

-Canadian Composers Portraits Series
Malcolm Forsyth Documentary

Produced by Eitan Cornfield

Transcription

JOHN CHARLES: I'm not aware of any Canadian composer that I think is stronger, both interestingly complex and accessible. It's music that goes somewhere and is meaningful.

ALLAN GORDON BELL: There are few composers in his time period, which are the '70s and '80s, who had the courage to write sensuously beautiful sounds; to make use of the major third as a sonority. During his time he actually was committed to some old-time values of sensuous beauty.

AMANDA FORSYTH: I think he wants you to feel an emotion of some sort of joy or love. It's sort of a sigh that I feel when I listen to his music or play his music; it's like, "Ah-hhh". It's like a release, you know. I think he would like to think other people have that response.

FORDYCE PIER: Malcolm's aesthetic never really changed. I think that he relies, to a great extent, on the security of his inner ear; that's where his music comes from.

ALLAN GILLILAND: There was something that really drew me to his music, and I think what it is was that he's a player, as well as a composer, and so there is a sensibility to his music; and I don't mean it's toned down in any kind of way, but there's a sensibility to what it is you're writing for, and a real understanding of orchestration.

MALCOLM FORSYTH: Of course the orchestra is what moved me. The orchestra is what made me decide to be a musician. The orchestra is where I got my feet wet. The orchestra is where I immersed myself and half-drowned myself, and the orchestra is where I have swum ever since.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Malcolm Forsyth is a South African-born Canadian composer. That says it simply, but it doesn't answer the question one CBC colleague asked me: "Just how Canadian is Forsyth?" To answer the question is to tell an essentially Canadian story. Forsyth was born in Pietermaritzburg, a city about eighty kilometers from Durban. Durban was cosmopolitan; it even had its own symphony orchestra.

MALCOLM FORSYTH: Now, I think I'm talking about 1955. The Durban Civic Orchestra, the professional symphony orchestra, which was small, they came to Pietermaritzburg, and under their conductor Fritz Schlurman, a Dutchman, they played a concert, which included Rimsky-Korsakov's, Scherezade.

Oh, my God. I had never heard anything so absolutely mind-blowingly beautiful in my life. It was absolutely stunning, and I was completely knocked out by it; I never recovered. I've never recovered; that was it, and I remember saying, "That's what I'm going to do."

AMANDA FORSYTH: My dad is Scottish. His upbringing was, in his words, “anal-retentive, Presbyterian upbringing.”

EITAN CORNFIELD: Forsyth’s daughter, Amanda was also born in South Africa, and has played the cello since the age of three. She has a career as a soloist, and became the principal cellist of the National Arts Centre Orchestra in 1998. She recalls that the family’s musical tradition really begins with her dad.

AMANDA FORSYTH: He’s the only artist in his family, in South Africa. His father was deputy mayor of Pietermaritzburg, in Natal, and his brother is an accountant, I think, and all the children of his brother are in sort of business and everything else, so the fact that my dad broke out to be a musician in the first place was very odd, and very brave, I think.

MALCOLM FORSYTH: We used to visit my aunt, who was very upright, you know, very much in that Edinburgh, Presbyterian -- would be upper-class, and she had this perfect house, with everything just right, and there was the piano, and I discovered I could play *God Save the King* on it with one finger, and I wanted to play more. I wanted to play that. It was just totally fascinating to me, and so every time we visited, which was just was once in about three or four weeks, I would go and play *God Save the King*. I mean I was seven or eight.

It took a couple of years to persuade my parents to get a piano, and finally they did it, and I remember it cost ninety-nine pounds, and that was just an unbelievable amount of money at that time, and they impressed it upon me that this was incredibly expensive, and such a lot of money that they were putting out, but anyway I bashed around on the piano, and I had piano lessons, and hated my teacher, who didn’t teach me anything, didn’t give me – didn’t teach me any love for music, and didn’t teach me how to play the piano, and I had no love for the music that she gave me to play, and she didn’t give me any reason to love it, and that killed everything, and I preferred to be a soccer player.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Forsyth was passionate about soccer as a teenager, but like fellow composers Harry Freedman and Murray Schafer, he also had a flair for drawing and painting. He actually thought about pursuing visual art as a career, but then the Durban Symphony Orchestra came to town.

