

JEFFREY LEWIS

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Jeffrey Lewis was born in Neath Hospital, South Wales, on 28 November 1942. He was baptised at St Mary's, Aberavon, Port Talbot on 13 January 1943. His father, Thomas John, (1905-1987) was a steelworker and his mother, born Kathleen Teresa Power, (1908- 1973) was a housewife but her antecedents came from Southern Ireland. She had learned the piano as a child. The family home was at Port Talbot. A brother of Thomas John was a well-known boy soprano, Cyril Lewis, (1921-2000) who made recordings for Decca. Jeff has a brother, Anthony, born 19 August 1935, who is a retired Ford Motor Company executive. As a boy, Anthony also learned the piano and sang in the church choir.

Jeff's awakening to music was from singing in the self-same church choir, St Mary's, Port Talbot from 1949 onwards. He learned the piano privately and was taught the violin at school and played in the Youth Orchestra. His schools were Mountain Primary School and, at the age of eleven, he won a scholarship to Dyffryn Grammar School in Port Talbot eventually achieving his A levels in English, History and Music.

The organ was his greatest love which instrument he began to learn in 1952 and his teacher at St Mary's was Colin Jones who had studied with Herbert Sumsion at Gloucester cathedral. Within three years, Jeff was the assistant organist at St Mary's.

On leaving school, Jeff went up to Cardiff University studying the organ with Robert Joyce at Llandaff Cathedral and composition with Alun Hoddinott who was to say that Lewis was the best student he ever had being very skilful and talented. In the mid 1959s Lewis had discovered Messiaen, Stockhausen and Varese. For his BMus, Jeff had to submit an 'exercise', which was a large scale orchestral composition, as well as two instrumental studies for piano and organ respectively. In his student days, his 'Chamber Concerto' and 'Fanfares with Variations' were performed by the BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra under the direction of John Carewe. Jeff was involved with the founding of the 66 Group and, as a pianist, he played in his 'Epitaphium – Children of the Sun' for chamber ensemble, at the Cheltenham Festival in 1967. This work and the Two cadenzas were performed at the Cheltenham festival.

His second degree was a MMus which he completed in Cardiff submitting a portfolio of compositions.

In 1978 the University of Wales conferred upon him a PhD in music and composition.

But to backtrack. In 1967 he entered a Welsh Arts Council Competition for Young Composers writing his 'Trio for flute, oboe and piano'. He won this competition in which the adjudicator was Michael Tippett who recommended that Jeff be awarded a Welsh Arts Bursary for foreign study which he took up for the academic year 1967- 8. He studied composition with Boguslaw Schaffer in Krakow and compositional analysis with Stockhausen and Ligeti in Darmstadt. At the Warsaw Autumn Festival of 1967 he met two of the most outstanding Polish composers of their time, Tadeusz Baird, who initiated this annual festival, and Grazyna Bacewicz. He also had a period in Paris as the pianist of the New Music Ensemble specialising in modern works.

He received second prize in the International Organist-Composer Competition held at Zwolle in Holland for his 'Mutations II' and first prize in the Stroud International Composers' Competition for his 'Tritoma for horn, violin and piano'.

Boguslaw Schaffer was a great influence on Lewis's life although he was something of a maverick. He wrote indeterminate and aleatory music which was, at the time, unusual and yet very challenging. He concentrated on precision and was a very stimulating teacher.

Of particular interest from this time is Jeff's setting of Samuel Daniel's 'Care-charmer sleep' for unaccompanied chorus of 1968. In this work, and many others, he is concerned with matters of timbre and unusual scoring. It is true that time, sleep and infinity are all issues that concern him and this is inherent in his music.

His first marriage was to Ann Airton in 1970 at a time when he was a lecturer at Leeds College of Music teaching 20th century composition techniques, a post he took up in 1973.

Ann was a pianist and, as an example, played Beethoven's Piano Concerto no 1 in Leeds with her husband conducting. Lewis left Leeds in 1972 and the following year took up a post in Bangor where he stayed for twenty years. He and Ann were divorced in 1975 and there were no children of the marriage. His second marriage was to Sheelagh Hywel in 1983. Richard was born in 1984 and he graduated with a degree in sports science in 2005, Sarah was born in 1985. Her birthday is the same day as her father's. In 2005, she went up to university to read sociology and criminology.

In 1971 Lewis composed his Duologue for violin and piano, a thoroughly convincing and appealing work. Later, he was to compose Scena for the same forces which is a work of urgency and tension.

While at Leeds, Lewis had the benefit of outstanding musicians and opportunities to perform some of his own work. He had an experimental music group and they performed new music such as Terry Riley's In C.

As we have said, from 1973 Jeff was a lecturer in the University of Wales in Bangor, subsequently becoming senior lecturer in music and composition. During this time he had two commissions from the BBC.

