

FRANK HARVEY

David C F Wright, DMus

Francis Alvin Harvey, known as Frank Harvey, was born in Southampton on 12 April 1939. His father, Stanley Norman Newnham Harvey (1909-1982) was a keen and competent amateur pianist. He could probably have become a fine organist, but, as a young man, he had a motor bike accident and severely injured his leg. This reduced his mobility to the point where he was unable to master pedal technique. It gave him severe pain throughout his life, and possibly contributed to his sudden death from heart attacks on Christmas Day 1982.

However, his main occupation, which he loved, was working in the aircraft industry. He spent almost his entire working life in the Supermarine Aircraft Construction firm, which became Vickers Supermarine, and then the British Aircraft Corporation. In the early part of his career, he worked under the great designer, R. J. Mitchell, on aeroplanes preceding and including the Spitfire. His early education had been limited, and verbal or written expression did not come easily to him. His son, Frank, tried to persuade him to give an account of his career, which had begun with wooden bi-planes, and ended with the Concorde, but without success.

Frank's Fourth Symphony, of 2008, subtitled "Supermarine", is dedicated to his father, and is also meant as a tribute to the work of R. J. Mitchell. It is also worth noting that, as a young child, Frank's father took his son on a tour of an aircraft production line. This gave the boy an experience of industrial noise which may well have influenced his development as a composer when he began to explore contemporary music styles. It was certainly in the back of his mind when, in 1987, Frank wrote a ferocious organ piece entitled G. W. R 150 Tragicus as an angry commentary on the closure of the historic Swindon Railway Works, and when writing his Fourth Symphony.

Frank's mother was Freda Gladys (1908-2005) who had piano lessons as a child, and Frank remembers her playing to him when he was a young child. But for reasons that he has never been able to understand, she gave up playing completely when he started learning. When he was a very young child, he was very slow, and did not appear to show much academic aptitude. He was an 11 plus failure, but his mother had a deep belief in his potential as a late developer. It is largely due to her persistence in those early childhood years that Frank achieved so much. He owes her a great deal. Recently, he wrote a piano piece called Flashbacks as a tribute to her memory.

It is sad that neither she, nor her husband, achieved their full potential. Her greatest achievement was a prize-winning essay on Classics. She was awarded a scholarship to a grammar school, but was unable to pursue this due to the necessity to work in order to nurse a sick father. Whatever faults the British education system may possess today, (and there are many!) there are certainly more opportunities. She spent her working life as a buyer for a credit drapery firm.

Frank does not have any brothers and sisters.

His qualifications are BA in Music, Southampton University 1972, MA in music education, ARCM diploma in pianoforte teaching 1963 Cert Ed. University of Keele 1974, studies at Crewe Education College, University of London Institute of Education 1986.

His first education as a child was at Ludlow Road Junior School, Southampton, 1944-1950. With two exceptions, he does not have very happy memories of this school. As we have said, he failed the 11 plus examination. Recently, on examining his late mother's effects, he discovered a report which described him as "slow and dreamy"; a description which is extremely similar to the reports given to his youngest, mildly autistic son, Stephen who was given special needs support throughout his education.

Frank's next school was Bitterne Park Secondary Modern School, Southampton, 1950-1955. Again,

he does not have very happy memories of this school. Largely due to his mother's persistence, he was allowed to join the O Level class, and eventually succeeded in obtaining passes in English Language, English Literature, History, French, and Music. The school did not offer Music as a subject; Frank studied it privately, with the aid of his private piano teacher, Mrs. Hilda Bearman. It is interesting to recall that the school took credit for his success; it is thought that Peter Maxwell Davies had a similar experience.

After his unhappy school experiences, he had no desire to progress to the sixth form of a grammar school.

The next stage of his musical education was provided during his army service at the Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall 1955-1957. As with the rest of his army experience, he learnt more from the two years that he spent at this establishment than he realised at the time. Life at KH was a bizarre combination of parades, drill, inspections, guard duties, cookhouse duties, and music! His first love was playing the piano, and it was a severe disappointment that he was not permitted officially to continue studying it, in spite of what Frank and his parents understood to be a clear commitment to the contrary. Frank was told that he would be studying the clarinet and the violin and that was that. It did not help that neither of the two civilian teachers were very inspiring. In all, he cannot say that the two years spent at KH were happy.