MALCOLM FORSYTH: And, I remember saying, “That’s what I’m going to do,” and I didn’t know what instrument to play. “That’s what I’m going to do.” I was nineteen, far too late, and one of my workmates said -- who was very keen in jazz. He was a tenor saxophone player, and he played gigs on Saturday nights, in jazz – very devoted to jazz -- said, “The trombone is so interesting. It’s unique.” I said, “Okay, I’ll buy a trombone,” and I bought a trombone, and bought a book called *First Step: How to Play the Trombone*, and taught myself how to play the trombone, and I was playing in the militia band within two weeks, fumbling around, at the age of nineteen, and I said, “I’m going to do this professionally.”

EITAN CORNFIELD: Forsyth taught himself to play trombone in his off hours, while working by day as a municipal clerk. Then, despite his father’s protests, he quit his job, and entered the music program at the University of Cape Town. He was a bit behind at first, in fact, illiterate in theory, but in his second year, at the age of twenty-three, he began studying with South African composer Stanley Glasser.

Glasser had his students write pieces in the style of specific models, say Bach, Schubert, or Debussy.

MALCOLM FORSYTH: I didn't think of myself as a composer. I thought of myself as maybe a trombonist, if I was lucky. I knew I still had a long way to go, but here was the interesting thing. I really liked my first piece, my Debussy prelude. Now, it was supposed to be a Debussy prelude, so "go and listen to all the Debussy preludes, and then write your own."

That was how composition was taught, and I think it's a wonderful way. It's just completely non-you. It's just completely frowned upon and sneered upon today, but I'm always telling students, "go and find models. Find a model. What do you want to write? You know, choose your own model," and then in my fourth year I decided I was going to write an orchestral piece, because I had been playing in a professional symphony orchestra now for two years, and I knew what this sounded like, and so I wrote a piece based on everything that I had – it was like a mishmash of everybody.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Forsyth showed his new score to the Cape Town Symphony's conductor, David Tidboald.

MALCOLM FORSYTH: He said, "Hmm, it should sound nice. Get the parts written, and we'll play it." I nearly fell over, and I hadn't even asked him -- I hadn't even thought of that, and so we feverishly copied out the parts, I and a couple of student friends, and my first performance as a composer was an orchestral piece played by a professional orchestra; that was literally my first ever performance.

AMANDA FORSYTH: I think in the early years he wrote very, very lovely, beautiful unchallenging music to the ear. He wrote melodies and beautiful feel-good music. In the early years, people would always say to him, "Why don't you go to Hollywood, because, you know, it would be so great? You would be – you would do so well. You would become so rich," et cetera, et cetera, but he didn't want to, which amazes me, now, actually, because it would be so easy for him to write film scores, but I think his integrity made him not want to do that.

EITAN CORNFIELD: By 1966, Malcolm Forsyth had graduated from the University of Cape Town. He was married with an infant daughter, and played in the symphony. He had composed a few works, but was growing disillusioned with his orchestral job, and with South African politics. The young family was ready for a change, but it wouldn't be Hollywood. A friend had moved to Canada, and told Forsyth of a critical shortage of teachers there. He and his wife agonized about the decision, but at the end of 1967, they took the plunge. They traveled by sea to Southampton, then flew to Toronto, arriving in the dead of winter.

Malcolm was soon offered a position as a high school music teacher in North York, but first had to complete a year of study for his teacher's certificate. In frustration, he sent out dozens of CVs all over Canada. He was supporting his family with the odd job supply teaching, and living in two rented rooms, when a letter arrived from the violinist Thomas Ralston. Ralston was then acting head of the music department at the University of Alberta in Edmonton.

