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4BR Interview: Nigel Clarke

— Part 1

In the first of a major three part interview, Chris Thomas talks to composer Nigel Clarke about his early life and musical influences

WEDNESDAY, 2 APRIL 2014



Creative persona: Composer Nigel Clarke

Despite Nigel Clarke's success as Composer in Residence during the late James Watson's tenure at Black Dyke, two recent events have brought the work of one of our most original creative thinkers into sharp focus.

The first was Brassband Buizingen's double CD, 'When Worlds Collide'; a magnificent showcase of Clarke's brass band music and a striking testament to the productive relationship that has developed between the composer and the leading Belgian band.

In addition, when his Cornet Concerto 'Mysteries of the Horizon' was announced as winner of the Brass and Wind category of the 2013 British composer Awards, it further confirmed his compositional status.

However, music our genre forms only a part of the creative persona of a composer with a refreshingly innovative approach to everything he writes.

Chris Thomas recently caught up with Nigel to discuss all things music...



The amazing Harmen Vanhoorne

Chris Thomas: Many congratulations on your British Composer Award. How did it feel to win the brass and wind category?

Nigel Clarke: I was more than thrilled to be nominated for a 2013 BASCA Award with 'Mysteries of the Horizon' but I never expected to actually win.

To be judged by your peers and not found wanting is very special, although like all awards it represents past achievement!

I see the award very much as a team success, with the amazing Harmen Vanhoorne who commissioned the concerto, conductor Luc Vertommen and Brass Band Buizingen who recorded it so brilliantly.

Then comes Tredegar Band and Ian Porthouse who also deserve special thanks as they delivered a stunning British premiere with Harmen at the RNCM Festival of Brass in Manchester last year, which meant the work, could qualify for entry in the 2013 BASCA competition.

I must add that I didn't enter myself for the award; it was my publisher Studio Music. The first I knew about it was when the nominations came out.

Anyway, it was a true collaboration!!



Collaboration: Teaming up with Tredegar MD Ian Porthouse and a political hero

Chris Thomas: You were brought up in Margate and went to a school with a strong emphasis on music. How did your musical interests start to take shape in those early years?

Nigel Clarke: I loved music from the start. One of my earliest school memories was the head teacher playing classical music to us during morning assembly.

I still remember her choices - Kabalevsky's 'Comedians Gallop' and Khachaturian's 'Sabre Dance' through to extracts from Tchaikovsky's 'Swan Lake'. I would sit there mesmerised, savouring every moment.

Once the music stopped the rest of the day was downhill for me!

I started off learning the recorder, which increased my interest in music. After failing my 11 plus exam, I went to the local Secondary Modern school and was required to do metal work and wood work classes for two whole afternoons - activities in which I had no interest in whatsoever!

However, music was encouraged and the school had a brass band with a highly motivated teacher, Ben Tillett.

Band practice was on Monday and Thursday evenings after school. The school band played hymns every morning in school assembly and we had a dedicated band room to practise in at lunchtimes. How much better could things be!

The school band also acted as a nursery for the local Margate Silver Band, and we often hopped across the channel to do concerts in Calais, Boulogne and Lille.

It was not unusual for pupils to join the armed services bands as a career. In those days Army and Marine bands gave concerts on local bandstands and in the Margate Winter Gardens on the seafront.

Chris Thomas: When did you begin to compose and take a greater interest in the creative side of music?

Nigel Clarke:With the school having an unofficial emphasis on music, jotting things down on manuscript paper started then.

It was a different world at that time. Music seemed important to our cultural life!

Andre Previn would appear on Sunday evening TV presenting music with the LSO, the Proms were on in the summer every evening and 'Young Musician of the Year' was covered every evening at a respectable time and not in the graveyard slot.

In those days it was about the music and the talent of the competitors - not watching the young players go shopping to choosing their concert dress etc. Today we seem obsessed with the human-interest side of the story rather than the talent of the performers.

Chris Thomas: What kind of music were you writing in those early days?

Nigel Clarke:Like almost anyone that starts out, it was very traditional.

I remember writing a set of variations on 'Land of Hope and Glory' for cornet and also penning a piece for church organ called 'Toccata', which was a little too near for comfort to one by J S Bach - but that is how you start!



Polish influence: Composer Lutoslawski

Chris Thomas: Later, you were drawn to the music of the new Polish school and composers such as Lutoslawski and Penderecki.

What was it that attracted you to their music and did it influence your own writing at the time?

Nigel Clarke: I have to preface this answer by saying that I hated new music as a child.

