An Interview with Michael Finnissy

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Abstract

Michael Finnissy (born in London on March 17, 1946) is one of our foremost living composers of art music. He is also gay, but his sexual orientation is just one aspect of his character, and he resists being reduced to the label 'gay composer'. This long-form interview explores his life, works, and career, examining aspects of his 'queer' identity, the impact that this may have had on his career, and his queer artistic influences and questions of legacy. The interview was principally conducted on May 31, 2024 in central London and on December 7, 2024 at Michael's home in Sheringham, Norfolk, with further clarificatory emails and telephone calls between those dates and after, up until November 2025.

Keywords

Michael Finnissy; queer identity; composing; teaching; contemporary music; music education.

Introduction

Michael Finnissy is one of our foremost living composers of art music. Born in Tulse Hill, London on March 17, 1946, he studied at the Royal College of Music in the 1960s with the aid of a Foundation Scholarship, before embarking on a phenomenally productive, successful and varied career as a composer and composition teacher, which has seen him hold positions at the Royal Academy of Music, the University of Sussex, and the University of Southampton, where he was Professor of Composition for some twenty years. He retired from Southampton in the summer of 2018 and was appointed Emeritus Professor, but continues to compose and give occasional tutorials and masterclasses.

Michael is also gay. He met his partner, Philip Adams, in 1987, in Zwemmer's bookshop (now closed) in London, and they entered a civil partnership on December 31, 2005 in Worthing (they were among the first to do so: the UK's *Civil Partnerships Act 2004* came into force on December 5, 2005). Michael's sexual orientation is, of course, just one aspect of his character, and he resists being reduced to a 'gay composer'.

I met Michael soon after I joined the Music Department at the University of Southampton in 2007. I recall us discussing allusions to Schubert's music in his *Mozart Requiem Completion* (2011), and, on another occasion, him showing me texts by World War I poets when he was composing *Remembrance Day* (2014). He has always shown an interest in, and been supportive of, my own work, and indeed, Michael is well known for his generous

and supportive attitude to students and colleagues. I am delighted that he agreed to be interviewed by me for this special 'queer' issue of *Contemporary Music Review*.[1]

This interview was principally conducted on May 31, 2024 in central London and on December 7, 2024 at Micheal's home in Sheringham, Norfolk, with further clarificatory emails and telephone calls between those dates and after, up until November 2025.[2]

I.

David Bretherton [DB]: Your Wikipedia biography currently ends with a three-word paragraph: 'He is homosexual'.[3] Do you prefer to use the term 'homosexual', 'queer' or 'gay'?

Michael Finnissy [MF]: The Wikipedia 'profile' is, of course, a cut-and-paste assemblage of out-of-context quotations and facts. I wondered why my sexuality needed to be highlighted. Is it so odd, or considered abnormal? Like it or not, there are millions of us, homosexuals, queers, or gays, and we are doctors, scientists, care-workers, novelists, even sportsmen. The Wikipedia entries for the four other composers mentioned elsewhere in the profile do not mention 'he is heterosexual'—one presumably must assume that all four of them are, as it does not need mentioning. I don't really like labels. I am, by chance, a 'homosexual' or 'gay' male, who writes music.

Writing music is more a vocation, a need, than a 'profession'. I really dislike terminological disputes. Quite a lot of people say that my music is 'queer', but more in the 'old-fashioned' sense of being peculiar, rather than denoting a particular sexual orientation. In British culture in 2025, all classical music is peculiar to the majority of people, according to the media. It seems we are now a dumbed-down society. Do words have any precision anymore? After primary school, until I was twenty-one, I was 'one of those', a 'poofter', 'bent', and effectively a criminal. These days, depending on circumstance I would use 'gay' (acceptable in church), 'queer' (more aggressive) or 'homosexual' (more scientific and abstracted).