His orchestral work 'Memoria', written in memory of his mother, was premiered at the North Gwent Festival in 1978 by the BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra under Boris Brott. What makes this work so important is its originality and perhaps one could call it radical. It reveals again his interest in sleep, time and infinity. Its originality, as it is with any great composer, is an essential for composers. It is a work of stunning calmness and serenity and only Boris Blacher's Study in Pianissimo can compare with it. The difficulty with works of this stillness is that cynics can dismiss them as uneventful pieces as if they were boring slabs of grey or discoloured concrete. The music has to be listened to, not just heard and if this discipline is put into practise it will reveal fascinating textures and harmony and some interesting orchestral colour.

It has been said that Memoria was the beginning of the change in his style of composition and that, although he had used modal styles before, he now embarked on more complex modal features. He also used consonant harmonies. Another major consideration was his challenging and demanding works for voices.

There is a work, Sratos for chamber ensemble including a guitar, glockenspiel and vibraphone full of colour and a dreamlike quality.

Lewis is a very sensitive composer, a deep thinker and takes matters very seriously. He is not interested in being a showman or writing music of blazing brilliance some of which is not durable although it can be exciting. His music inhabits the world of stillness, a world that cries out for universal peace.

An impressive work is the 'Epitaph for Abelard and Heloise', a commission from the Chapter Arts

Centre in Cardiff and first performed there in November 1979. Odaline de la Martinez and Lontano took it up subsequently. The work, which has a rare hypnotic quality, captures the tragic love story and the self-pity of the lovers and the music conveys the eternity of their love, its unconquerability even though Abelard became a monk and Heloise a nun. It is scored for flute doubling alto flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano and percussion and lasts about 18 minutes

A work of similar content exploring new timbres and sounds is 'Litania', completed in January 1993 and scored for two piccolos, percussion, harp and celesta. It is a work which further explores timelessness. It goes back to the twelfth century with a plainchant melody Jubilemus Salvatori and there is a fascinating sequence of chords with a marvellously sinister tread from the harp. The bell-like conclusion of the work may, consciously or unconsciously, signal the end of time.

He and Sheelagh separated in 1993 and were divorced in 1998. This was after a period when Lewis's music was gaining in interest perhaps culminating in his Westminster Mass of 1990.

There are also some choice instrumental pieces including two works for clarinet and piano, 'Sonante' of 1986 and 'Cantus' of 1996. 'Sonante', which word means resounding, was written for Thea King and Clifford Benson and dedicated to Jeff's daughter, Sarah, who was born in November 1985. It is a piece of uneasiness and agitation and the resoundings are in the sinister bass notes. The funds were provided by the Welsh Arts Council and Thea King and Clifford Benson premiered it at the Lower Machen Festival in 1986. The same beneficiary was behind 'Cantus' first performed at the Beaumaris Festival in 1966 by Peryn Clement-Evans and Harvey Davies. As originality is an essential for any composer, this work is certainly original since it juxtaposes the attack of the piano with the gentleness of the clarinet.

Another clue into Lewis's personality is 'Teneritas for flute and piano'. The word means tenderness. It was written for Jonathan Rimmer and Harvey Davies and premiered at Bangor University in 1998. The writing for the flute is exemplary. Every note counts.

Jeff has written a wide range of music. There is a one movement 'Piano Concerto' of 1989 commissioned and premiered by Jana Franeklova with an orchestra conducted by Stephen Barlow and was later broadcast by the industrious Martin Jones with the BBC Welsh SO under Nicholas Cleobury. There is also an impressive orchestral score 'Aurora', premiered by the late Akeo Watanabe and later revived by superlative Bryden Thomson, some splendid organ music admired by such performers as Gillian Weir, some engaging choral music, some of which is published by Novello, and a 'Westminster Mass' published by Goodmusic.

There a substantial solo piano works including the three movement 'Trilogy' of 1992 and 'Musica Aeterna' of 1997. The 'Trilogy' is another gentle work with outer movements of a sinister calm. The middle movement is an animated vivo. 'Musica Aeterna' was originally intended to be part of a set of piano studies but developed in a massive harmonic study lasting almost half-an-hour. Again these works are not showy although they call for a cool head and steel fingers but, as the title of the latter piece suggests, it is timelessness that is inherent in the music.

Jeff was never a composer to be a stick in the mud. He was always progressive and took an interest in may thins such as Indian music and eastern philosophy. He has also endured periods of ill health.

In the world of music Comparisons are odious. Walton was incensed when the absurd nonsense that he was Elgar's successor was mooted. But the delicacy and beautiful textures of Jeff's music is reminiscent of the skill of that great composer of the Second Viennese School, Anton Webern.

Of exemplary note is that Jeff's scores are neat and precise and works of art in terms of calligraphy and preciseness.

At Manchester Cathedral on Saturday 18 February 2006 his eleven 'Sacred Chants' for SATB choir and organ was given a successful premiere by the Alteri Chamber Choir conducted by David Jones with Jeffrey Makinson at the organ.

