3. Bach: *Goldberg Variations*
4. Mozart: Piano Concerto no 23 in A major
5. Schubert: Impromptu in G flat (D.899 No 3)
6. Mendelssohn: String Octet
7. Richard Strauss: *Ein Heldenleben*
8. Mahler: Sixth Symphony

9. Britten: *Variations on a theme by Frank Bridge*
10. Stravinsky: *Petrushka*

… and that's just a start, off the top of my head.

Advice For Young Composers

There is obviously a huge difference, in terms of the musical environment, technical resources and employment opportunities, between my experience as a young budding composer, 60-odd years ago, and today's generation of students, so I will try to confine my advice, such as it is, to general principles.

1. Take advantage of any opportunities that present themselves, and try not to under-rate your abilities. It may be tempting to turn down projects for fear of failing, but you'll probably be surprised at what you can achieve when required to. On the other hand, experience will gradually make you aware of your strengths and relative weaknesses, but you won't know unless you've tried!

2. Don't be so hypercritical that it damages your self-confidence. If things go wrong, it isn't necessarily your fault (in fact, it very often isn't). If it obviously is, learn from it, and put it down to experience. No-one can succeed all the time, and (comparative) failure is all part of the game - I've had quite a few, but I've learnt to live with them and move on.

3. Don't get obsessed about the necessity to sound 'original', or to create a 'personal style'. Just write what comes naturally, and if you have an individual style it will emerge without any deliberate effort on your behalf. One of the most pleasing (and unexpected) compliments I've ever received was a friend's reaction to one of my student works: 'David, it sounds exactly like you!' Of course, you must try to avoid obvious cliché, though sometimes they lie temptingly in one's path, especially when writing against the clock - but if you can make it sound convincing enough, you'll probably get away with it!

4. Stay in touch with anyone who might prove helpful to your future career, and try to establish new contacts. Regarding publishers, don't give up after a few rejections - though you may find it more rewarding to self-publish.

5. My mother was fond of saying "You'll have to blow your own trumpet, because no-one else will do it for you" - though she might have added "unless you have a good agent!" It takes some courage and a lot of self-belief to publicise one's wares effectively, but it is easier now than ever before. Good luck!

David Lyon
July 2021

www.impulse-music.co.uk/davidlyon
davidlyon1938@gmail.com