However, on the positive side, there was the experience of being part of a large military band, with musicians of all types and grades. This gave him a valuable insight into the workings of band instruments. Also, although he was never very good on either the clarinet or violin, he did gain a valuable knowledge of these instruments. There was also the experience of being conducted by John Hollingsworth and, in particular, Percy Grainger, who conducted his *Molly on the Shore* with an energy and exuberance which seemed to defy his advancing years.

The happiest memory of the KH experience was being awarded a prize for Aural Training which consisted of the 1944 edition of the *Harvard Dictionary of Music* by Willi Apel.

As we have said, Frank had pianoforte lessons with Hilda Bearman between 1946 and 1955 who he remembers with great affection. She started him on the road to deciding upon music as a career. Unlike most of the adults with whom he came into contact as a young child, she treated him with kindness, sympathy, and great patience. She certainly helped Harvey to become an effective pianist within a few years, which was a comforting antidote to his lack of progress elsewhere.

Piano lessons continued with Cimbro Martin 1959-1965. These lessons were an antidote to the unique combination of the absurd and the brutal that could only be found in the British Army during his period of service; the Army of today may well be very different. Cimbro Martin was a fine pianist, and a demanding teacher.

Harvey studied harmony, counterpoint, and had organ lessons with W. A. Bennett 1963-1966. Mr. Bennett was a former, retired organist of Rochester Cathedral. He was one of the few people that Frank met who could be described as being "saintly". Again, these lessons were an antidote.

Bennett's teachers had been Ebenezer Prout and R. O. Morris. However, although his teaching was thorough, it was also imaginative; there was certainly nothing pedantic about it. Frank's lessons with Mr. Bennett were among the few experiences that he missed when he left Chatham in 1966. His organ lessons with him also began an interest which has developed into an important source of income.

He had composition lessons with Jonathan Harvey at Southampton University 1970-1972. Although Harvey would by no means describe Professor Harvey as being "saintly", he was a very gentle person with a deep, genuine interest in spiritual and mystical matters. Obviously, as an "avant-garde" composer, his attitude was very different from that of Mr. Bennett, but he planted in Frank a realisation that contemporary music, about which he had previously been somewhat dismissive, is a rich mine to be explored if one can clear ones mind of all preconceptions.

Southampton University during 1969-1972 were extremely happy. In addition to studying with Jonathan Harvey, his main study was renaissance music with Dr. David Brown, and baroque and classical music with Professor Peter Evans. Harvey's dissertation topic was the opera *Il Pomo d'Oro* by Cesti which he felt unable to pursue study because this work was flawed, but fascinating, and sadly neglected. Frank Harvey did produce a performance with fellow students of an extract from this opera, which was the first performance for 300 years!

He attended University of London Institute of Education 1985-1986, a secondment from his teaching post at Swindon and Wiltshire schools. It consisted of intense research into the philosophy of music, with particular emphasis on the work of Suzanne Langer and John Dewey, the psychology of music, with emphasis on the work of Bentley and Seashore, and to a lesser extent on the sociology of music. Harvey found the philosophy part of the course to be particularly useful, and progressed from Langer to Arthur Schopenhauer.

As part of this course, Frank wrote a dissertation entitled *The Position of Music with regard to the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative* which may be accessed from the Institute Library.

He had attended Crewe College of Education 1973-1974 for his Certificate of Education which was awarded by Keele University, but he never actually went there! Crewe College of Education was under the supervision of Keele University. The students were an intriguing mixture of post graduate trainees, and non-graduate trainees. In one of his first attempts at composition for public performance, he wrote a piece for flute and piano which was a rather impudent imitation of the style, and kind of notation used by Luciano Berio in his *Sequenzia*. This was a blatant parody that was, frankly, meant as a joke. To his utter amazement, the audience took it absolutely seriously!