I remember hearing a Béla Bartók string quartet and almost being angry at its dissonance and aggression even though ironically, this was something I would be very interested in later.

Then, aged 18, I discovered 'Le Sacre du Printemps', which was a life-changing moment.

Suddenly new music was central to me. I still remember the recording that I bought; a tape cassette of a performance given by the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. I would die to get hold of that performance now!

My love of music from Poland must have come soon after that encounter. I was also encouraged by a wonderful man called Peter Wastall who edited music for Boosey & Hawkes and published many contemporary music editions for brass and wind instruments.

I remember turning up one day at his house near Deal in Kent when he had just received a new handwritten manuscript through the post by Peter Maxwell Davies. What an inspiration it was to hold the score!

Somewhere along the line I started to be fascinated by Polish composers such as

Penderecki, Lutoslawski and Andrej Panufnik, which was helped by having the chance in my late twenties to attend a summer school in Poland led by the composer Marek Stachowski.

I was also lucky enough to be a student at the Royal Academy of Music when Penderecki and Lutoslawski were in residence for a week as part of the International Composer Festival series.



Compositional influence: Composer Paul Patterson
With permission granted by Josef Weinberger Ltd

Chris Thomas: You studied with Paul Patterson, who was also influenced by the New Polish school and who wrote several aleatoric experimental works for works for band in the 1970's including 'Cataclysm'.

What are your memories of those studies and how did Paul influence and encourage you as a young composer?

Nigel Clarke: Paul was a gifted teacher who never imposed his own musical style on his student. He always tried to let his student develop his or her own musical voice and vocabulary.

It often saddens me when you hear young student composers tell you that they are required to write certain types of music at university to enable them to pass their teachers' scrutiny as well as obtain their degree.

I don't see that as being very creative, practical or helpful.

Perhaps this explains why I think so many composers today are almost set up to fail and

move into different professions: They effectively lose themselves.

I was also lucky to have a conductor friend called Robin Page who was always encouraging and thoughtful when looking over my student scores.

I think it would be fair to say it took a while for my studies at the RAM with Paul to really take hold and it was around 1983 that the musical 'penny dropped'.

I wrote a brass quintet called 'Cross Currents' which won a competition judged by Sir Michael Tippett. It was a very important time in my development.

Paul's words still ring in my ears and remain my motto today: 'You are only as good as your last piece'.

I now find myself saying the same thing to students that I teach around the world.



Receiving the Queen's Commendation for Excellence from Princess Diana

Chris Thomas: Initially you pursued a career as a military bandsman, and to what degree was it beneficial to your development?

Nigel Clarke: I spent 8 and half years in the military, joining at 16 years old.

I did my boy service at the Royal Marines School of Music, Deal, and continued with the British Army where I served in the Staff Band of the Royal Army Medical Corps directed by Major Peter Parkes. I then spent the last part of my service career in the Band of HM Irish Guards.

Going to the Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall was hugely beneficial to me.

There I met Gordon Reynolds (the Queen's organist) who first encouraged me to have proper composition lessons. It was Gordon who first mentioned the name of Paul Patterson to me.

I do remember being marched in front of Lt. Col George Evans on a disciplinary charge for abusing the inside of one of the Steinway pianos with ping pong balls, amongst other inappropriate objects!

The Colonel thought this all very amusing and said if I really did need to throw objects inside pianos I should choose not to use instruments owned by the Ministry of Defence. I was given a caution and a slapped wrist and was back within the hour finding other MOD instruments to abuse!

On a serious note though, the military bought me time to develop and make up for my under-achieving education.

I have a lot of fond memories of those days, even when one Band Sergeant Major asked me if I, "was still writing all that shit music?"

That type of comment always made me work harder.

Chris Thomas: Was the decision to devote yourself entirely to composition always part of the grand plan?

Nigel Clarke: I was only ever good at two things; athletics and composition.

I was never a cornet or trumpet player destined for greatness so my options were limited. I now see that as an advantage. So many talented composers stray from the path of composition never to return.

To be fair I wanted to be a composer but it always felt like a bit of a pipe dream.

4BR Interview: Nigel Clarke

— Part 2

In the second part of our major interview with composer Nigel Clarke, Chris Thomas finds out more about his compositional processes and the different musical genres he has written for.

TUESDAY, 22 APRIL 2014



A composer of horizons and vision

Chris Thomas: Could you tell us something about your working methods.

Do you tend to have a ‘vision’ of a piece in its entirety before you commit anything to paper?