Another compelling work is *Silentia Nochs* (Silence of the Night) based on Helen Waddell's translation of Petronius.

He is another fine composer in danger of being forgotten. That must not happen.

And he is original!

Here follows a list of his works expressed briefly. Some of the dates may not be precise and from this list we see that many of his works have not been performed.

Untitled piece for piano
Improvisation on the Compline Antiphon- Salve Regina for organ 1958-9
Sonatina for bassoon and piano 1963
Duo for trumpet and piano 1963
Four pieces for piano 1963
Sing we merrily SATB 1963
Care-Charmer sleep SATB 1964
String Quartet 1964
Two Dance sketches for ensemble
Theme and Variations for orchestra 1964
Diptych for organ 1964
Two Medieval Sketches for harp 1965
Improvisations for flute and piano 1965
Portraits for flute, clarinet and harp 1965
Symphony for large orchestra 1965
Fanfares with variations for orchestra 1965 rev 1970
Two Cadenzas for piano 1965
Trio for flute, oboe and piano 1966
Chamber Concerto for orchestra 1967
Epitaphium, Children of the sun, narrator, SATB, ensemble 1967
Stanzas for mixed ensemble 1967
Spatialis for flute, oboe and clarinet 1967
Mosaic for string quartet 1967
Gweledigaeth SATB 1968
Antiphony for groups of instruments 1968
Brass Piece 6.4.4.4 1968
Collage for orchestra 1968
Antiphony 2 for chamber orchestra 1968
Chamber Music violin, three flutes doubling piccolos, six violins 1968
Work for large orchestra 1968
Four studies for two flutes 1968
Mobile 1 SATB 1968 rev 1971
Mobile II for two groups of instruments 1968 rev 1971
Mutations for orchestra 1969
Untitled piece for organ 1970
Sonanze for clarinet, piano and percussion 1971
Mobile III for mezzo and ensemble 1971
Mutations II for organ 1971
Duologue for violin and piano 1971

Dream Sequence violin, harpsichord and cello 1972
Tritoma for violin, horn and piano 1972
Visual Music 1972
Strata for wind, brass and percussion 1972
Refrain for cello and piano 1973
Music for cello and piano 1973
Aurora for orchestra 1973
Realizations for double bass and piano 1973
Ritornel for flute, viola and harp 1974
Praeludium for orchestra 1975
Scenario for orchestra 1975
Woodland Mass male voices, piano or harp 1976
Time- passage for mixed ensemble 1977
Spectra for guitar 1977
Esultante for organ 1978
Momentum for organ 1978
Memoria for orchestra 1978
Stratos for mixed ensemble 1979
Epitaph for Abelard and Heloise for mixed ensemble 1979
Tableau for piano 1980
Elegy for two oboes, organ and strings 1980
Carmen Pasche SATB 1981
Untitled organ piece 1981
Pro Pace, SATB soloists and electronics 1981
Limina Lucis for organ and orchestra 1982
Piano Trio 1983
Chaconne for ensemble 1984
Fantasy for piano 1985
Fanfare for three trumpets 1985
Hymnus Ante Somnum SATB organ
Wind Quintet 1985
Sonante for clarinet and piano 1986
Sequentia de Sancto Michaelae SATB organ 1987
Scena for violin and piano 1988
Piano Concerto 1989
Silentia NoctIs high voice and piano 1989
Dreams, Dances and Lullaby for harp 1989
Threnody for piano 1990
Westminster Mass SATB 1990
O Mare for orchestra 1991
Lux Perpetua four soloists ATTB 1992
Trilogy for piano 1992
Litania for mixed ensemble 1993
Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis SATB organ 1993, also boys voices and organ
(Second) Nunc Dimittis SATB organ
Antiphon voice, boys choir, trumpet and organ 1994
Cantus for clarinet and piano 1995
Night Fantasy for piano, four hands 1996
Calmo for piano 1995
Musica Aeterna for piano 1997
(Molto tranquillo shortened version of above) 1997
Piano Duet no 2 1997
Teneritas for flute and piano 1997

Recordatio SATB 1999
Bellissima for flute, oboe, clarinet and piano 2000
Scarborough Fair for clarinet.guitar and piano 2000
Fantasy for electric guitar 2000
Dead Leaves for treble recorder and piano 2000
11 Sacred Chants for choir and organ 2003 -2005
Risoluto for treble recorder, oboe, bassoon and piano 2004
Serenio for piano 2004
Beyond the Heavens for soprano, viola and piano 2007
Untitled piece for piano 2008
(Another) Untitled piece for piano 2009
Pulsing for piano 2010
Memoria Echoes for piano 2010
Fous Amoris SATB 2010

Why is his music ignored? Is it because it is regarded as avant garde ? Is it because it is demanding to perform ? He was once performed regularly and held in high esteem. Is it because of the unfortunate vagaries of fashion or the ignorance and shallowness of musicians who only want tradition and convention.

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