

*RM: Tell me more about this Celtic connection.*

CB: In my teens I used to borrow from the public library in Leeds volumes of collected Hebridean folk songs made by Marjorie Kennedy-Fraser. They were very imaginative settings for voice and celtic harp (or piano), miniature works of art. Some 10 years later the then-young Scottish tenor Kenneth McKellar recorded an entire disc of these songs with tasteful orchestrations by Kennedy-Fraser. The orchestrations even included the recorder, which gave an additional level of folk authenticity. The effect was magical. It still remains one of my top favorite recordings ever made and is fortunately still around, now on CD. I can still only come to the conclusion that the impression made by this atmospheric record was so strong that it is to this day surfacing in style in my own music. Even the last movement of my Violin Concerto shows the Celtic influence of Irish folk fiddlers.

*RM: I'd like to return for a moment to a controversial subject you opened up at the beginning of our conversation. You expressed fairly strong feelings about "cutting edge" vs. traditional, conservative-style composers. Would you care to elaborate on this?*

CB: Funding bodies are interested only in young, cutting-edge composers, which is a shame because these are the very same composers most audiences want to avoid. Present-day composers of serious classical music seem to think it's a sin to write music that in any way resembles a tune or to compose anything that in any way can lift an audience's spirit. The way to establish their maturity is to write deadly serious stuff with all the weight of the world's miseries on their shoulders. They are looking for profundity at too early an age. The emotional vibrations from these gritty works can only add to what we already know is a far from perfect world. Most people want to be uplifted by the spiritual beauties that music can convey more strongly than any other art. By all means be serious and dramatic and, hopefully, moving, but most composers nowadays are chiefly concerned with being what they like to think of as "original." Of course it is possible to sound like no other composer and still write bad music that nobody wants to hear. We have reached the state where every new composer is afraid to admit he has been influenced by anyone else. Human beings do not change that much over the ages. "It's still the same old story; a fight for love and glory," as the song goes.

There is nothing wrong in wanting to strike out in new directions, but I honestly think that in doing so, young composers have taken the wrong path. It is not the path the audiences for music have chosen to follow. New music can empty a concert hall. After a century of atonality not one single piece has been taken to heart by the human beings who were drawn emotionally to classical music in the first place.

*RM: Atonality seems almost anathema to you. Some people must like it, no?*

CB: Let me tell you a little story. I once had a cat that heard both live and recorded music all day long every day and was perfectly happy with this. But when I was asked to premiere some atonal music for recorder and piano at Wigmore Hall he got very distressed every time I tried to practice it. He would give me no peace and would try swiping at the recorder. I must stress that the music contained no strange avant-garde shrieks and squeaks. It was merely atonal. This was the only atonal music I ever played and the only music he ever hated. It led me to think that perhaps atonal music breaks some universal law in music of which we are unaware.

My present cat seems to enjoy whatever music is being played, with one exception. This is a perfectly enjoyable piece by Piazzolla, but twice Piazzolla briefly goes into bitonality. My cat definitely does not like music played in two different keys at the same time! In both passages his ears go back and his face assumes an expression of outrage. When the music returns to "normal" he's OK again. Perhaps music is even more magical than we think if its moods and vibrations can be detected by some animals.

*RM: Does music affect us more profoundly than the other arts?*

CB: Look, go to any great play performed by the greatest actors and measure the applause at the end. Then go to a concert of great music conducted by say, Dudamel, and you'll experience a mass standing ovation, cheers, bravos, and intense exhilaration and high spirits lasting 10 times longer than applause for the spoken word. Such is the power of music. Music *is* magic.

*RM: What's next on your compositional agenda?*

CB: Well, I've had several requests for a bassoon concerto and one for a viola concerto, but I