Nigel Clarke: I think my working method has developed substantially in recent years. I’ve found an approach that is not easy and very time consuming, but does achieve results.

It’s much like a sculptor: The music is inside the slab of marble and it’s a matter of finding it; then, shaping, continually sanding away and finally spending many weeks,

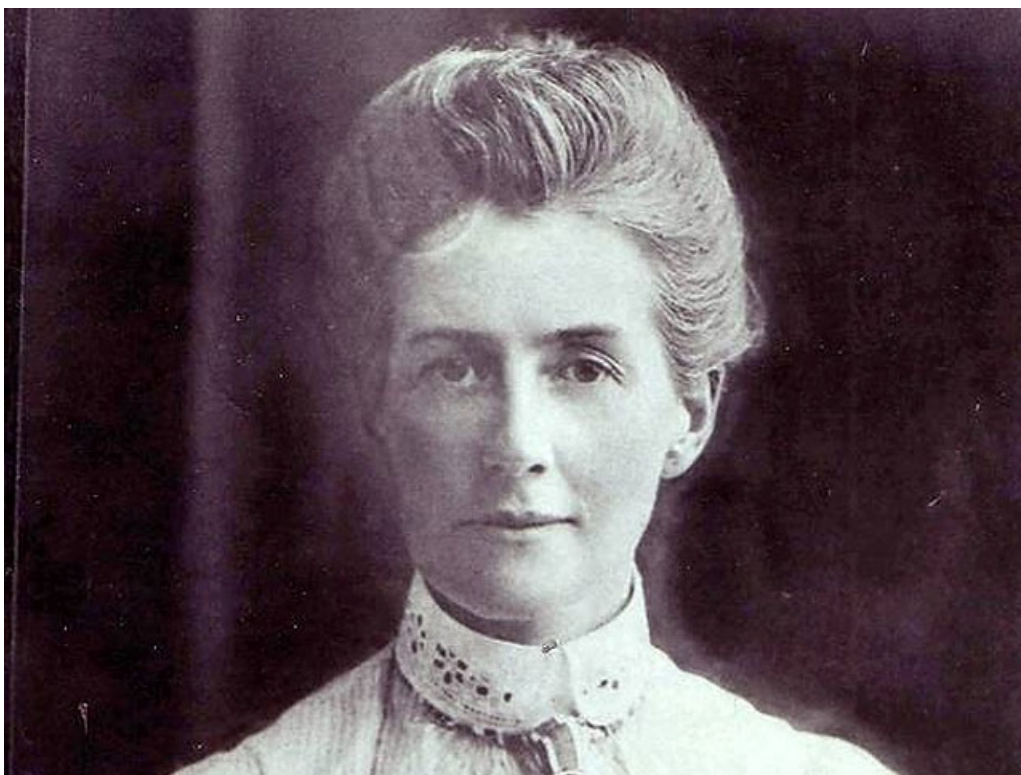
days and hours polishing it.

I always write about a specific subject and I almost always write for musicians that I know and trust.

These days I also almost always write outside of my comfort zone.

I was a late starter in many ways and I try to make every work count rather than repeating ideas and techniques: This is what I mean by not making my task easy.

I do not really see myself exclusively as a brass and wind composer, but an all rounder. This I believe helps me a lot as I'm able to deploy writing methods for brass and wind that I might also use for strings or film.



Musical inspiration: Edith Cavell

Chris Thomas: The titles of your works nearly always exhibit strong visual associations, even if they are not strictly programmatic.

Do you find that you need an external stimulus to get you started on a piece or does the music sometimes come before the title?

Nigel Clarke: I spend a lot of time hunting out themes that interest me. For example I'm interested in the First World War nurse Edith Cavell who was executed only about a mile from our family house in Brussels.

I plan to write a work for flugel horn and strings in the coming months on that subject.

'Mysteries of the Horizon' refers to a series of paintings by René Magritte. I really wanted to write a work that had Belgian blood flowing through its veins, and this subject was perfect for me.

I spent many hours in the Magritte Museum in Brussels and also worked closely with soloist Harmen Vanhoorne and Brassband Buizingen, the band of which he is principal cornet and I'm Associate Composer.

Each of the four movements was named after one of his paintings: 'The Menaced Assassin', 'The Dominion of Light', 'The Flavour of Tears' and 'The Discovery of Fire'.

In the last few years I've collaborated with a British poet and author based in Brussels, Martin Westlake.

This collaboration has been inspiring and I'm delighted that on my recent double disc CD by Brassband Buizingen, each composition is preceded by a poem especially commissioned to go alongside each work.

