

David, our Goliath

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“I shall miss his contribution to the Board more than he can know. Always passionate, always thoughtful and occasionally so contrary that he winds up arguing with himself... David has the fine quality of always being open to a change of heart when a persuasive enough case is made. It will take a big man to fill his little shoes.”

Gary Osborne, Chairman, SEC

Interview / Photo: DH

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Bringing in the Association of Professional Composers to join with the Composers' Guild of Great Britain and the Songwriters' Guild, made him one of BASCA's de facto founding co-Chairmen. He has chaired the Classical and Jazz Executive Committee "for years", represented BASCA on the European Composers' Forum and worked tirelessly to represent the interests of composers. After 25 years, David Stoll, is resigning from all BASCA committee work. He acknowledges that now is the moment to get back to writing and producing music full-time. BASCA recognises his tremendous work and contribution.

Now you've stepped down from your stewardship in the BASCA executive, what do you intend to do with your free time?

Free time? (laughs). I remember saying to a bank manager about 30 years ago, he said "surely you just want to make a lot of money so you can retire?" and I said "you don't understand composers". I want to make a lot of money so that I can do my work without worrying about paying my bills, paying my mortgage or anything else. At the moment, a lot of my free time is grabbing the time for writing and recording. But as I diminish the committee work and have more and more time during the every day, then there is more free time. So what do I love doing that is not part of my music? I love theatre, I love walking, I love playing an ancient Chinese game call 'Go', which is a great passion of mine and at which I'm very, very bad. It's the greatest game in the world. And of course I like family time and anybody who knows me would think it disingenuous if I didn't mention that I enjoy going out to eat; good company with good friends and a having a nice meal. I do like good wine and I like single malt scotch too.

What advice would you offer BASCA for its future existence?

When we founded BASCA - and I was founding co-chairman with Guy Fletcher - what we had to put together was an organisation which had a sort of noughts and crosses structure. We had to work so that the different genres could be different and yet work together: We had to work so the different levels of membership, say interested amateurs, part-timers, seasoned professionals, again with different interests, could work together and that's always been a difficult structure to carry out. In other words: Do you want as many members as possible whether they are professionals or not? Or do you want the most high profile members? Or what do you want? I think BASCA has been magnificent in solving these inherent problems but I think there is still further to go and that will be decided

by the Board as it continues.

BASCA is beginning to be looked to as THE voice of songwriters and composers, of significant producers and creators of music and song, here and around the world, amongst politicians, amongst the media, amongst the arts organisations and the music industry. I want that to continue and grow. I can't see why it shouldn't. There's no reason why BASCA shouldn't go from strength to strength. People should inevitably think, we want to know what composers and songwriters say ... well, BASCA will tell us. I want to be with the community of composers and songwriters, I want to be in BASCA.

What do you feel will be the biggest challenge affecting the working life of composers in 2014 / 2015?

This is an ongoing one. It's about the delivery of one's work to the public and the way the public responds to that both commercially and artistically. We cannot any longer live with aspects of the old models of how to earn a living. We must embrace the methodologies which are now for instant, global and cheap delivery of music and ensure that happens efficiently and fairly for the creators.

The second thing is, without making a value judgment about how people listen to music or work on other people's music, we need to understand that music is now for very many people a background activity and we need not to complain about that but to persuade people that it can be a valuable foreground activity.

The arts, in general, offer a safe rite of passage or life experience for the reader or the listener or the viewer and they gain more, the more they allow the mind of the artist to be in control and reflect their own experience against that. There is still a very strong reason for the audience to be receptive and not exclusively interactive.

What have been your career highlights?

My experience, and I think many people's in this sort of job, is that I haven't organised my career. For example, for various reasons the first job I got from the BBC was writing

music for a children's programme but it happened to be a children's programme teaching English as a foreign language. Then for several years I was the main person writing songs, teaching English as a foreign language. Now I loved that but it wasn't what I'd chosen to do.

Then the first documentary I wrote the music score for on the television was a science documentary, so for a while, science documentaries were what I was asked to do.

And then similarly, a bit later on, I was asked to write a piece of chamber music for a concert in Holland and then I was asked to write a lot of chamber music. So career highlights in a sense are slightly difficult because you're following what comes up.

I've written four string quartets, in fact two of them separately and almost coincidentally, came out on CD in December. To me they are the things which I find very difficult but really, really rewarding to write. I love string quartet music. Let me put it like this, the highlights that I'm expecting to come will outshine all the ones so far. Is that cheeky?

What's your favourite piece of music that actually makes you emotional?

Oh God. I'm not going to allow just one. The last time I burst into tears while listening to a piece of music was 'Sibelius' Fifth Symphony' where the combination of rigorous intellect and gigantic emotion is so balanced that it's a privilege to be able to hear it. On the other hand, I will never ever forget the moment I first heard 'Love Me Do' and knew that suddenly something new and important was happening. It was as though colour was coming into a black and white world.

If you were to meet the 18-year old you, what advice might you give based on what you now know?

Very good question. Believe in yourself and trust in yourself and your work. Don't undersell your work. Don't try and do what you think other people want or expect but follow your own artistic vision. 