

PAUL PATTERSON

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Paul Patterson is both a successful and gifted composer who has taken his rightful place in the forefront of British composers. There is little doubt that he has produced some exceptional scores which include his recent Symphony premiered by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Geoffrey Simon at the Cheltenham Festival of 1990, a richly textured work, aurally accessible and complete with a cracking finale; a real symphony in the tonal tradition with both the captivating exuberance and depth associated with the best antecedents in Haydn or Mozart.



Patterson's music, or, at least, some of it, has been likened to the music of Malcolm Arnold. That may be so, but whereas both composers deploy an enviable brilliance and expertise, Patterson's work is less superficial. This may, in part, be due to the younger man's wider musical experience including a 'way-out phase' (his own words) which began with his setting of the Kyrie Op. 13, and continued up to and including *At the Still Point of the Turning World* Op. 41. Since then he has rediscovered that a simple musical utterance is the most effective means of communication.

Paul was born on the 15 June 1947 in Chesterfield to Leslie Patterson, an insurance agent, and his wife, Lillian, née Braund, who was a nurse. Neither of Paul's parents or any other antecedents had any musical interests. Indeed, it was Paul's schooling in Exeter that generated and developed his interest in music; these schools were the Countess Wear School (1952-8) and Vincent Thomson School (1958-64). At the latter school he took up the recorder and in 1960 joined the Topsham Silver Band, playing the trombone. During these years he was profoundly impressed with the music of Bartok and Stravinsky. Consequently with these many influences he entered the Royal Academy of Music in 1964 where he studied the trombone with Sidney Langston and the 'basics' from Richard Stoker. Surprisingly, harmony lessons, which can be very dull and restrictive to creativity, encouraged Patterson to take up composition. In 1966 he wrote his Brass Quintet which was by the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble. Sadly, the score and parts have since been lost. That year also saw the first performance of any of his work in public; *Rebecca* Op. 1, for speaker and instrumental ensemble, being a setting of one of Hilaire Belloc's *Cautionary Tales* concerning girl who slammed doors and 'perished miserably'. The music tellingly captures the annoyance of this infuriating habit; the humour is woven into a very entertaining score; there is excellent situation portrayal; and how wise of the composer to break into the modern music scene by writing a piece that has to sound 'contemporary' to correspond with the subject matter.

This premiere was on 21 August 1966 at the Dartington Summer School where Patterson received valuable help from Elizabeth Lutyens on diverse subjects ranging from film music to structure and form. He was also intellectually stimulated by Harrison Birtwhistle and Hans Keller at this venue. Patterson's *Wind Quintet* Op. 2 won the South West Arts Competition at which event the adjudicator was Richard Rodney Bennett. Following this success Patterson went to study with him during the years 1968 to 1970 thus learning more about form, serial technique and the business side of the profession. The *Trumpet Concerto* Op. 3 dates from 1968 and already reveals a competent and fluent style. Perhaps the outer movements betray a slightness of material as well as indebtedness to Hindemith, but the slow movement, if played well, has a warm quality reminiscent of the delectable sweet sound of the cornet conjuring up nostalgic pictures of Brass Band country, cold breath and coal fires. It is music that recalls austere but happier days of yesteryear. However, I do wish that there was a break before the energetic finale, though this does not impair the logic of the piece nor obscure the clarity of the orchestral writing which is for strings and timpani only. The concerto deserves a revival.

Six months before the first performance of the *Trumpet Concerto* Patterson's initial broadcast was of

his Symphonic Study entrusted to the BBC Northern Orchestra under George Hurst which had won the Royal Amateur Orchestral Society Prize.

On leaving the Academy in 1968 Patterson played the trombone professionally and continued to compose. The Horn Concerto Op. 11, of 1971 may not be so clearly defined or as attractive as the Trumpet Concerto Although both are in a traditional and conservative idiom, the later work has a darker hue and perhaps needs stronger orchestral support than strings alone can give, although this is not evident in the earlier concerto.

Comedy for five winds, Op. 14, is certainly one work that most recalls Malcolm Arnold as well as Stravinsky's *Dumbarton Oaks* It is a very attractive work with a mellow slow movement; the other three movements imitate styles ranging from New Orleans jazz to Gershwin and the most famous of all hornpipes is never allowed to appear in its complete form. This scintillating piece is one of the 'repertoire' pieces written during the composer's experimental phase and out of keeping with that idiom which began with the stunning *Kyrie* Op. 13, scored for chorus and two players, with hands respectively at the keyboard of, and inside, one piano. To my mind, the music is totally out of character with the dignity and solemnity of the words. Some may even think it irreverent, and feel that this music would be more at home in a nightclub or at a pagan sacrificial rite. Yet for all this the work has absorbing and fascinating colour and unmistakably stirring qualities. The many effects elicited from the chorus, including clapping and aleatoric devices, make for a varied and truly exciting sound. Often there is a strangely exhilarating, percussive savagery anticipating the later works, including the *Canterbury Psalms* which was still fully ten years in the future, after the composer had reverted to his diatonic style.