During World War II, my parents learnt to be discreet and to use words carefully, and I was encouraged by them, and at school, to do the same. 'Explain yourself' is a phrase I remember from childhood. I was encouraged to read books and was brought up in a house full of women. My dad (George Norman Finnissy) had worked on radar research during the war, and afterwards was employed by the London County Council, using his

[1] This research was supported by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (Grant Reference: AH/P007740/1). The University of Southampton ethics approval number for this interview is ERGO 93638.
[2] The two face-to-face interview sessions in 2024 were loosely structured, and, although we discussed Michael's life and career in broadly chronological order, our conversation frequently moved between topics and back to earlier questions and answers. Therefore, the following text has necessarily been sympathetically curated, to improve sequencing and readability, and to remove a few conversational 'dead ends' and tangents. Occasional footnotes have been added to clarify terms and references that may be less familiar to those who have not lived in the UK.
[3] Thank you to Daniele Sofer for drawing this passage to my attention.

photographic and surveying skills to document the re-building of London. There was much to tell, and explain to me, regarding the dishonest behaviour of those involved in that project—important life lessons! Adults could be a disappointing lot!

DB: What was the influence of your extended family—and all those women—during your childhood?

MF: My mum (Rita Isolene Finnissy, née Parsonson) was the supportive parent, as well as her younger sister Sheila (Parsonson), and my Auntie Rosie (Rose Louise Hopwood, my maternal grandmother's sister). And they were particularly encouraging when I took to music, playing the piano and trying to write my inventions down. My godfather was Polish and proud of his nationality. When he went back to Łódż after World War II, he left a folder of Polish Folk Dances, brightly coloured pictures and sheet music. I still treasure it. When my brother was born, four years after me, I was ushered out of the way, carrying the camera tripod for my dad for a while on the bombsites and damaged parts of the city. Or, less often, I travelled to Peckham with Auntie Rosie. She was a secretary at a stationery company, and I have loved pens, pencils, erasers and paper ever since.

DB: Important tools for a composer! How would you sum up the influence of your parents?

MF: I have Dad's political conscience and sensitivity. Mum's vigour.

DB: When did you realise you were gay?

MF: I realised I was different from most other boys quite early on. Certainly, by the time I was six years old, at infant school, in 1952.

DB: What do you mean by 'different'?

MF: I was called a 'sissy' at school. The boys seemed brutal, crude and threatening. The girls were friendlier. It wasn't a matter of sex, certainly not with six-year-olds. I was more interested in music, and fearful of admitting my personal 'attractions' even as a teenager. I sublimated that side and clumsily hid it in my music, perhaps I still do. For goodness' sake, I did not choose or particularly want, to be homosexual—it came naturally, and I just had to try and make the best of it.

DB: These names you were called at school—'poofter', 'bent', 'sissy'—did you know what they meant?

MF: I knew they were insulting. But I didn't confirm or deny the 'accusation'. I kept my mouth shut.

DB: What happened after infant school?

MF: Junior school, and then the 'Eleven-Plus' exam,[4] and then I went to Bromley Technical High School, which trained people to go into jobs like advertising, metalwork, woodwork, business studies, those kinds of things. There was no music study at all.

DB: So, it wasn't a good fit?

MF: Not really. But there didn't seem to be any choice. I don't know why I was given a place there. I'd written an essay for the Eleven-Plus about an imaginary visit to the Louvre, to see the 'Mona Lisa'. Who would imagine an eleven-year-old writing that? But that's what my juvenile imagination came up with. The junior school had invited me to play Old Time Music Hall songs for their summer-term concert—I already owned all the music! Looking back, I was an impossibly weird child. But there was 'no room at the inn' for weird children.

My parents battled against the decision for a while but had no luck. I was studying piano privately, but I was indeed a very poor fit with technical school. Never mind—I did discover sex in the course of my time there. Other boys who were willing. And I did get to upstage a visiting celebrity pianist by playing Liszt's very short, loud and flashy *Transcendental Étude* No. 2 at a school concert. Heigh ho! I later transferred to an unusually politicised and progressive sixth form at Beckenham and Penge Grammar School for Boys.[5]

DB: Was the all-male environment at your secondary school and sixth form homophobic?

MF: No, surprisingly not. It was the beginning of when London, briefly, came out of the doldrums.

