

DAVID F. GOLIGHTLY

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From motor mechanic to composer must be an unusual transition but that is the case of David F Golightly. Another unusual aspect of this composer is his love for Russia and their apparent love for him and his music. Equally interesting is Golightly's naivety seemingly believing that everyone is good, decent and honourable and there is his individual and personalised Christian faith, a private faith which he does not force on anyone.



While some composers have scales, intervals and keys which they treat as colours, Golightly has a similar system so that C major tonality speaks of spirituality and the root C triad normally represents the Holy Trinity. In common with many composers he uses notes in the diatonic scale to represent his own initials and he is fortunate in that he has three initials represented by musical notes. The interval of the 7th represents the upward climb, although perfection is never reached. He explains that a lot of music is influenced by his Christian faith but not in a religious context.

It will also be a surprise to some that he has written a symphony for a football club and it is not Manchester United, Chelsea, Liverpool or Arsenal. It is Middlesbrough.

One of our finest composers and pianists, John McCabe, has performed Golightly's Piano Sonata no. 1 which the composer dedicated to him. They met and became friends while working together at a Performing Rights Society committee.

His music is not avant garde or 'way out' but it is not bland either. He does not care for some types of avant garde music and, while he has studied serial music, he does not intend to use this discipline.

His naivety is somewhat disarming. He was certainly no outstanding academic at school. His honesty is praiseworthy. It was a LP record of Moura Lympany that turned him to classical music which record included Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata. He found and purchased this LP in Woolworths in Blackpool in 1965. This developed into his appreciation of real music.

He admires the clarity of Monteverdi, the refinement of Mozart, Schubert's perception, Beethoven as the most magnificent communicator and, Brahms' wonderful expansive music. He has stated that listening to Mahler's Symphony no. 9 is like holding the hand of God and he admires some of Britten's music and he says that Tippett's music is austere but sometimes worth the effort. He refers to Humphrey Searle as an obvious major talent.

Golightly speaks of the tremendous friendships he has made through music both in this country and in Russia for whom he has the highest regard.

His Russian connection came about through Charles Blair of Manchester Business School who had met Ludmilla Patrova the agent for the Soglaise Male Voice Choir. Blair said that he would give the choir's conductor, Alexander Govorov, a copy of the video of David's opera *The Eye* and, if he liked it, there might be a chance that the choir would perform some of Golightly's choral music. David and Blair travelled to St. Petersburg in 1993. The choir had learned David's choral work, *Rites of Passage*. Alexander commissioned the *St. Petersburg Mass* and, as a thank you, David organised the choir's British tours.

He was born David Frederick Golightly on 17 November 1948 to Joyce Golightly, a district nurse and then a sister for the local community hospital. His mother was not trained musically but loved serious music, the theatre, reading and studying her family history.

There is a strong family history of community work including charitable concerts, research into local dialects and the work of preservation groups. Mrs Golightly's mother, Emerline, was well-known throughout the north-east for her creative embroidery and dressmaking for dolls and her husband, James, was an active Socialist who had many Labour MPs as friends.

Charity concerts were given regularly when musicians and performers gave their services free of charge for the charitable concerns advocated by Mrs Golightly's mother.

She lived with her son at 14 Paragon Street, Stanhope, County Durham and she was lady of culture and helped her mother arrange concerts for the elderly and charitable concerns.

They attended Stanhope Methodist Church regularly and were known throughout the Dales for their community work. Their ancestors have given support for John Wesley's visits to the area at the beginning of his ministry.

David had piano lessons with a Miss Potts for about five years from the ages of five to ten but he would not practise and so, thereafter, he played just for fun and at the concerts organised by his grandmother. He attended Wolsingham Grammar School from 1959-1964 and from then to 1969 he had day release to attend Darlington Technical College to train for his City and Guilds as a Motor Vehicle technician. He was an apprentice engineer with Doxford and Sunderland Shipbuilding Company in Wolsingham and, from 1969-1972, was foreman of vehicle maintenance at John Roxby Surtess at Shotley Bridge.