From 1971 to 1974 Patterson had the appointment of Manson Fellow at the RAM lecturing in modern music and being responsible for the electronic studio. Later, and for several years up to 1980, he was head of electronics with the London Sinfonietta and, when required, played the tapes, attended to the amplification, played the synthesisers and worked with such performers as David Atherton, Boulez, Stockhausen, Henze and Berio. During these years he composed five works employing tape, namely *Fusions* Op. 23, with orchestra, *Shadows* Op. 27, for clarinet; *Strange Meeting* Op. 29, with orchestra; *Wildfire* Op. 33, also with orchestra, and *Brain Storm* Op. 39, for four voices and live electronics.

As Manson Fellow at the Academy he built up a library of modern scores to be housed there. For him the greatest discovery was that of the Polish school, which included such composers as Penderecki and Lutoslawski. This was to be the major influence on his experimental phase and during this time probably his greatest success was composed, a piece that has in eighteen years received over 1,500 performances. This work was *Timepiece* Op. 16, written in 1972 for the versatile Kings Singers to humorous if completely daft words by Tim Rose-Price. That work, notwithstanding its uncertain beginning, soon becomes amusing and engaging, irreverent and sarcastic. For example, we have an account of Creation which provides Adam with a wrist-watch, so the Adamic Paradise is 'okay with a watch to measure the day'. There is a variety of superb vocal effects, from blues, Anglican chant, an allusion to Stockhausen's *Stimmung* and an imitation of Louis Armstrong to several timepieces chiming and setting off their respective alarms.

The *Requiem* for chorus and orchestra, Op. 19, was written for the tenth anniversary of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, having been commissioned by the Washington Choral Arts Society for performance at the Kennedy Centre. Union disputes prevented this performance and the premiere took place in Coventry cathedral on 21 June 1975, during the six years up to 1981 when Patterson was Director of Contemporary Music at the University of Warwick. The *Requiem* is in six movements of which the fourth, for unaccompanied chorus, is taken from Ecclesiastes 3, 'To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven' which words were quoted by the President at the time of the Cuban crisis. The fifth movement, *Dies Irae* symbolises the last hours of the President's life in Dallas with the orchestra providing simulated rifle shots and the chorus the screams.

It is an uneven work often more felt and experienced than enjoyed; it is highly dramatic but its non-conventionality again may give the appearance of irreverence. Its brilliant Kyrie recalls Opus 13 and the Dies Irae is often very powerful; the weakness of the whole work, if that is what it is, is that the static music does not convince. The final movement, In Paradisium is highly atmospheric but there is no sublimity; in fact, one or two passages suggest hell rather than heaven but the closing pages are very fine and in a performance conducted by Sir Charles Groves I found it to be profoundly moving.

Another religious work, the Gloria Op. 21, for chorus and two players at one piano lacks the momentum and continuity of its companion piece, the Kyrie Op. 13, and is neither glorious nor joyful. At times the music may appear to deride the text and the words are subservient to vocal technique rather than a setting of triumphant affirmation. The work foreshadows the nightmarish world of Patterson's *Voices of Sleep*.

The Clarinet Concerto Op. 34 was written in 1976 and must rank as one of the very finest contemporary concertos for this instrument. There is an overlong and uncertain opening which lacks purpose and direction but when the music does erupt the result is well worth waiting for. The density of the texture of the strings is offset by the high and bright register of the clarinet which becomes almost human arid vocal, successfully embracing a wide range of emotion. The slow movement also takes a long time to establish itself yet, as with the Requiem the last minutes are of a rare and special quality. The finale is strong and highlights the composer's shrewd sense of sonority which he has evidently assimilated from the Polish school. Whilst his interest in Polish music and his subsequent invitation to visit that country in 1976 by Penderecki (he has made several further visits since) clearly influenced his music of the 1970s, his indebtedness is further acknowledged in such works as Cracowian Counterpoint op. 38, for a large instrumental ensemble first performed by the London Sinfonietta in 1977 for the Queen's Silver Celebrations. The Sinfonia for strings Op. 46, dedicated to the Polish conductor Jerzy Maksymiuk and the Polish Chamber Orchestra, a work which obviously pleases its composer. The Mass of the Sea Op. 47 is dedicated to Penderecki for his fiftieth birthday, and the Luslawice Variations Op. 50, for solo violin Penderecki commissioned for Konstanty Kulka to perform. Patterson's gratitude has also been shown in practical ways not the least his tireless efforts to help establish Penderecki in England. More recently Patterson's interest in Eastern Europe has extended to its folk music.