My move to the sixth form coincided with attempts, following the Wolfenden Report,[6] to reform the laws relating to homosexuality in England and Wales. The sixth-form Common Room housed copies of *Encounter* and other informative journals, and my form-master, Alan Brownjohn, was quite 'politicised'. Sixth formers were encouraged to explore ideas. Later, in my final year of study at the Royal College of Music in London, the *Sexual Offences Act 1967* partially decriminalised male homosexual activities in private for adults over the age of twenty-one, coincidentally my age at the time.

DB: What was your parents' reaction to your sexuality, assuming they knew?

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[4] 'Eleven-Plus' (or '11+'): a standardised examination, introduced in 1944, for determining whether children were placed in grammar schools, secondary technical or secondary modern schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, for their school education from ca. 11 years upwards. It was largely phased out by the mid-1970s, with the increasing adoption of the 'comprehensive school' system, but it persists in areas where academically selective grammar schools remain.

[5] 'Sixth form': the last two years of school education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, for children aged ca. 16–18 years.

[6] See Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution 1957, commonly known as the 'Wolfenden Report', after the Committee's chairman, John Wolfenden.

MF: Naturally, like many parents, my mother wondered if she was responsible—at one point, she said to my brother 'Where did we go wrong?'. My dad was away so much that he was never there to be talked to. In those days, and evidence suggests even now, it wasn't something you could easily talk about to your father. We talked about politics—these days, I would say he was rather Marxist in his views. He died when I was twenty.

DB: I'm sorry, that must have been very difficult.

MF: He had the same cardiac problem that both my brother and I now have, but he refused to take any medication. I really think he believed that it would be to admit some sort of weakness. He wanted to appear strong—typical of his generation—and made of 'sterner stuff'. He was killed in a traffic accident, but might have survived if his heart hadn't been in such a poor state.

So, at the age of twenty-one, halfway through my studies at the RCM [Royal College of Music], and working part-time playing for contemporary dance and ballet classes, I wondered if I could manage to be any kind of breadwinner. My mother had brought up two sons, having given up office work to do so. In middle age, would she still be employable? My brother had no fixed idea of what sort of training to go for. I wasn't sure whether our house was still mortgaged, or what to do if it was. It was not exactly the best time to emerge from the closet with all flags flying. However, in the best 'wartime' manner, the family muddled through—all the problems simmering away under discreet wrapping.

It was a struggle. Let's not kid ourselves: only just a year's step away from potentially being discovered, arrested and imprisoned for being a queer; trying to build up sufficient self-belief to function as a 'creative artist' with few realistic role models; not really interested in pop- or rock- music; resistant to 'playing the game'.

Under those circumstances, my mother's support was unwavering. She went out and found secretarial work. I stayed at college, and then, in May 1968, managed to get further musical training and life-experience in Rome, staying at the Scuola Britannica with a lot of archaeologists. May 1968—not a good time to be a student in Europe! When the scholarship-funding ran out, I came back to England, and back to accompanying dance classes. More interesting work occasionally came and went. I was still learning, and relatively happy. I wasn't craving a career, in either the typical heterosexual-middle-class sense, or a 'glittering career' in the stereotypical gay sense. I had support and help from time to time—it wasn't all bleak. I applied several times to competitions run by the Gaudeamus Foundation in the Netherlands, until I was too old (thirty), and then via Harry Halbreich I had performances at the Royan Festival. I was shadowing Brian Ferneyhough, whom I had met while I was still at the RCM. I had the backing of Stephen Plaistow at the BBC, Roger Wright at the British Music Information Centre (BMIC), and so it goes. No sex was involved, open or concealed, in case you were wondering. I just kept writing, and a few people even liked the results. I think my family would have liked me to win more prizes and get more accolades. My mum was thrilled when I was given a Professorship at the University of Southampton. I was happy to have a regular salary, and—following Bernard

Stevens as a teacher, insofar as I was able—I was more thrilled to have the regular stimulus and challenge of informed discussion with students and colleagues. A safe and tolerant place to exercise one's thoughts and abilities.

I was forty-one when I eventually found my life-partner, and introduced him to my family. My mother, as usual, was not unaware of the difficulties which potentially lay ahead. She was concerned about the major shift in my responsibilities, adopting something of the role of the archetypal father in a Victorian novel. I don't remember her actually saying 'Well, what will people think?', but it was certainly somewhere in the background. Perhaps she thought I had lived too long in the dreamland of the Arts, and not put what she knew of actual social tolerance to the test. It was a necessary warning.