Most recently I designed my latest wind orchestra work 'Storm Surge' to have specially written words by Martin that are read over the music at the beginning of the work. I really feel that has added to the power of the piece.

The premiere was given by the Marinierskapel der Koninklijke Marine (the Marine Band of the Royal Netherlands Navy) under the baton of its Director of Music Peter Kleine Schaars in the De Doelen Concert Hall, Rotterdam.



Working with different genres: With the Royal Netherlands Navy

Chris Thomas: And in these visual associations there is perhaps a direct link to your music for film?

Nigel Clarke:I'm not really sure how true that is, as I've always written music around subjects that interest me. I have never been the sort of composer that would write 'Sonata No 1' or 'Theme and Variations'. That just isn't me.

It might be fair to say that I like to evoke images, ideas and atmospheres when I write.

That surely is no different to Gustav Holst writing 'The Planets' or Arthur Honegger's piece about the journey of a steam locomotive, 'Pacific 231'.

Chris Thomas: How was it that you first become involved in writing film music?

Nigel Clarke:It was really by accident.

A former Principal of the Royal Academy of Music, Sir David Lumsden, recommended me to a producer who was looking for a composer for a film called, 'Jinnah' which featured Sir Christopher Lee in the title role.

To cut a very long story short I became part of a film writing partnership with an ex-student of mine, Michael Csanyi-Wills.

We have written over ten feature film scores together, recording several with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the London Symphony Orchestra as well as other leading symphony orchestras.



Poet, author and collaborator Martin Westlake

Chris Thomas: Where a film score such as your 'The Little Vampire'

necessitates a very different language to some of your concert music, do you find it natural to genre or style hop and what particular challenges does it present?

Nigel Clarke:As a composer it is an area of writing in which you are a servant to the visual image, often taking on the role of the third actor (an actor you cannot see) in helping to tell the story.

I don't find this as rewarding as I once did, as you are often asked to write in the language of other film composers, who in turn are also writing in someone else's style. Consequently, I regard this field as the work of an artisan rather than artist.

There are however always exceptions like Erich Korngold, Bernard Hermann and of course John Williams.

At the end of the day it has been an extreme thrill to record with our country's finest talents in Abbey Road Studios. But it 'ain't art. It's a highly specialised skill!

In many ways, film music has become a mostly generic language. For that to change it might need a different approach to the music from the director.

Writing film music often means writing short sequences of music where large-scale structure is not imperative to the overall design of the music.

I'm harsh with my judgement of modern film music where sometimes dozens of named and unnamed writers are contributing to the finished product.

I rarely see the inventive qualities of the composer of yesteryear. What I do not understand is why people buy music that is so derivative.

Why not go to the original where real creativity lies?

Chris Thomas: Would you therefore say that the strict discipline necessary for writing for film has had an impact on your wider music generally?

Nigel Clarke:Absolutely:

It's broadened my musical vocabulary vastly and has also helped give me the ability to deploy ideas from different musical genres at will.



Violinist Peter Sheppard Skaerved

Chris Thomas: Your catalogue includes many works for brass and wind band but it is clear from your collaboration with the violinist Peter Sheppard Skaerved that you have always wanted to remain creatively active across a range of genres.

Was it a conscious decision early on that you didn't want to risk being stereotyped as a composer active in one particular field?

Nigel Clarke: Working with Peter is a sheer joy and has been the source of my most personal and original music. What I think I am trying to say here is it allows me to be me!

We spend months getting excited about ideas, trying out fragments and then letting the music grow before finally settling on a definitive composition.

We have also been lucky to travel all over the world writing and performing new work, from the Gobi Desert and the Balkans to more locked away and hidden parts of the United States of America.

My work with Peter has never been about performing in famous iconic venues. In fact the opposite is true, taking music to unusual locations where the audience has none of the expectations you would find in more traditional settings.

Another example of this is not performing in concert halls but 'up close and personal' in private homes. In fact, the string quartets of the past were often not designed to be played in grand concert halls at all but in much more intimate settings.

My belief is that we should experiment more with musical settings; the results are often surprising.

Working with Peter means that the impossible becomes the possible!!



Relaxing Belgian style with Luc Vertommen and Harmen Vanhoorne

Chris Thomas: Peter Sheppard Skaerved also figures significantly on a Naxos disc of your works that include the wind band piece 'Samurai' and 'The Miraculous Violin', effectively a concerto for violin and string orchestra.

How specifically has Peter influenced you as a composer since your early days together at the RAM?