Voices of Sleep scored for soprano, chorus and orchestra dates from 1979. For the present writer, it is a very uncomfortable work that soon becomes aurally exhausting. We are in the world of bad dreams; of feeling sick enough to faint but unable to manage either and there is no relief. It is all too much. Yet one has to record that this piece has its admirers and the composer ranks it highly; indeed, it is true to say that Patterson's modern idiom does have a wide audience. After its premiere in Washington the work was featured in 1981 Henry Wood Promenade Concert Season.

I have the same problem with *At the Still Point of the Turning World* Op. 41, Patterson's second work dedicated to Amelia Freedman, the director of the Nash Ensemble, the first being the *Wind Quintet* Op. 2.

With the return to simple diatonic procedures in the 1980s Patterson produced some of his finest and most rewarding scores, including two works for brass ensemble. *Deception Pass* Op. 43 was written for the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain and first performed at the 1980 Cheltenham Festival. It was inspired by the dramatic channel of water dividing two islands off the west coast of America near Mount Vernon. The first movement suggests the hard angularity of the rock face; the second is atmospheric and suggests receding water pounding the rocks. Five years later *Meantime* Op. 53, for brass quintet appeared. This is in three sections a lively opening one, an elegiac central one with some exquisite moments and a finale of humour which is never allowed to become brash or vulgar as is often the material relegated to these noble instruments. It is a diverting and robust score.

Patterson's most immediate and enduringly attractive choral work is probably the *Canterbury Psalms*

Op. 44, which was commissioned by King's School, Canterbury when he was composer-in-residence there during 1984/5. The opening psalm, Psalm 97, begins with an impressive orchestral introduction and the whole movement is quasi-savage, recalling, in turn, Stravinsky's Rite of Spring and his Symphony of Psalms the music's syncopated rhythm have an infectious swagger; the crescendo to a staggering climax is truly exciting. Psalm 121 is an excellent contrast of stillness and quiet confidence; there are moments of telling tenderness and the music conveys a sense of awe and wonder blending a warm Middle-Eastern feel. Psalm 148 is majestic, powerful and patriotic, yet it is the passage for unaccompanied choir that is most impressive. This splendid work's only problem is that the full-blooded orchestral writing could easily overpower the choir particularly, as was the intention, when boys' voices are to be used. There is a curious predilection of intervals in this work the recurring perfect fifth of the first psalm; the recurring fourth of the second and the consecutive fifths of the last.

In 1981 Patterson married Hazel Wilson at St. Bartholomew's Church, Smithfield. His wife was, at one time, a music officer with the British Council; there are two children Philippa and Alastair the latter, born in 1986, five years junior to his sister.

The Concerto for Orchestra Op. 45 dates from 1981. It was commissioned by the Feeney Trust for the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and is designed in three movements: the first is competent; the second, albeit traditional but none the worse for that, is almost profound, having an admirable and long melodic line; the finale is another good fusion of humour and energy, although the performance I heard lacked the excitement the piece demanded. The Sinfonia for strings Op. 46 is another work of impeccable craftsmanship. It was followed by the Mass of the Sea Op. 47, for soprano and bass soloists, chorus and orchestra, written for the 1983 Three Choirs Festival. The opening Kyrie is coupled with an account of Creation. The following movement, Recitative for bass is a rare example of melisma in Patterson's music; the Gloria seems to step out of Carmina Burana or the Symphony of Psalms but it includes, as in the opening Canterbury psalm, a gradual build up to a tremendous climax. The subsequent movement deals with Noah and the Flood and the music recalls Wagner; one expects the Valkyries at any moment! The storm is captured imaginatively and there is a cadenza for solo trumpet. The Sanctus contains the best music of the whole work and has that same sublime B major climax as was to appear in the Sanctus of the Missa Brevis Op. 54. The Angus Dei is an allegro molto combining with the usual text Christ's instructions to His disciples to be fishers of men. Tim Rose-Price's words are absurd, attributing words to Christ of which there is no record that He ever spoke and out of keeping with who He was. The work ends with the words of Revelation 21 'and there was no more sea'. The work is often impressive but it is difficult to maintain quality in an extended piece whereas the Duologue Op. 49, for oboe and piano is as near to an ideal duo work as one could wish. The Missa Brevis also has the unifying intervallic device of thirds in three movements, the Kyrie the rhythmically vital Gloria and Agnus Dei whereas major seconds prevail in the Sanctus whose staccato slow march qualities may again be out of character with the words, and the Benedictus which contains the widest range of emotion throughout what is another accomplished work. Again this composer manages to write another ravishingly beautiful conclusion.

