

## **JOHN PITTS**

Dr David C F Wright

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John Michael Pitts is a young British composer currently living in Bristol.

He was born at Kingston upon Thames to David Yate Pitts, a civil servant with the inland revenue, and Rosemary, who is a French tutor. They were both fine singers being members of the BBC Chorus.

At the time of John's birth, the family were living at East Molesey in Surrey. There are three other children. Antony, who was born in 1969, studied at New College, Oxford and is a composer and the conductor of Tonus Peregrinus and has recorded works by John Dunstable and Orlando Gibbons, among others. Some recordings are available on the Naxos label and Arvo Part's Passio is available on Hyperion. He was a producer at Radio 3 but resigned over the outrageous Jerry Springer opera broadcast. James also studied music at Christ Church College in Canterbury. He is now a primary teacher in Belgium. Timothy studied business at UWE..



John is the youngest of the family. He took up the violin at a very early age and the piano by the time he was nine. His violin studies were with Vivienne Price, the founder of the National Children's Orchestra. While at Bristol University John took up the viola and tenor viol.

It is amazing to hear John say that in his early days he found the music of Haydn and Mozart dull. As a boy he read Enid Blyton, Willard Price, the Just William stories, Sherlock Holmes and Jane Austen. As a Christian, he also read missionary biographies such as The Cross and the Switchblade by David Wilkerson..

He sang with the school choir, Tiffin Boys, and wrote his first piece at the age of nine, a little piece for the piano.

He was at Tiffin School for Boys in Kingston upon Thames from 1988-1994. He achieved eleven GCSEs and four A levels in, Music, Latin, French and Greek. He went up to Bristol University in 1995 and graduated in 1998 with a BMus (Hons) in music.

He was a music teacher at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Clifton, Bristol during the spring and summer of 2003 and, when needed, playing the organ for assemblies in the Lord Mayor's Chapel.

In 2004 and 2005 he was teaching at various schools around Bristol, and, since 2006, has been the joint subject co-ordinator of music at Clevedon School with 1300 pupils including directing the jazz band !.

I wonder if he finds Haydn and Mozart dull today. Like the majority of people he has expressed grave doubts about Britten both as a man and a composer.

He does not believe that the symphony is dead but would like to write one if time and opportunity permits. He used to compose late at night and into the early hours but now is married with two small girls, Katie and Emily. His wife is Vicky and she is a GP.

He worships in an Anglican Church but is not adverse to worshipping at a Roman Catholic Church and rightly states that denominations are man made. Politically he may describe himself as a Conservative with a small c and explains that sometimes it is difficult to vote positively.

He has music degrees from both Bristol and Manchester Universities studying composition with Adrian

Beaumont (see my separate article), Geoff Poole, John Casken (whose orchestral work *Orion over Farne* is a masterpiece) and John Pickard. He also has had some lessons with Raymond Warren and Robert Saxton and, briefly, from Diana Burrell.

In 2003, John won the Philharmonia Orchestra Martin Musical Scholarship Fund Composition Prize of £5000 with his Piano Quartet. Two of his chamber pieces, *Typhus* and *Nuts & Bolts*, were short-listed by the Society for the Promotion of New Music. He also writes Christian music and two of his hymns are on the Naxos label with Tonus Peregrinus. In 2006, he was commissioned to compose *And I will raise him up at the last day*. He has written music for four plays and two short operatic works... *Crossed Wires* for the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival in 1997 and *Three Sliced Mice* commissioned by the Five Brothers Pasta Sauces. Obviously he has a sense of honour. He has conducted four Bristol Savoy Operatic Society performances of Gilbert and Sullivan arranging *Pirates of Penzance*, the *Gondoliers* and *Iolanthe* for small band. He certainly is not narrow minded!

He is one of the founding members of the Severnside Composers Alliance. This Alliance includes Frank Harvey, David Bedford, Raymond Warren, Steven Kings, Geoff Poole and Adrian Beaumont.

Pitts has written about his style and that he is sure of the type of music he wants to write and that he has developed a personal harmonic system. But he states that this is a tool and not a style and that serialism is merely a tool and not a style with which I strongly disagree. Serialism is a style and calls for discipline and is only effective in the hands of a master composer. Pitts has called his style twisted harmonies.