MALCOLM FORSYTH: He said, "I would like you to go for an interview; we have a position; and one of our faculty is in Toronto at the moment doing a course in electronic music at the U of T, so I'd like you to go and meet her and have an interview. Her name is Violet Archer," and it was a pretty strange interview; I did a lot of talking;

and a few days later Thomas Ralston phoned again, and he said, “Oh, what’s the time there?” I said, “Two o’clock in the morning.” “Oh, sorry, I got it wrong. Anyway, we want to offer you a position at the U of A in Edmonton as assistant professor of theory and composition, and I thought, oh, my god, hallelujah. I don’t have to go and teach junior high band in Queensborough Junior High.

I bought a new car with almost the residue of my life savings, everything that I had. It was a butter yellow Dodge Dart ’68, and so off we went to Edmonton -- drove across Canada – couldn’t imagine the distance. I mean it took us two days to get out of Ontario.

EITAN CORNFIELD: In ’68, Forsyth began what was to be a distinguished career teaching composition, theory and trombone. It was a career that ended with his retirement from the University of Alberta in the spring of 2002. Along the way, he played in the Edmonton symphony, led and instructed various ensembles, and conducted the university orchestra. He developed a reputation as a stern taskmaster, and he left his mark. Fordyce Pier is an old friend and colleague, and head of the University of Alberta’s music department.

FORDYCE PIER: He’s uncompromising there. I mean, he has mellowed somewhat over the years, but still I would say that the outstanding feature is kind of an uncompromising standard of excellence. He believes a lot in basics. He believes a lot in a lot of hard work, and is not afraid to give them the bad news that, this time, they didn’t measure up.

However, I mean, he said to me once, very tellingly, he thought that the most beneficial experience that a student could have was a good performance, and whatever it took to get to that would be well worth the doing, because that would teach everything it was that you wanted them to learn, from being there. That would be in the performance domain, of course.

He did quite a bit of conducting and coaching, as well as teaching composition. With respect to the other things I think he just thought that there was a lot of tradition, a lot of basics, that one had to learn in order to be a complete musician. I think Malcolm still focused on that old idea of the complete musician.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Forsyth and Archer were one another’s counterparts in the music department. They had very different styles of teaching, but they complemented one another perfectly. When the jazz trumpeter and arranger Allan Gilliland approached Forsyth for lessons in arranging and composition, Malcolm sent him first to Violet to bone up on the basics. Gilliland then began studies with Forsyth. The experience transformed him from a performer into a composer. His works have been played in Canada, the United States, Britain, Wales and Japan, and he’s currently the Edmonton Symphony’s composer-in-residence.

ALLAN GILLILAND: I mean, I consider him my mentor. I mean, I never called him that, or referred to him that way, but he is definitely the most influential person in my career as a composer. Violet really taught me the fundamentals of composition, the two years that I studied with her; and Malcolm taught me how to find my voice, he really did, by sharing a lot of his experiences, but encouraging me to find my own voice, what’s true to me; never imposing any kind of language on me, never imposing any kind of style on me in that way; but just guiding me through, and helping me to find my voice.

I wrote a piece, a choir piece, while – in my undergrad degree, that had a bit of a success, and I remember taking that piece to him, and I had four, five pages worth of sketches, and he looked at the first bar, and said, “Right there – that’s the piece right there; the rest of this stuff -- interesting. I’m not interested. You’ve got to make the piece about just that,” and focusing that way was really a turning point for me.

I really started to realize that, oh, yeah, if I use kind of the craft of composition along with the creativity, that’s how you turn small ideas into big pieces, and still keep this kind of sense of cohesion, and don’t go wandering off.

ALLAN BELL: Violet believed that composition could be taught; and Malcolm believed that composition could not be taught.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Allan Gordon Bell is a composer who teaches at the University of Calgary. He studied with both Violet Archer and Malcolm Forsyth. He regards Malcolm’s approach to teaching and composition as a product of his experience as a performer.