Harvey became an Army Musician with Royal Engineers Band, Chatham, 1955-1966. Life was not nearly as onerous as at KH; there were no more guard duties and cookhouse "fatigues", although there were still parades and inspections. The first Director of Music, Major Alfred Young was a fine musician, but he was of the "old school", who seemed to believe that the best way to get excellent musical results out of the musicians was to terrorise them. After he retired, life became easier. At first, Harvey was required to play E flat clarinet in the band. Unless one is a brilliant player, playing this particular instrument in a military band can be a grim experience. One is screaming away in the upper register, either supporting the flute, or the solo B flat clarinet. There can be terrible problems of tuning, which Frank did not always manage to overcome. Eventually, he was demoted to 3rd B flat clarinet, but was also required to play piano with various orchestral combinations. This "quasi continuo" role in which he had to fill in harmonic gaps for all kinds of orchestral combinations was extremely valuable experience.

Another result of this experience of army absurdity, as in the case of the Crewe College of Education piece, was a "tongue-in-cheek" approach to some of his compositions.

He was a professional pianist and electronic organ salesman 1966-1969. This employment "bridged the gap" between the army and Southampton University. He was required to sell, and demonstrate electronic organs of various makes, mainly Hammond and Lowrey instruments. This was a curious mixture of retail-commercial and musical experience. For part of the time, he worked as an electronic organ salesman and was a pianist with a band that worked in a night club. One amusing situation when Harvey was required at short notice to accompany a cabaret act, which was based, in part, on a parody of a Verdi aria, and the rest of the band were amazed that Frank was actually able to do this!

Working at two occupations at the same time was extremely demanding. But the night club job earned him a great deal of money that eventually went towards the deposit on his present dwelling.

He was part time church organist Peartree Church, Southampton during 1970-1973, his first permanent post as a church organist. This was not nearly as lucrative as the night club experience, but it was not nearly as demanding. The fees were a useful support for his university grant.

Then he became a class music teacher at Swindon and Wiltshire Schools between 1974- and 1990. This was a most unhappy experience. Some music pieces were written by him purely as therapy, but some were written for pupils. One piece was amazingly successful. It was a setting for soprano and a “contemporary music group” of Lewis Carroll’s poem Jabberwocky. It was absolutely crazy, very “tongue in cheek” indeed, and made use of techniques learnt from Jonathan Harvey and Peter Maxwell Davies, in a manner that he has not duplicated since. The performers’ age range was 14-18, and they thought it was wonderful fun! So, to his amazement did an audience of normally very truculent 15 year olds.

Unfortunately, the score was produced in great haste, and it badly needs to be written out properly. Also, he made use of a particular type of synthesizer and reel-to-reel tape recorder distortion; neither of these effects are now available. He hopes to be able to apply his mind at some time to producing a revised version.

His next activity was as a part time keyboard teacher at Bradon Forest School, Purton, Wiltshire, 1991-2010. He became part time church organist St. Saviours Church, Swindon 1984-1992. The liturgy of this church is of an extremely Anglo-Catholic nature. Both the correct Ordinary and Proper settings are observed every week, which makes an organist’s life very interesting.

Then he was part time church organist St. Mary’s Church, Purton, since 1992 which is his present appointment. It is close to his home, the organ has a much more varied registration, the salary is much higher, and is supplemented by fees from weddings and funerals. However, it is of a much more evangelical character, and the liturgy is not nearly as interesting. Sadly, as he has found throughout his musical career, there are times when aesthetic values really do have to give way to financial stability. He is also employed as accompanist to Wootton Bassett Choral society.

The “dimly remembered childhood wartime experiences” were the inspiration for his first attempt at large scale composition, a symphonic poem entitled Moonlight Sonata 1940. Harvey was horrified to discover, as the result of a television programme, that the German code name for the terrible air raid on Coventry, was Moonlight Sonata. His composition was based rhythmically, for the most part, on two patterns from the first movement of Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata and melodically, again for the most part, upon the rise and fall of the siren. As a young child, Frank vaguely remembers huddling in a shelter with his mother, aunt, uncle, and grandmother, and, if this piece is ever performed, Frank would dedicate the performance to their memory. To this day, he has a residual feeling of panic when he hears a recording of an air raid siren.