DB: It came from a place of love and protection?

MF: Yes. My parents weren't intolerant people at all, and I was never brought up to think negatively about people of any race, religion or colour. Sex was not discussed.

DB: Aside from your parents, what were people's reactions when you came out?

MF: My friends, both male and female, had known for years. Otherwise, casual acquaintances and neighbours never made their views obvious. Are things ever that clear-cut in the UK?

Years and years before, I had been occasionally bullied, once beaten up at school, and once outside Bromley Library, so I knew I had to be circumspect, even if things might have changed in the larger metropolitan centres. Elsewhere, I'm not so sure. It seems that most people need scapegoats. The question is whether it is worth putting it to the test? I have my composing as a retreat from squalid realities. I want acceptance for who I am as a 'classical' musician and composer, and ideally—pushing things a bit further out—as a homosexual. Why shout it from the rooftops? I had read that, I think it was Graham Greene, valued 'not being visible in public', as recognition got in the way of observing, or researching people and events. The opposite of 'celebrity culture' and, in my view, definitely the right way for a 'creative' person to go. I didn't feel confident that I had sufficient experience as either a composer or as a 'practicing homosexual' to announce and defend myself as either, except to 'enlightened' friends. There are a good many people who still think writing music is not a 'proper job', so I have mostly taken to saying I teach or taught at university. They smirk at the word 'university' and mutter 'clever clogs' disparagingly, or they say 'I don't really understand music'. Do I feel under pressure to add 'and I am homosexual'?! It has got a little better, in some quarters, since the start of the new century. In larger cities across the world, in some churches, one might even have a measure of social equality, but people are still on their guard. The whiff of 'immorality' in sex, and 'wasting public money and time' on contemporary music, is still in the air, and is still good copy for journalists.

DB: Did you feel like you didn't 'fit in', or perhaps felt alienated, particularly when you were younger?

MF: Yes, as a composer I have always felt *alienated*, including from the very large number of bog-standard British 'successful' composers. And also from the typical British male stereotypes: football, cricket, heavy-drinking, not to mention the complacent private-school yahoos. As a gay man I am now relatively comfortable in company, although that was not always the case. But the word 'gay' does not cover all the things that you are. The words 'gay composer' seem to me like a convenient, but restrictive, stereotype; not unlike 'minimalist' or 'serialist' or 'classical'. These words are coded. Should gay music only and conveniently be like Tchaikovsky, or Boulez, Samuel Barber, Ethel Smyth, Charles Wuorinen, Cage, or Tippett?

DB: Who was it who inspired your love of twentieth-century music?

MF: Antony Hopkins and his programme on BBC radio, *Talking About Music*. He introduced his listeners to Charles Ives's *Concord Sonata*, when I was eleven or twelve years old. I felt I recognised the kind of thing Ives was doing immediately. Listening to that piece, it was almost as if a close friend was telling me what they thought and felt. I had already discovered—serendipitously, on the radio or looking through the music in libraries—Satie, Bartók and Varèse. I still like exploring on my own. Most recently Massenet—not so interesting! My Auntie Sheila would order scores for me from Largs music shop in Holborn. I marched to a different drum, every few weeks.

DB: And you always wanted to be a composer?

MF: Yes. I'd be no bloody good at anything else! Composing and music seemed to come to me quite naturally; a means of documenting, of exploring my experiences, my thoughts about life. Music is rich in information to me, I knew that music could come under fire, could be easily dismissed as 'trifling' (and still can). I remember I once rose to the bait of defending Varèse in my second week as a new student in sixth form: the music teacher, Jasper Scott, who didn't seem to take 'New Music' very seriously, played Varèse's *Ionisation* as a joke, and I had the nerve to defend it. True, I had an outspoken side, which could be useful for breaking the ice, but I also cared for New Music. Mr Scott was surprised I even knew what the piece was.

DB: To be fair, to know that type of repertoire in sixth form is a little unusual, isn't it?

MF: Is it? But you see I'd channelled myself in that direction.