ALLAN BELL: Lessons with Malcolm were not about the act of composing, in a sense that -- directed in the way that they were with Violet. They were about music; they were about his responses to what it was -- he said, “The best I can do for you is to respond to your music,” and so his major concern at that time was: how does this sound? How does this actually sound, and how is a player going to go about actually doing it?

ALLAN GILLILAND: I always felt an affinity to his music; I really did. There was something that really drew me to his music, and I think what it is – later when I studied with him in my master’s – I think one of the things that really brought us together was that he’s a player, as well as a composer, and so there is a sensibility to his music, and I don’t mean it’s toned down in any kind of way, but there’s a sensibility to what it is you’re writing for, and a real – a real understanding of orchestration, and it always works, you know. It works on many levels, and then the other thing that really grabbed me about his music was the rhythm, you know, and being a jazz guy, I mean, it immediately appealed to me as a compositional technique.

MALCOLM FORSYTH: The house I grew up in in Pietermaritzburg, Pine Street, my street, was the major arterial street for all the buses at the end of the work day, for all the black people who lived in the township of Edendale; and it was a vast slum called Edendale, and then at the end of the work day, the busses would come just one after the other, packed with people; but all day long there would be black people wandering up and down the street singing, Zulus playing little homemade guitars, and they’d be playing repetitive ostenato figures and singing in Zulu -- and, of course, I learned to speak Zulu long before I learned to speak Afrikaans; so I listened to them.

I would play out in the front garden in the flower beds and so on, and I would hear Zulu people singing their music and playing their little ostenato figures and rhythmic figures from my very earliest recollection, long before my father ever got me to listen to Johann Strauss’s waltzes; so I heard this music and I knew it without ever even thinking about it, and it didn’t come to the surface until I came to Canada.

Suddenly, being removed from all of that, I said, “I know that I’m from Africa; I’m from a different place. I’m not from here,” and suddenly all of this music came to the surface, and I started writing African sounding music for the very first time, in 1968.

I then wrote a choral piece with percussionist called *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto- Toms* – using a lot of Zuluphonic sounds – no actual Zulu text – but

Zuluphonics, which to me are so rhythmic – the actual syllables are so rhythmic and so musical; and then I felt well on my way that I knew how to be the African that I was, with the European training, and I think the next thing I did was to write a piano concerto for Helmut Brauss, because he heard my choral piece with the percussionist, and he said, “That’s just something so original. I’ve never heard anything like that ever. Would you write me a piano concerto,” and at this stage I was still writing music for free.

I was a university professor here, but I didn’t expect anybody ever to pay me to write music, and so I just set about writing the piano concerto, and it took about six years altogether – started in ’73; and it was finally premiered by Helmut Brauss with the ESO for a CBC festival concert in Edmonton, and it was a smashing success, absolute smashing success. It was the biggest success I’ve ever had.

That is very African, but I was at the same time integrating my African writing with myself, and really creating what became me as a composer; so that was a very, very important work in integrating everything of my musical influences into something which I felt was uniquely and my own.

EITAN CORNFIELD: That unique voice is a product of all of Forsyth’s musical experience, but most particularly it arose from his marriage of African and European traditions. These roots have caused some, like my colleague at CBC, to wonder whether we can consider Forsyth to be as much a Canadian composer as say, John Weinzweig or John Papineau-Couture. For Allan Bell, the answer is obvious.

ALLAN BELL: Without question, Malcolm is a Canadian composer, because he embodies diversity. Yes, he came from South Africa, and when he was in South Africa, he listened very carefully to the music of the Zulu people. Then he comes here, and, yeah, some of that remains: he brings who he is.

That’s what makes this place rich, that people bring who they are, and they look elsewhere. Alexina Louie found her greatest opening when she looked at her own Chinese heritage, something that, in fact, had been sort of something she had turned away from as a child, as she rushed to become assimilated or as her family did. Then she opened up, and all of a sudden, an incredible music comes out of that; and so in Malcolm’s case, there’s an incredible music coming forth from the embodiment of diversity that’s there.