There are aspects of this piece about which he is not happy. Thanks to the Sibelius Music printing programme, he is able to hear a MIDI version of it, and it is, perhaps, far too repetitive, although much may be added by an expressive live performance. It is modelled on the first movement of Shostakovich’s Leningrad Symphony, and a piece by Peter Maxwell Davies entitled St. Thomas’ Wake Pavan Foxtrot. There is a 1940’s-style foxtrot in this piece which is repeated several times. The trumpet who plays the melody is asked to “improvise in 1940’s jazz style”, and it will depend on his or her skill whether or not this section “works”.

It is worth mentioning that, some years ago, Peter Maxwell Davies spent some considerable time looking at Harvey’s score. He very kindly gave his time free of charge, and said that “it should be performed”, so perhaps it will be, one day.

Observation of his severely autistic son, Daniel, in a strange way, took over the composition of his First Symphony. Like Vaughan Williams’ Ninth Symphony it originally had a programme which “got lost on the journey”. There are no intentional musical references to the Vaughan Williams symphony in the work.) As Harvey was writing it, the mental condition of his son became more and more obvious, and the terrifying, yet somehow inspiring world of autism became more and more the real subject of the symphony. When Frank reached the last movement, he discovered that Malcolm Arnold also had a severely autistic son, and there is a rather “cheeky” theme that is inspired by him, although Harvey has

tried to develop it very differently. Having said all this, it may well be that the original programme may be obvious to the listener.

The Second Symphony could be described as an act of musical revenge upon the Army, for the misery that it inflicted upon him. It occurred to the composer that the various musical forms of military music could be subjected to the same kind of extremely unsubtle parody techniques that Peter Maxwell Davies had employed in his works for the Fires of London, particularly *Eight Songs For a Mad King*. The forms in question were the Patrol, the Quick March, the Troop, and the Slow March. There were two situations that were a particular inspiration; the first was a ghastly experience called Junior Military Band. The less competent band members had to endure two hours every afternoon, conducted by an inexperienced non-commissioned officer who was usually as incompetent as they were, and the result, in terms of bad tuning and lack of cohesion, had to be heard to be believed. The second situation was a single incident when the band arrived at some God-forsaken barracks, and the food was so bad that it could be described as pig swill, if this were not an insult to pigs. The entire band responded by playing in what might be described politely as an inefficient manner; after all, we were weak from starvation! It is worth mentioning that the Slow March is written as a serious quasi-funeral march, and might well stand on its own as a comment on the current Afghanistan tragedy.

The Third Symphony took a long time to write, and it is, probably, far too long. It was inspired partly by the poetry of World War One, particularly that of Wilfred Owen, Robert Nichols, and Lawrence Binyon. It was also inspired by acquaintances, during his youth mainly, with veterans of that War.

The Symphony no. 5 has recently been completed, and was inspired by the relationship between time and chance. Certain ideas are presented in the first two movements, and treated first in a dissonant manner in the third movement, as though chance has led to tragic outcomes, and then, in the final movement, similar ideas are treated as though the outcomes are happier.

The String Quartet no 1 was his first attempt at a large scale work. It was written in the late seventies, when he was finding that certain aspects of his teaching post were making him very unhappy indeed. This was only a few years after he had finished at Southampton University, and Frank remembers that Jonathan Harvey had looked briefly at Schoenberg's Fourth String Quartet. Harvey took this Quartet as his model.

The String Quartet no 2 has received a professional performance by the Emerald Ensemble. It was inspired by a television play in which an actress, mourning a recently deceased colleague, offered a vision of Heaven as a vast cinematic cutting-room, in which all of the unhappy, bad parts of ones life are gradually consigned to the cutting-room floor, leaving, at the end of the process, only the happy, good parts.