He explains his belief in God as creator and that God created man in His image. He states the need to control our imagination which is in contrast to day dreaming and that free imagination can lead to a random idea then our focused imagination creates a set of events and then we use our skills to create the work. He believes that God having given us a mind and logic should result in our using these gifts for personal creativity.

In 2008 a CD was released of his *Seven Airs and Fantasias* for piano played by Steven Kings which received good reviews and one reviewer described the work as stunning and seriously impressive.

However, I query the use of his notation. In one piece he constantly has the same chord repeated as quavers but only gives the notes for the first chord and has bare lines for all the repeated chords whereas to give all the notes of the chord each time is easier to read and preferable.

I have listened to some of his work with interest. His song *Was there e'er* of 1994 has an attractive vocal line but there may be a reliance of repeated patterns. Repetition is also a feature of *Fun 4 Three* (1996) and *My Lute Awake* is somewhat static with pastel colours but which captures atmosphere. The *Fantasia on a Pakistani hymn tune* is often vital with a splendid part for the clarinet, while *Cerebrations* for string quartet is a compelling work of contrasts. At times it is 'teeth on edge music' but there are fine moments and a vitality coupled with recognisable thematic material, although the music retains its angularity.

He has had good opportunities and a good start in life but, as yet, may not have made his mark and we are awaiting a remarkable work from him that which will make us all sit up and take note.

## WORKS

- O little town of Bethlehem for choir and organ (1992)
- Love me not for Comely grace voice and piano? (1993)
- Agnus Dei SATB (1993)
- Misella Puella for flute and piano (1993)
- Psalm 13 for choir (1994)
- Serenade for guitar (1994)
- Sweet day for voice and piano (1994)
- Three violin duets (1994)
- Was there e'er for voice and piano (1994)
- Changes for piano duet (1995)

Prelude for organ (1995)  
 The pilgrim for voice and piano (1995)  
 Antigone, music for the play for chamber ensemble (1996)  
 Fun for Three for oboe, piano and gloved hand (1996)  
 Mischief for piano (1996)  
 Motet 4 Eight (1996)  
 Table manners for cello (1996)  
 The Fawn for chamber ensemble (1996)  
 Journey through a distant land for flexible instrumentation (1996)  
 Crossed Wires for chamber ensemble (1997)  
 Typhus for voice and chamber ensemble (1997)  
 Piece 4 six for string quartet and two percussion (1997)  
 Peter Piper for voice and chamber ensemble (1997)  
 A streetcar named Desire, music for the play for piano (1997)  
 Cerebrations for string quartet (1998)  
 My Lute, awake for voice and chamber ensemble (1998) also for voice and guitar,  
 Fantasia on a Pakistani hymn tune for flute, clarinet, cello and harp (1998)  
 Square Dance for large ensemble (1998)  
 And I saw a new heaven for chamber orchestra (1999)  
 Backcloth for brass quartet (1999)  
 The Inmates for chamber ensemble (1999)  
 Toccata for piano (1999))  
 And after these things, for choir and accompaniment (2000) also for string sextet  
 The voice that breathed o'er Eden for SSATBB (2000)  
 Thy way, not mine, O Lord for SATB (2000)  
 Passacaglia for orchestra (2001) also for organ and for piano duet  
 Lord Jesus, come SATB and accompaniment (2001)  
 Piano trio (2001)  
 Nuts and Bolts for violin, piano and percussion (2001) also version without percussion  
 Three Sliced Mice for chamber ensemble (2001)  
 Typhoid for clarinet, violin, cello and piano (2001) arrangement of Typhus  
 Prelude, Sarabande and Fugue for chamber ensemble (2001)  
 Four Short pieces for recorder and piano (2001)  
 Jesus said I AM for SSATBB (2001)  
 Voice from the throne for string orchestra (2001)  
 You are worthy, O Lord SSATBB (2001)  
 Dreams do show thee me, for voice and accompaniment (2001)  
 Eternal Love voice and accompaniment (2002)  
 Tiger Raag for string trio (2002)  
 Piano Quartet (2002)  
 Swirling Skirmish for recorder and harpsichord (2002)  
 My God, I love Thee, congregational hymn (2003)  
 All glory, laud and honour SATB and accompaniment (2003)  
 Are you going? for piano, six hands (2003)  
 Seven Airs and Fantasias for piano (2007)  
 A Winter Night, three movements for piano (2008)

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