There are few composers in his time period, which are the seventies and eighties who had the courage to write sensuously beautiful sounds, to make use of the major third as a sonority; and this of course comes from African harmonizations, yes, absolutely, the kinds of singing that was there; but now we have nothing but the major triad in some situations, and not a very skillful use of the major triad, and it’s somehow a revolutionary thing, but during his time, he was actually committed to some old-time values of sensuous beauty.

MALCOLM FORSYTH: My *Atayoskewin, Suite for Orchestra* is for me a piece of Canadian landscape, and an attempt by a complete outsider to appropriate the idea of this country being a very spiritual place, with a population which lives a life with its spirits, and I celebrate it in whatever way I can; and I live here, and I contribute to Canadian music, and not to South African music.

They don’t want to play my music there. I can’t get anybody to play anything there, and I honestly can’t tell you what is specifically Canadian; but I am writing music which will be identified by later generations as Canadian music, and it will be, because

people played that music, and not only the first performance, but other people have taken up the performance of it, and it is right now informing what is going to become Canadian music.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Forsyth has virtuosic control of the orchestra. His orchestral colour is instantly recognizable; he also has a melodic gift he's not ashamed to exploit; but despite his music's immediate appeal, there's a lot more going on than you might think at first.

ALLAN GORDON BELL: You know, people listen to his surface, and they think, oh, this is just simple music; this is just somebody writing the past. The moment they actually start to – if you start to analyze and take a look, and really listen to it, you see that the structure of this thing is really quite complex, that the tonal relationships that you've just passed through, you've actually gone through some extraordinary sets of relationships, and you move smoothly through them in a way, like Debussy, where you have these little shifts; and the ear isn't upset by them, because they don't slam you, but they're really quite extraordinary, and, guess what -- really difficult to do, to bring off; and this has some long stretches of true daring, in particular, the cello concerto that begins with a very long, long, long, long opening passage, and it was a kind of extremism there.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Malcolm Forsyth titled his cello concerto *Electra Rising*. His intention to dedicate it to his daughter Amanda became much more than that, when she actually began to materialize in the music.

AMANDA FORSYTH: Well, a lot of me is in there. You know, we were on the same wave length, and as the older I got, and the more accomplished I got as a musician, I mean he knew everything.

My dad talks about how when I was young, I was very quick and learned everything by ear, and very naturally, but he discovered that I was tricking him in saying, "Dad, how does this go here?" and then he'd go, "da da da da da da," and I'd say, "Okay, thank you," and I'd go in my room, and I would play it immediately, and then he said he caught on pretty fast to say, "Okay, miss, I've caught onto you. Now you have to learn how to read this. I'm not going to sing it to you," so that was great, because not only did I find it helpful in him singing it to me, but then he helped me, you know, really learn how to read music properly, and I became a fantastic sight reader, because he would constantly bring me things that he was writing, and plop them on my stand, which was very annoying at the time, and he says, "How does this work? Can you just play this for me?" and I'm like, "No, no, I'm practicing Elgar!"

You know, and he would say, "No, but I'm writing this piece, and I need to see if this works." Well, consequently, he really understood the cello, from watching and having that, so we were really helpful to each other, I think.

MALCOLM FORSYTH: Amanda and I are in many ways sort of joined at the hip. The existence of music as the conduit through which we communicated was so strong, and just to see her growing as a musician, and finding new repertoire, and finding new models was of course very, very exciting and wonderful and engrossing and captivating in your own child, and in those very tender years, really from the age of ten until several years into her Juilliard career, we were extremely close, and I thought that this was just a way of making a statement about us.

Here's an interesting thing about it though. I discovered in composing *Electra Rising* that, more in retrospect, that I was not only writing for Amanda, and it wasn't only for her sound as a cellist, and particular technical things that I thought she did beautifully: I had been writing about her. The piece starts in such an innocent way, and it really is Amanda the child, and then she starts to battle; she has her cello, and in the middle of that opening cadenza, you hear the sudden emergence of another Amanda. It's a very determined, almost gritting the teeth, almost growling and saying, "I will – this is what I will do." So that's really what that first cadenza is about.