It is very interesting to note that, prior to this performance, the score had been examined by a critic who had declared that the use of artificial harmonics was "dubious". The Emerald Ensemble had no trouble whatsoever with these harmonics. By way of diversion, it is worth mentioning that this is not the first experience of this kind that Harvey has had. His only piece for military band was a piece called *Remembrance*, which was written for a Royal Engineers Band re-union. Again, after this performance, the score was examined by a critic, who informed the composer that a certain passage which involved a change from a fast passage to a slow passage via a *rallentando* "was impossible to bring off".

Harvey's eldest son, Jonathan, born 1980, is a brilliant violinist, and his father wrote a piece entitled *Night Flight* for him, which contained a great deal of double-stopping. He managed it perfectly well, and the composer was told by a critic that this double-stopping was "impossible"; Frank was able to reply, with great satisfaction, that his son, a Grade VIII violinist, had just done the apparently "impossible".

The String Quartet no 3 was inspired partly by Ivor Gurney, and partly, again, by Schoenberg. Gurney's poem *Strange Hells* has a reference to a popular World War I song, *Après La Guerre Fini*. Harvey

decided, therefore, to imitate Schoenberg's Second String Quartet by including a part for singer, (in this work a baritone) and a popular melody. The melody in question is subjected, again, after the manner of Peter Maxwell Davies, to a process of musical sabotage in the second movement, while the last movement is a setting of Gurney's poem.

His Fourth String Quartet was inspired by the theft, recovery, and restoration of a rather beautiful 17th century painting in St. Mary's Church, Purton. This painting was stolen some years ago, and, amazingly, turned up in America. It was in an appalling state, and it was decided that the money would be raised for its restoration. The process was expensive, but well worth the effort, because it is now actually far more beautiful than it was before it was stolen!

His only choral and orchestral work has been a setting of a poem by an acquaintance, a lady called Mary Ratcliffe, entitled *The Ballad of Steam*. Like his organ piece previously mentioned, *G. W. R 150 Tragicus*, it is a commentary on the closure of the Swindon Railway Works. There are two influences from Jonathan Harvey in this work. The first is the use of onomatopoeic voice sounds, and the second is the scaled down orchestra. Frank Harvey was present at the first performance of Jonathan Harvey's *Passion and Resurrection* in Winchester Cathedral, (a superbly powerful work that is shamefully underperformed), and noted the way in which a small orchestra could be used to powerful effect.

In spite of promises made when it was first written in 1988, there has never been a complete performance of *The Ballad of Steam*. A small section was broadcast on BBC Wiltshire Radio. It has been said that the choral and orchestral writing is "far too difficult for amateurs". This may well be true of the orchestral parts, but a local choral group, who are not noted for their sight-reading abilities, very kindly gave the chorus parts a "trial run", and had no difficulty whatsoever. Some years ago, Peter Maxwell Davies gave a brilliant speech, in which he described a "reprehensible resistance" to new music of any kind.

Since the early nineties, Frank Harvey been submitting songs to the English Poetry and Song Society. These settings of great English poetry have been a challenge to him in that he has tried not to use the words as a "prop" for the music, but to use the music to enhance them. The setting of A. E. Housman's poem *Loveliest Of Trees* has a subtle, ironic wit in this poem that Butterworth's setting has not conveyed. There is also a setting of William Blake's poem *The Fly*. As Harvey saw it, there is again an ironic wit in this poem that is far less subtle than in the Housman poem, and his setting is correspondingly unrestrained. This received a public performance at the Bristol Music Club, and he was gratified to receive a compliment from a distinguished member in the audience.

There is also a group of small scale choral works that have been performed by Wootton Bassett Choral Society, for which Harvey has written the words, such as *Summer Will Come to the World*. This was written for a Christmas Carol concert, and concerned the fall of man and salvation. *The Ballad of Scrooge* was based upon the Dickens story, and was most definitely not meant to be taken seriously. *Walking in the Wood* was an affectionate parody of Thomas Morley's *Now is the Month of Maying*, and was included in the same programme.

