

intolerant of modern composers if they weren't writing experimental, "fire-in-a-petshop" music. I have heard that certain composers wishing to write in what might be called a traditional style were actually blacklisted. This attitude is still quite prevalent today, not only at the BBC but at universities and conservatories. I felt no inclination to compose in such a musically arid world. However, it eventually dawned on me that film composers were highly successful and were greatly enjoyed by most "classical music" lovers. They were writing in a traditional style. I figured, therefore, that if only I could get my music played, it might go down well with the majority of audiences.

*RM: What happened specifically to make you change your mind and start composing?*

CB: The opportunity to put my idea to the test came when an outstandingly talented young recorder student of mine at the Royal Academy of Music won a prize in competition with players of all instruments. The prize was to play a concerto with a professional orchestra, but the conductor soon discovered that, although there were many recorder concertos by Baroque composers, their total length was always only in the 10–12 minute range. After that there was a hiatus in recorder music until the 20th century revival. But even then, the very approachable Malcolm Arnold was still only 11 minutes long! The only solution seemed to be for me to write one myself lasting the desired length of approximately 25 minutes.

About this time, which was in the mid 1990s, something very curious happened. Shortly before this need for a recorder concerto arose I had switched on the TV and was watching our most famous chat show host, Michael Parkinson, and his guest, Quincy Jones. In those days I had never heard of this artist, chiefly because his world of music was very different from mine. However, I strongly sensed that he was a special and exceptionally pleasant human being. Parkinson asked Quincy, in view of his enormous catalog of compositions, where all the music came from. The surprising reply was, "I just ask for it!" Parkinson asked what on earth he meant. Quincy said he would let his subconscious mind generate ideas for whatever type of music was required. He would lie in bed and make a list of what was needed (mood, instrumentation, style, length, etc.), then wait for the music to come to him out of the ether a day or two later.

I found this immensely interesting, so shortly afterward, when I needed to write that 25-minute recorder concerto, I recalled the Quincy Jones story and thought, "I'll try that too!" So I did—and to my amazement it worked! A couple of days later I was on my way down the stairs to go to the supermarket when, out of the blue, a tune came to me as if it were being played in my head. I ran back upstairs to write it down, a slow, expressive idea. It occurred to me that, by its nature, it would be perfect for an alto recorder. It all clicked! This was what I had asked for!

Once I had written this much, I realized I could write an entire concerto of the required length. Thereafter, tunes for the other movements were already in my head when I awoke in the morning. About 85 percent of the music I have written since then has come from ideas that greeted me upon awakening.

*RM: So the Recorder Concerto was the catalyst that sent you merrily on your way as a composer?*

CB: Essentially, yes. I'd written a few short, light orchestral pieces years before, but starting with the Recorder Concerto, I was in it for good.

*RM: Many of your subsequent works have also been concertos. You seem to have a predilection for this genre. Why is that?*

CB: Actually, I don't. Things just turned out that way. An oboe concerto followed the Recorder Concerto for two reasons. As a result of favorable public response to the Recorder Concerto, a taped performance was sent to a recording producer. He wanted to release it commercially but he needed more music to fill out the CD. The solution was simple: "Have Christopher write some more music!"

With this kind of encouragement I was raring to go. Paul Arden-Taylor, who had been such an impressive soloist in the Recorder Concerto, also happens to be a well-known professional oboist. So I thought it would be a good idea to display his versatility on the same CD by also being the soloist in an oboe concerto. This was written over a six-week period over Christmas 1995 and into the New Year of 1996.

My own principal instrument was the clarinet. As a matter of fact, I studied with three world-famous soloists: Jack Brymer, Reginald Kell, and Gervase de Peyer. So, almost inevitably, I began to think about the possibility of composing a clarinet concerto.