Nigel Clarke: I wrote my first larger scale multi-instrumental work for Peter's (at the time) string orchestra 'Parnassus'.

In fact, the work was of the same name. We did not collaborate on that work; I simply handed over the composition and attended rehearsals.

These days we spend hours playing with ideas, seeking out musical possibilities and seeing how they can be coloured, using different fingerings, bowings, bow positioning etc.

This approach now infects everything that I do. It has also worked well in my collaboration with conductor Luc Vertommen and Brassband Buizingen.

Chris Thomas: Although there is music for string orchestra in your catalogue, there is nothing for full symphony orchestra.

Is there a reason for this and do you intend to write for symphony orchestra in the future?

Nigel Clarke: If your life style choice is to write for brass band, symphonic winds and occasionally educational music, it probably means you will not be taken seriously as a composer of major concert hall music.

Perhaps this statement should start a debate. Yes, John McCabe, Edward Gregson and Judith Bingham have been able to make that transition but most don't and the opportunity is probably not open to them.

The same could be said of film music composers where as I mentioned before, the music tends to be quite derivative these days and therefore not in demand in the symphonic concert hall.

4BR Interview: Nigel Clarke — Part 3

In the final part of our major interview with composer Nigel Clarke, Chris Thomas finds out more about his compositional involvement with brass bands.

SATURDAY, 24 MAY 2014



The best yet to come from Nigel Clarke

Chris Thomas: Turning to your brass band music, you have now written several major works and concertos.

What continues to fascinate you about writing for brass band and what specific challenges do you feel it presents?

Nigel Clarke: If you write for brass and wind band you have numerous possibilities to write for open-minded musicians and with considerable potential for performance.

To have music performed with such extraordinary commitment is a privilege and there is the added luxury of being able to write whatever I want, as there are no technical

constraints.

In saying that, it seems to be only in continental Europe that bands will take a chance on original programming. Where would we be without the commissions and opportunities that the European Championships bring?
A good example of this is Thomas Doss's masterwork 'Spiriti'.

As far as I personally am concerned I still think the best is yet to come but I have to be disciplined and make every piece count!

Chris Thomas: In the 1990's you spent a time as Composer in Residence at Black Dyke working closely with James Watson.

How did he inspire you and what are memories of him as a musician?

Nigel Clarke: Jim was an inspiration; all he touched turned to musical gold. I firmly believe that to this day, the brass band world still has no idea how fantastic he really was.

He was principal trumpet of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at 24 of age, also playing in the London Sinfonietta, the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble and LSO Brass.

From his early 20's he was absorbed in music making with both players and conductors who were world-class talents. How can that not rub off on you?

When it came to conducting Elgar Howarth's 'Songs for BL' in the National Brass Band Championships in 1995, he understood how Howarth's difficult musical language worked and of course, this resulted in another win for Dyke.

Imagine being at the Royal Opera House conducted by Sir George Solti or Sir Bernard Haitink, with artists such as Domingo singing.

High-level music making was just the norm for him. Jim's premature death has left a huge hole for all of us that knew him or were taught by him.

Chris Thomas: For a time after your association with Black Dyke you turned away from writing for brass band.

Was there any particular reason for this?