When young he enjoyed pop music such as The Beatles which calls for no application, aesthetic or brain power. You cannot equate Paul McCartney with Shostakovich. Shostakovich was a great musician and superlative composer. But when David came across the Moura Lympany LP, it was a welcome turning point for him since it set him off in a new direction which has been rewarding for him and those who admire his music.

He had no pre-conceived ideas on music, literature and art. He read the works of Shakespeare, Alexander Pope's Essay of Man, Chaucer in the original Old English, Adolf Hitler's Mein Kampf and Karl Marx's Das Kapital. He enjoys the poetry of Byron, Shelley, Ted Hughes and many others and it was his discovery of Pushkin that may have lead to his fascination with Russia, its people and its culture. He was not happy with being a motor mechanic and the damage it did to his hands did not help with playing musical instruments.

His first compositions were a piano sonata and two settings of Pushkin originally sung by Mr Henderson, the lay clerk at Durham cathedral with whom David had had some singing lessons.

In the course of time his music was influenced by Shostakovich, Copland and Britten, and his music has musical codes within the structure, as was the case with Berg, organic forms with pitch anchors and melodic reference points related to the inflection of speech.

He is not a drinker but once was a smoker, which may have stimulated his work but he finds any time of the day suitable for composition but the length of time to compose at one setting depends on how confident he feels.

He went to New College, Durham, where he studied for his both O and A levels from the age of twenty three (1971-1975) where the Head of Music was Anthony Elton.

While at College in Durham, David worked part time as a Betterwear salesman. He achieved six O levels and 2 A levels and Grade 8 in Tuba and obtaining Grade 7 in both piano and singing. Then he went up to Huddersfield University (1975-1978) to work for a BA honours degree in music composition and performance. His tutor there was Richard Steinitz who founded the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival. David also studied orchestration with Arthur Butterworth. A fellow student was the clarinettist Roger Heaton.

While at Huddersfield, he met a fellow student, Pamela Moakes, who was a year ahead of him and who was a fine pianist and an excellent musician. They married at Blackpool Methodist Church in 1989 after a long courtship, but, sadly, the marriage did not work and a divorce was granted three years later. There are no children.

From there he went on to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama for a post graduate certificate in advanced studies. Among his tutors were Alfred Niemann who taught, among other things, serial music, and Patric Stanford. In 1979 David went up to Leeds University attending for a post graduate certificate in education in Music and English. From 1990–1992 he was a part time student at Nottingham University receiving a AMusM in composition which is identified as Master of Musical Arts

His first acknowledged works are Moods for solo clarinet of 1980, written for Roger Heaton, and his opera The Eye of 1993, for which he also wrote the libretto, which project concerned him since the subject matter related to the reality of hell which was now overcrowded, but it was presented in a comical way, and his other successful early work Rites of Passage for chorus and piano to words by Pushkin.

He has no strong political views but believes in honesty and fairness which he expects to find in everybody. His Christian views are expressed in that he states that the total human condition validates the existence of God and that God is a god of love whether one is a Christian, Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. He does not attend a church these days but was brought up as a Methodist and he emphasises that his faith is important and expressed in his music. He feels that his best music has been inspired or generated by Divine impulse but he does not live in the ridiculous world of Rosemary Brown who claims that great composers dictate new works to her from the grave.

His heart attack in 2004 and the passing of his mother the following year were great trials but his faith carried him through in days when the Christian faith is being dismissed in the UK and elsewhere and is now the subject of increasing ridicule.

He is an animal lover acknowledging that animals are 'honest' and apologising that he is not a vegetarian yet. He enjoys his football, fishing, reading, poetry, conversation and studying people which we all do to some extent.

Of his own musical works he probably values most his St. Petersburg Mass, which had a ten minute standing ovation at his premiere, and his Symphony no. 1 subtitled The Middlesbrough. The Mass was sung by the Soglasie Choir for whom Golightly arranged extensive tours in Britain in May 1993 and June 1995. The city of Prague played and recorded the Symphony no. 1 under Gavin Sutherland in 2000.