The second movement is called *Mayibuye Afrika!* which is the cry of the African National Congress. This is to celebrate the country of her birth.

The third movement is another cadenza, and this is Amanda the teenager, the rebellious teenager: confused, angry, yearning for the light; and the last movement is Amanda the artist soaring. She finally rises above it all, and finds herself in the stratosphere, in the clouds, way above the orchestra, singing, and she's said about that movement that, "it is literally like flying." She feels that she has actually left the ground when she plays that, which is the most wonderful thing that anybody could say about the music you've written, that it actually makes you fly.

I have appended a little note on the title page of the score, which says, "To Amanda, a gift from my soul," and that's really what it is: it is a gift from the very heart of me, for a very, very special person.

I think a lot of people, amateurs in the best sense of the term, music lovers, like to think of composers as their works having sprung from the deepest recesses of their feeling, and I think that this is probably so, in a very subliminal way: I've written love music when I have been feeling anything but love.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Igor Stravinsky wrote, "Just as appetite comes by eating, so work brings inspiration." Like one of his favourite writers Doris Lessing, Forsyth has always disliked words like "inspiration". He feels composers are inspired on a more fundamental level: by a commission with a deadline. The rest is just hard work. Fordyce Pier:

FORDYCE PIER: He needs to have a reason to write. Now, when he was younger, I'm sure that wasn't the case. He didn't have so many opportunities, and I don't know how he might have done it then, but certainly, you know, in the last twenty, twenty-five years, he has written, because somebody wants the music.

AMANDA FORSYTH: He cannot sit down while he's writing music. He'll get up. He'll do anything but sit at his desk. So he has a desk, and he has his piano, and he has his sort of electric piano thing. I don't know why he has that. He has -- a chart on the wall, actually, for a while, called "Cello", where he had the fingerboard, and the strings and a drawing that he drew of a hand; so I think he would put his hand on the sort of diagram, and say, "Hmm, I wonder if you can reach E flat if you have first finger on the A string on a B flat," so that was kind of interesting, but he does – he wanders, he paces. He drives me nuts: he paces back and forth, and back and forth.

FORDYCE PIER: And, at times, he has complained about not having anything come to him, and he went through a period of time -- he couldn't write music he claimed, and yet, he had some to write, because of his obligations, and he told me that, you know, he would just put down some notes, and then if he didn't like the second one, he would change it, and then he would put down some more notes and see where that went, and it

could be that nothing was there that sparked an idea, but he would stick at it, and I had a lot of admiration for him, working his way through that.

He didn't really give up. He complained a lot, and it hurt him a lot/ I mean it was hard, and he was dispirited about it, but stuff still came out, and I don't know whether he feels that it was good product or not, but I think that by and large it was. I don't think that there's any sense of a sort of a swale in the quality of his work during that period of time, so that's how it is. He's very methodical, when it comes time to really doing composition. I mean he works things out.

There are these original ideas that you have, which are sort of on the intuitive, creative side of things; but then when it comes to actually being a composer, there's a lot of working out of this stuff, which is a very workmanlike thing. That original spark, which is the thing that he claims is almost impossible to teach people, when he talks about teaching composition, he says he doesn't really know how to teach that. He teaches the other parts okay, but this part about having a good idea that really is going to work is something that just – he's not sure where that comes from.

EITAN CORNFIELD: What is certain is that many of Forsyth's most important commissions came from the CBC. In 1975, John Roberts who was then head of CBC's radio music department, asked Forsyth to compose some songs for contralto Maureen Forester.

MALCOLM FORSYTH: And, I went on a great search for Canadian folk songs. That's what I was asked to set, and they were supposed to be western. He meant specifically Albertan, but I really couldn't find anything in the way of Albertan folk songs, which were anything other than the early British army songs, which go right 'round the whole world. I mean they're as much Australian, New Zealander, South African, Kenyan. They're the same old songs, so that didn't seem to me to have any identity whatsoever, but in my researches at that time, I came across this little publication of Barbara Cass-Beggs, an ethnomusicologist, who has passed away now, and she had published a little book called *Seven Métis Songs*, and she went out into the field, mostly around the Capell Valley in Saskatchewan, and asked people to sing the old songs to her, and she'd written them all down with the kind of Patois French that they used, and published it; and I chose three of them, two of which inevitably were imported folk songs; they had come with the French centuries before; and the third one was a genuine piece of Canadian composition.