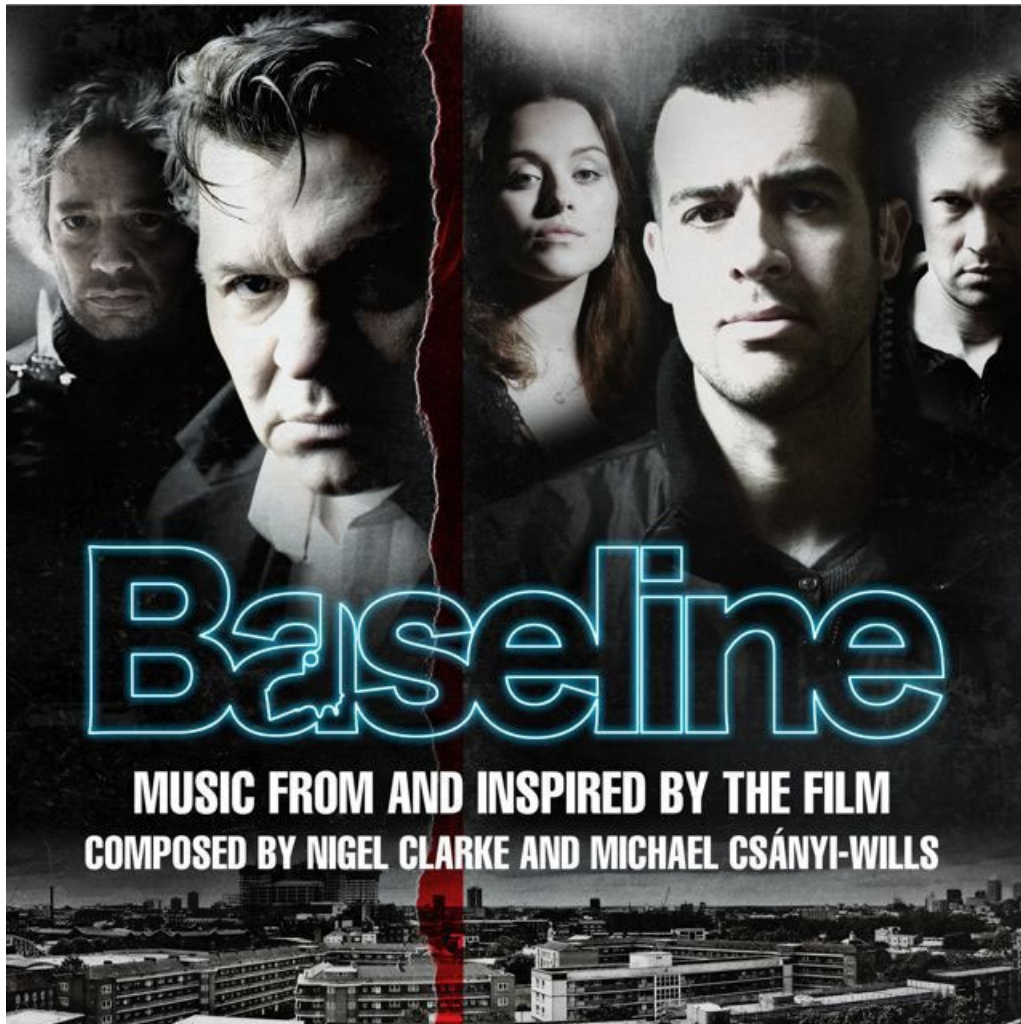
Nigel Clarke: Put simply, it was my loyalty to James Watson.

How could I continue once Jim had left the movement permanently?

Dyke's new Musical Director Nicholas Childs, was very understanding and wrote me a kind letter (which I still have) to acknowledge my resignation.

But the truth is that this was the end of my venture into brass band music. I suppose it was a case of out of sight, out of mind.

To be fair, you need to be very committed to take on my works. They are certainly not pieces you can rehearse for a competition a few weeks before.



New works and new areas of composition

Chris Thomas: One non-musical challenge that you have faced is your battle with dyslexia.

Could you tell us a little about how dyslexia has affected you musically?

Nigel Clarke: Dyslexia is a double-edged sword, which I live with daily.

It is what makes me work hard in an attempt to prove myself after early failures at school. It makes me understanding of other people's problems and the help they need. Dyslexia for me is not an excuse.

However, it does sometimes result in other people having to help me to solve written problems.

I can give you two examples of this.

My wife Stella will have read and corrected every word before I sent you the answers to this interview.

I spent a day with 4BREditor Iwan Fox covering the Swiss Brass Band Championships in Montreux. I took notes and then dictated my thoughts on all of the performances to Iwan who kindly typed everything that was posted!

What is curious is that I do not make many errors when writing music. The danger is only when I add words on the score. That's the bear trap that is always waiting for me.

If only Sibelius had a spell check!

Chris Thomas: Has music helped you to come to terms with your dyslexia, and if so, how?

Nigel Clarke:In short yes. I believe that dyslexia can give back in unexpected ways. Or if you like, strengthen other aspects of your intellect.