He rightly prizes his Piano Trio no. 1 (Letters of Regret) which he says is a precis of all that he has done so far. It is a powerful and compelling work. I have seen the letter from the distinguished British Composer, Arthur Butterworth, who praises the work highly referring to it as an excellent trio which it is. Others have written in similar fashion.

It was composed in 2002 and dedicated to a dark Irish colleen, a woman with whom David fell in love with and probably still loves but which possible romance seems no longer possible. Having had the same experience I can identify with this work. The three movements are Demon, Angel and Letters of Regret. The demon is some external force with an unknown agenda that influences events. Angel is obviously the Irish girl and the music seems to be very ghostly; the finale charts the regret at the unsuccessful efforts at romance and is a set of variations depicting private love letters written but not sent. The music also captures the nervousness of the participants.

The opening movement really displays the composer's burning desire and the second is a description of the one desired in a movement of extraordinary gentleness and loneliness. The finale is introspective and episodic and needs an excellent performance to make it hang together. It is full of isolation and despair, a very moody

piece. It is clearly autobiographical and proves my assertion that the character of a composer is found in his music or some of it.

This work will only be fully appreciated by musicians and may leave music lovers standing unable to appreciate the depth and continent of this very personal human document. It was commissioned by the Fenice Trio who gave its premiere.

A second piano trio has since appeared subtitled *In Memoriam* and was written in memory of his mother who died in 2005.

The St. Petersburg Mass is an outstanding achievement by any standard. Just before Christmas 1993 the poet Steve Hobson was asked by the composer if he would be interested in writing some poetry to include in the setting of the Latin mass and it was needed quickly as the Mass was scheduled for a performance in Russia in May 1994. Hobson and Golightly had worked together before on a cycle of songs, *Songs of the Cliff Top*, which were premiered in Manchester in a concert in aid of the Multiple Sclerosis Society. In 1993 David had composed a cycle of six poems, *Rites of Passage*, to texts by Pushkin for the Roussland Soglaise Choir of St Petersburg which this male voice choir performed on their extended tour of Britain in 1993. Golightly had been interested in the poetry of Pushkin since he purchased an anthology of his poems in an antique book shop in Hexham when he was seventeen.

For interpolation with the Kyrie, Hobson wrote a poem *The Lake is Frozen* in which the line *Pain is like ice is vital*. The desolate landscape of Russia is portrayed. The Gloria begins with brass fanfares and continues with Hobson's poem *The Cathedral*. The Credo includes the poem *The Long Man* which seems out of place in a Mass since it seems to criticise society's lack of interest in ancient gods. The Sanctus is much better since it portrays Christ in Gethsemane and if the opening Kyrie owes something to the G Minor opening of Shostakovich's superlative Symphony no. 11, the Sanctus has a very English feel about it. The bleak of the frozen north returns in the Agnus Dei with the poem *Cradle of Ice*.

With any work of length, the Mass takes 55 minutes, the quality varies as it does in Gerard Victory's monumental *Ultima Rerum*. Nonetheless, Golightly's Mass is a great achievement and worthy to be well known. It would make a deserved trinity with the two other great British choral works of the twentieth century, Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* and Fricker's impressive *The Vision of Judgment*.

The premiere at the State Capella Hall in May 1994 was a triumph. The press called it the toast of St. Petersburg, The conductor of the State Conservatoire Orchestra, Alexander Polyichuk, said, "It is a work of great talent." Professor Mussein, Head of Conducting at the St Petersburg Conservatoire said, "It is music of the heart." The ten minute standing ovation was so remarkable that the composer was somewhat embarrassed. He was called the Englishman with a Russian soul.