It was not a folklore piece. It was a genuine Canadian composition by Claude Falcon, who was called "The Singer of the Plains," and he was a Métis musician who celebrated this little victory, a little skirmish between the Northwest Company and his band of warriors, which took place at Seven Oaks on the Frog Plain in 1820, and this was a real piece of composition, and so I took his melody and his words, and rearranged them; so that has a distinct Canadian identity, and that was the first time that had ever happened for me.

FORDYCE PIER: I think that Malcolm's aesthetic never really changed. I think that he relies always to a great extent on the security of his inner ear. That's where his music comes from. That said, I think his harmonic language got more challenging. I think that his melodic sense, at times, in more recent years, but not systemically, has gotten more -- less conventional; that would be it; so you get washes of sound or textures, and structures, like, for example, the *Trumpet Concerto*.

EITAN CORNFIELD: John Charles is music critic for the Edmonton Sun. He arrived from the U.S. eager to find out as much as possible about the music of his new home. One of the first major Canadian works he encountered was Forsyth's *Piano Concerto*. It made an impression.

JOHN CHARLES: Yeah, it was a very powerful impression. First of all, listening to a piano concerto at that time, which I think was the 1980s – I'm expecting to hear sort of echoes of the great twentieth century piano concertos, which would be in terms of a new twentieth century sound, Bartok and Perkofiev, and I didn't, at all. I heard nothing that I barely recognized. It's a very powerful driven work, and I was just knocked out by the piece.

One of the things when I first came to Canada in the mid-seventies, and wanted to try to get to know what we already had here in terms of classical music, I found it very difficult to find large-ish works. The nature of commissions or such is that -- and maybe of programming -- is that it always seemed that Canadians were encouraged to write ten-minute pieces, which would be the first piece on the program, and then we could relax and get back to the nineteenth century Europeans; so one of the things that I was struck by and pleased by was Forsyth's music that I got to hear was large enough that it was a world you could really enter. Some of his later works like his cello concerto written for his daughter Amanda and the saxophone concerto that he's written for Bill Street, I think that those are wonderful pieces. The saxophone concerto in particular strikes me, because it seems to me the saxophone concertos I have heard, which are all twentieth century, are always emphasizing this sort of a jazzy, French aspect of the saxophone, and saying – kind of admitting, "Well, we really haven't accepted the saxophone into the orchestral world, and therefore we need to handle it like this," and Malcolm just ignores that utterly.

MALCOLM FORSYTH: While I was writing the piece, Olivier Messiaen died in, April of '92. Now, Messiaen's music had become my model of the 70s, and I decided to commemorate him, and the second movement of my saxophone concerto is inserted in between the three roads, is the *Omagio: Homage to Olivier Messiaen*, and I construct a couple of chords. Messiaen was very famous for his chords, the way in which he put chords together. I used some of his ideas and constructed my own chords, which become a kind of resonant memorial to Messiaen, whose music I admired so very much.

As you get older, it's more difficult to find stimulating models, than when it was when you were young and you haven't done anything yet, and the model that comes to mind might be this that or the other, and it's all fresh, and you wonder how did he do this? How did Debussy do that? How did Beethoven do this? Haydn -- how did he manage to make the sonata form work? And, you want to do it in your own way, and you get tremendous inspiration immediately.

As you get older, in a rather sad way, I suppose, you get to the point where you feel you've understood how those people did all those things, and those models cease to have that kind of power of inspiring you, which is a way of being forced to find one's own models, and to go in one's own individual direction. If you're going to be a composer you might as well be yourself. Ultimately, who else can you be?

- transcribed by Darius Truhlar