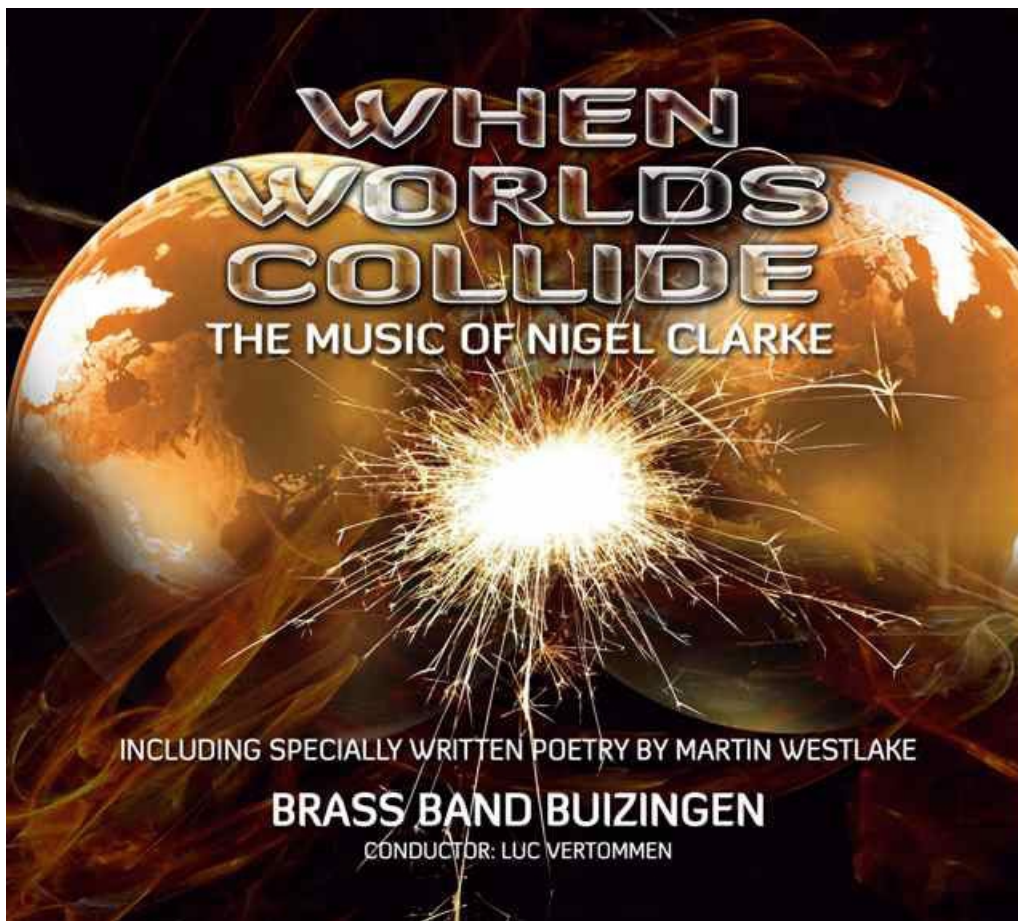
Chris Thomas: You have now lived in Brussels for several years. Could you tell us a little about how you find the brass band scene generally in Belgium?

Nigel Clarke:Actually this is a myth. I spend lot of time in Brussels, as that is where our family house is, as my wife works for the European institutions.

But I am firmly based in the UK and that is where I pay my taxes.

The brass scene is impressive in Belgium with many good bands and talented conductors. They punch above their weight!

The scene is much less partisan than in the UK, but perhaps this is true for most of continental Europe.



The award winning When Worlds Collide

Chris Thomas: I'd like to finish by turning to the recent CD of your music recorded by Brass Band Buizingen and Luc Vertommen.

As composer in residence with the band, how has your close relationship with and knowledge of the players impacted on your music for Brass Band Buizingen?

Nigel Clarke:As with my relationship with Peter Sheppard Skaevard, I have always enjoyed the act of collaboration and that is how I see my role with Brassband Buizingen and Luc Vertommen.

Of course it's a joy to work with a band that has talents like Harmen Vanhoorne, Glen Van Looy and Sébastien Rousseau, to mention but a few.

Every piece I write is uniquely for the band and I never go back over old ground, which is the only aspect that makes it hard being an Associate Composer. If I repeated myself they would be the first to notice.

Perhaps one of the problems I am noting in other composers work at the moment is the repetition of ideas. What is great for me with BBU and Luc is that they are open-minded when it comes to my crazy ideas in the sketch stages of composition.

I am convinced this has been the core to a united success.



The outstanding player of his generation: Harmen Vanhoorne

Going back to my piece for Harmen Vanhoorne for instance, I had been looking for sometime for a subject with Belgium at its core as a basis for a concerto to showcase Harmen's magnificent talents; in my opinion he is the player of his generation and is furthering the repertoire for his instrument.

Already an array of young talent has written for him including Stan Nieuwenhuis, Peter Meechan, Tom Davoren and Paul McGhee.

I have always believed hanging out with musicians is the best possible way to learn.

To quote Beethoven in his Tagebuch: 'note to self' "Every day share a meal with musicians, where one might discuss instruments and techniques and such...." (1812).