The previous year, 1992, saw the production of Golightly's opera *The Eye* at The Grange Arts Centre in Oldham conducted by Roger Heaton. The plot concerns good and evil and the dilemma facing the Devil since hell is now overcrowded. Heaven gives Lucifer the opportunity to demonstrate the qualities essential for salvation with the hope that humanity will learn the lessons about life and eternal life. The opera last two hours forty five minutes and is set in two acts with a libretto by the composer. It ran for five nights with considerable success.

It was for Roger Heaton that David wrote his *Moods* for solo clarinet which I consider one of his best works. It uses many aspects of the clarinet and, as a result, it comes out as a very original work second only to Stravinsky's solo clarinet pieces.

The Symphony no. 1 (*The Middlesborough*) was composed over a period of four years between the various other tasks of teaching. It is a tribute to Steve Gibson, the players and personnel of Middlesborough Football Club. The composer raised the £30,000 necessary to have the work recorded in August 2000 by the City of

Prague Symphony Orchestra under Gavin Sutherland. It is set in four movements Resoluto Marcato, For those who strive, knock hard on the door of fate, Scherzando Allegro Leggeiro Delicato, Follow the path of the visionaries, theirs is the way of the light, Expressivo sostenuto, There are no defeats only gifts of wisdom, and Giocos Maestoso, Seek ye the grail of life.

Gibson had invested much of his own capital in the club which David had supported since he was 12 years of age. Gibson also set up educational facilities at the club and other community projects and I understand that of all professional football clubs, Middlesbrough has the best record for community services. David's symphony acknowledges this and he explains that the symphony is not only about the fortunes and disappointments of this football club but a portrait of the journey of life with all its struggles and hardships as well as its joys.

I feel the symphony is best presented without the references to a football club or the subtitles of the movements since football and the subtitles do not have a universal appeal and will deter many. The work portrays the history of the club over five years, the scherzo represents the club's visit to Wembley, the slow movement reveals the pain of defeat and the final movement with its march attempts to capture the atmosphere of a match day with the climaxes suggesting the home team scoring a goal.

The symphony has a rhythmic vitality but probably needs more rhythmic contrast. The orchestral colour is commendable but I feel the recording lacks something and seems to show strain at times. However, the symphony is unique and should be made known but not just for curiosity value.

Programme music is not fashionable at the present time. Music lovers feel diminished when they cannot identify the events in the music although some programme music make the events they represent quite clear as in Richard Strauss's Till Eulenspiegel but, in his masterpiece, Ein Heldenleben the various events are not clear unless they have been identified beforehand. Liszt's From the Cradle to the Grave poses questions such as what part of the music indicates the marriage of the subject?

Golightly has also written fantasy novels and poetry and much music for film and the theatre including such well-known literary works as Blood Wedding, Cider with Rosie, Juno and the Paycock, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, The Glass Menagerie and Under Milk Wood.

In 1994, David formed the North-West Composers' Association which was initially formed to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Composers' Guild and was made up of composers living in the north west. Golightly was not only the founder but the chairman until 2000 and the list of members included David Ellis, Kevin Malone and Thomas B. Pitfield. Concerts were arranged as were some recordings.

At one time David was vice chairman of the Composers' Guild and a director of the British Academy. This shows his dedication to all aspects of music and to administration.

To return to Golightly's music it is my opinion that David's more intimate works are his best. His piano works are of real quality. The Piano Sonata no. 1 of 1997 has been recorded by John McCabe and the Three Shadow Portraits of 1996 have a virtuosity and clarity that is remarkably telling. Very few composers can write successfully for the piano. David Golightly certainly can.

There is a flute concerto, a trumpet concerto, both worthy of attention, and a massive Symphony no. 2. There are some songs including an effective setting for soprano and piano of The Lord's Prayer recently arranged for SATB. The solo version was premiered by Marie Smith and the author of this essay in November 2007 at Bembridge on the Isle of Wight and was well received.

David has his own publishing company, Modrana Music Publishers and there is a website which is modranamusicpromotions.com.

All of his works should be made available so that the general public can discern that here is a composer who has something to say and what he says is worthwhile. That cannot be said of many composers, some of whom are well-known and admired.

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