One may wonder why Patterson waited so long to write a string quartet or, for that matter, a symphony. When he did produce his String Quartet Op. 58, in 1986 it was an interesting work in four movements. The mood of the outer ones is lively, while the second, which is played pizzicato throughout, has a sinister feel to it. The third movement is thoughtful and mellow and played con sordini it is certainly the movement of greatest quality. The year of this quartet corresponded with Patterson's appointment as Head of Composition at RAM where he had become a fellow in 1981.

Paul Patterson obviously possesses a good business acumen, this being evident in many ways, not the least his composing of works for superlative musicians such as Malcolm Williamson in his Visions Op. 9, for organ; Osian Ellis with Spiders Op. 48; Klaus Tennstedt with his Upside-Down-under Variations Op. 56, given at a Henry Wood Promenade Concert in 1988, and Rostropovich with the Suite for solo cello Op. 62, to name a few examples. His down to earth common sense is also shown

in his willingness to involve young people. Many of his works have been composed with young performers in mind: Sonora Op. 17, for youth orchestra, the Kyrie Op. 13, and Gloria Op. 21, which must have been a splendid introduction to new music; Rebecca Op. 1, and the Canterbury Psalms Op. 44. The fact that the composer has conducted such pieces and is a magnificent communicator has won the respect of many.

His other superlative quality is infectious optimism, which itself cannot fail to encourage and to break down any barriers some may encounter between themselves and new music. As he once told me, 'I love giving pleasure to ordinary people with my music and enjoy talking to sympathetic listeners. I am very sensitive to criticism and listen most carefully to the slightest reservations people might have and often make revisions as a result. The audience, and more importantly the performers, are the most important influence when I write'.

Examples of music that give him pleasure are Gerard Schurmann's Six Studies of Francis Bacon Richard Rodney Bennett's Symphony no. 1, Britten's War Requiem and Walton's Belshazzar's Feast, Mozart is the 'perfect composer'; Bach is inspirational; Beethoven is the greatest master though his orchestration is quite unimaginative; Debussy has an admirable harmonic language and Fauré is serene; Wagner is rousing stuff, deeply felt but his ego gets in the way', Brahms is heavy going. Patterson's commitment to Polish music needs no further comment. As for British music he has 'a lot of time for Britten'; Tippett's early music is excellent but his later music is 'very indulgent and cluttered'; Elgar is sensuous and patriotic, and all the works of Walton he admires. Humphrey Searle is 'very gifted indeed'.

As for relaxation Patterson turns to swimming, sailing and fast cars as he finds, like many others, that composition is hard work. Surprisingly, he finds writing choral music difficult which, bearing in mind, his laudable results in this genre, is quite amazing. It has been said that he is a successor to the 'great British choral tradition'. That may be, but his music has little English feel about it. The Stabat Mater op. 57, written for the Huddersfield Choral Society, has a neo-classical elegance and the Te Deum Op. 65, his second work for the Three Choirs Festival, this time of 1988, are two further examples of this composer's mastery at combining choir with orchestra. In fact the Mass of the Sea, Stabat Mater and Te Deum look at the Creation, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Christ in an unplanned trilogy. Patterson's music is becoming well-known throughout the world since both he and his work have made lasting impressions. He has been composer-in-residence in many American universities as well as in Poland, Sweden, Norway, Australia and Canada. Indeed his music travels well and he is probably the most universally admired of younger British composers.

As well as the Clarinet Concerto there is a Violin Concerto Op 72 of 1992, a Cello Concerto Op 90 of 2002, a Viola Concerto of 2008-9 and the Phoenix Concerto for oboe and string orchestra. The concertos for violin, viola and cello also employ just a string orchestra. There is much to commend these concertos since they are well written but they are comparatively short.. Each of them has a welcome beauty but, perhaps, there is too much slow music to maintain our best attention. The Viola Concerto is often very beautiful but it is the Cello Concerto that is generally accepted as the finest of the three concertos all of which are tonal and aurally accessible.

He has received many awards including the Medal of Honour from the Polish Ministry of culture in 1987 for his promotion of Polish music in the UK and the Leslie Boosey Award in 1996.

He has been composer-in-residence at the University of Warwick and for South East Arts in Canterbury in the late 1970s. He was the director of the Exeter Festival from 1991 to 1997.

He has always be an topical composer as shown, for example, in his Millenial Mass of 1999.

As for the future one hopes Patterson will compose more symphonies and chamber music. There is

little so far for solo voice or guitar. One would like to hear what he would make of a set of orchestral variations on a well-known theme; or see him break into the world of opera. But he is a busy man one wonders where he gets the time to compose. What we do know is that whatever he writes he has a guaranteed audience ready to hear and who will not be disappointed.

[Paul Patterson's website](#)

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