For some years, Frank worked closely with a drama teacher named David Calder at Bradon Forest School. This was a most happy relationship, and he composed music for productions ranging from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* to *Shakespeare*. There was a production of *The Tempest* for which Harvey set, not only the well-known songs, but also the sequence in which Prospero asks Ariel to conjure up a vision as a "wedding present" for Miranda. David Calder asked Harvey to set this as a "miniature opera", and the composer had great fun while attempting to produce a pastiche of 17th century operatic style. The other production was a musical play called *Black Bart's Treasure*. Calder wrote the story and lyrics, based loosely upon a novel by Jeffrey Farnol, and Harvey supplied the music. The whole thing was designed as a pupil production, and it was a quite preposterous imitation of what used to be called "blood and thunder Victorian melodrama."

Finally, his latest "tongue-in-cheek" piece which was taken very seriously when it was performed at the

Bristol Music Club was a suite for piano entitled *The Deserted Cinema*. This was inspired by the sad sight of a derelict building in Southampton that had once been a popular cinema. The idea gave Harvey the opportunity to play around with various musical clichés that have become associated with a century of cinema. Once again, it was taken very seriously by at least one distinguished member of the audience, who declared that one of the movements reminded him of a waltz by Ravel.

When Frank is asked who his favourite composers are, he has some difficulty in giving a satisfactory answer. One reason is that if he declares that he prefers Handel to Bach, Mozart to Haydn, Wagner to Brahms, Berg to Schoenberg, and Jonathan Harvey to Peter Maxwell Davies, he is perhaps saying something meaningful about himself, but is saying very little that is meaningful about the composers in question.

The personal aspects of his life are that he married Madelene Constance Gem in St Helier in 1976 and has three sons: Jonathan born 1980, Daniel born 1983, and Stephen born 1987.

Two of Mr Harvey's songs are available on a CD entitled *Discovered Songs* with fifteen other premieres. This CD is available from [Nymet Music](#). See [CD Review](#) on this site.

Scores:

[Quartet no 2](#)

[Symphony no 4](#)

Works by Frank Harvey

Orchestral

Symphonic Poem *Moonlight Sonata* 1940.
Symphony No. 1 *Autistic* (1990)
Symphony No. 2 *Military* (2005)
Symphony No. 3 *1914-1918* (1984-1997)
Symphony No. 4 *Supermarine* (2008)
Symphony No. 5 *Time and chance*
Percussion Concerto
Cello Concerto
Flute Concerto
Double-bass Concerto
the concertos were written between 2005-2007
Horn Concerto
Electric Guitar Concerto
Lament for Lost Content for string orchestra

Chamber Music

String Quartet No. 1 (1978)
String Quartet No. 2 *Constructing Heaven* (1991)
String Quartet No. 3 *Strange Hells* with Baritone Voice.
It contains a setting of the poem by Ivor Gurney (2005).
String Quartet No. 4 *The Painting* (2007)

Violin and Piano

Night Flight
Fantasia: *Nearer My God To Thee*

Organ

G. W. R. 150 *Tragicus*
Meditation On *Eventide*

Piano

Flashbacks
Suite From The Tempest
Piano 6 hands
Double Vision

Harpsichord

Transformations of a Theme by Henry VIII

School

Soprano, chamber group and tape Jabberwocky Words by Lewis Carroll
Soprano, and chamber group Picardie A setting of the poem by Alys Fane Trotter
“Pop Cantata” The Emperor’s New Clothes
“Pop Cantata” Chicken Licken
Incidental Music For The Tempest
Musical Play Black Bart’s Treasure Story and lyrics by David Calder
Musical Play Village of the Atomic Zombies
For a “training orchestra”. Romance For a Silent Film

Military/ Concert Band

Remembrance

Brass Band

A Purton Suite for the Millennium

Opera/Melodrama

The Pilot’s Dreams

Choral Work for soprano soloist, chorus, and orchestra

The Ballad of Stream. Setting of a poem by Mary Ratcliffe

Choir

Salutations. Setting of a poem by Mary Ratcliffe
Summer Will come To the World
The Ballad of Scrooge
Walking In The Wood

Two of his songs are on the Wrightmusic label and available from Nymet Music and four songs are available on the Mynstrallsy label.

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