Not quite little green men, but spaceship troopers in Switzerland

Chris Thomas: ‘When Worlds Collide’ created quite a stir when Buizingen played it at the European Championships, partly on account of its subtitle, ‘Little Green Men in Intergalactic Spaceships with Rayguns and Phasers’.

Despite the quirkiness of the title however, it’s a seriously virtuosic piece, both creatively and for the band. Could you tell us about the inspiration for the piece?

Nigel Clarke:Where do I begin!

The subject that I chose for this work was the world of American Sci-Fi B Movies from the 1950’s. In fact the title of my piece comes from a film, Rudolph Maté’s 1951 movie ‘When Worlds Collide’.

The subject gave me so much scope to let my hair down and write a work for brass band that comes across as fresh. For example, the band members play kazoos at the beginning and there is a siren similar to that used by Edgard Varèse in his seminal piece ‘Amériques’.

The percussion get to use some DIY power tools. The performance directions also encourage many theatrical effects such as dry ice smoke and bubble guns releasing clouds of bubbles.

There are two occasions where the band can deploy remote control flying saucers above the audience. The work ends with a number of canons showering confetti onto the audience.



Plenty of smoke but no mirrors....

The music itself mostly counterbalances the theatre by being serious and demanding. My aim is to emphasise that a performance is more than just an aural experience; it is about the total experience.

The other slightly unique quality of the work is that the conductor can make a number of creative choices with the aim of making each performance personal and unique.

I was very proud of Luc and BBU's 4th position in the 2013 European Championships when they played 'When Worlds Collide' in the own choice category.

I would love to see a major championship take on the challenge of this work with every performance being totally different from the next. It would also be an extraordinary challenge for the jury as it could not and should not be closed.

At the end of November, Ensemble de Cuivres Jurassien under the baton of their

conductor Blaise Heritier, performed 'WWC' with all of the theatrical effects in the Swiss National Championships. The response of the audience was beyond my wildest dreams!

To give the reader a better idea here are two YouTube links to ECJ's recent performances, one a tryout concert and one an unofficial film of their contest performance.

Link1:https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxzcrCgo_is

Link2:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNdxpDXD7A8>



Buizingen line up....

Chris Thomas: Given the technical abilities of the players in Brassband Buizingen, is it a liberating experience knowing that there are few, if any constraints on you whilst writing?

Nigel Clarke: This yet again is a double-edged sword: it is liberating to be able to write absolutely anything for these extraordinary players, but they are looking for challenge as well as originality.

My problem therefore is to keep both conductor and band interested. So when I write, to use a metaphor, I flash a little bit of ankle to keep them interested!

In many ways this is the biggest challenge of being a composer attached to any organisation.

The moment you start to repeat yourself is the moment you either need to stop writing or move on.

Chris Thomas: 'Earthrise' is another piece that drew its inspiration from space travel?

Nigel Clarke: Actually the first work I wrote on the space travel theme was for wind orchestra and called 'Gagarin', a piece I wrote at the request of conductor Prof. Matthew J George and the University of St. Thomas Wind Ensemble in Minnesota, USA.



Another out of this world composition

Chris Thomas: The pieces on Brassband Buizingen's disc span a period of over fifteen years. Do you feel that your music has changed during this time and if so in what ways?

Nigel Clarke: To a certain degree yes, my music has changed but I believe that it is still the same old me that is coming through.

By that I mean that my music continues to be virtuosic, sometimes violent, rhythmic, colourful and sometimes bleak and occasionally playful.

I write each work as if it is the last time I am going to write for this genre. I believe that this can make me a difficult composer to commission as I am only really interested in writing on a grand canvas and it requires a certain type of conductor to take on one of my pieces. I am absolutely not interested in short-term popularity.

I believe a composer should sound like an individual and not like another composer; there are plenty of sound-alikes in our movement. I have always been drawn to composers of integrity that sound like themselves.

As a listening musician, I enjoy the work of composers who occasionally write for brass band like Edward Gregson, Martin Ellerby, Derek Bourgeois, Thomas Doss, Oliver Waespi, Philip Wilby and from the past, Wilfred Heaton and Gilbert Vinter.

To answer the original question in short, I see myself as being in a constant state of evolution.



British Composer Award winner

Chris Thomas: And finally. What can we expect from you in the near future?

Do you intend to continue writing for brass band?

Nigel Clarke: I can only continue writing for brass band if people are interested enough in my work to ask me but I certainly do not want to be just a brass band composer.

I am at my strongest when working in many different genres. This is what I can bring to the party and I hope that this has come through in my earlier answers.

Now over to Stella to check the English!