DB: You mentioned in a previous answer that you 'hid' your feelings in music and 'perhaps still do', and that your composing is 'a retreat from squalid realities'. Would you say, then, that music was a refuge or safe space, an emotional outlet, even a mask or shield, as you came to terms with your sexuality?

MF: Yes, but now I am reminded of Neil Bartlett's discussion of 'masking', 'disguising' and thereby 'avoiding recognition' as historically driven ways of not revealing one's homosexuality.[7]

DB: And maybe also there's an element of trying to take back control or preventing things getting out of control? Perhaps also a degree of introversion?

MF: Yes indeed, I am on the spectrum, and maybe even a control freak. I was one of the postwar baby-boom, my parents' firstborn, encouraged as a child to take control of my own life, as there were frequently lots of pre-occupied adults in the house, and my grandmother was upstairs dying of cancer. I was too young to converse sensibly, so I read books, was taken out on visits, and started to play the piano. I had an imaginary friend called Percy, who was very naughty, and defending him kept me quite busy. Is it that difficult to see how that might lead to a composing-as-a-testimonial approach? What I'm doing is still giving 'evidence to the court' about what I hear, see and feel.

DB: Would you say that there is a clear link between what you do as a composer and your father's work documenting the rebuilding of London after the war?

MF: Yes. He was enthusiastic and passionate about what he was doing, and was so horrified by the corruption he saw, but had no way of expressing it. But I do have a way. I'm lucky. And I don't see it as 'labour' in the sense that I have to work at it. Should I be on the alert to re-build, or re-focus, classical music? I don't know exactly how I do what I do. It's instinctive. A gift.

DB: You mean a gift from God?

MF: Yes. Perhaps. Alongside inherent musical values, life experience, rigorous stand-up-and-be-counted technique. I know if a page is rubbish, and what I do is I tear it up and throw it away. The council tip sees more of my music than anybody else![8] For me, composing is neither a chore nor an exercise. And I don't have points to prove. I'm not trying to be 'better than Boulez'. My music is there, with all its errors.

DB: And do you see yourself as religious?

MF: I prefer the word 'spiritual'. My family were not particularly religious in the regular church-going sense. I went through predictable stages as a teenager for about a decade from 1956. I was a Buddhist for a while, and then I met Archbishop Anthony Bloom of the Russian Orthodox Church, while I was studying Russian in sixth form. If you announce yourself as a 'man of God', which is a very brave thing to do, you have to mean it. He meant it, and he was.

DB: Has religion been a constant in your life since your childhood meeting with Archbishop Anthony Bloom?

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[7] See Bartlett 1988.

[8] 'Council tip': the local household waste recycling and disposal centre.

MF: Spirituality is always there. But not always obviously. I love the church where I go now, and I sing in the choir, because it is still something I am able to do, so I'm useful.

DB: Has there ever been any friction between your religion and sexuality?

MF: I don't have a stable religion. The church I go to, which is Church of England, is fairly open, and has the rainbow flag as its logo. I love the community side of things.

DB: And do you also *believe*?

MF: I have faith. I have doubt, too.

II.

DB: Was there ever a sense from your parents, or others, that music was something that ought to be discouraged in favour of a less 'artistic', and perhaps more 'masculine' hobby?

MF: My father did not want me to take up music professionally; he wanted me to teach English or Maths at a good school. But writing music was a real *need* for me. Not just a hobby. An obsession maybe. And certainly, at the end of sixth form, I saw my 'musical-spiritual vocation' as something to fight for. 'New Music' was a kind of crusade, even something that would build a better world. But England encourages a more cynical, less idealistic view, and, as we plodded around the teacher-training colleges to little purpose, he cautioned me 'don't you become like a prostitute—the music world is full of exploitation and shady characters'. As I've mentioned already, during the rebuilding of London after World War II he had seen a lot of corruption—black-market trading, lying and deceit from all quarters. To some extent, what he said was very wise and truthful. One needs colossal self-belief as a composer not to compromise, not to give in. Then, in my mid-teens, before I went to college, I won the William Yeats Hurlstone Composition Prize at the Croydon Music Festival, and perhaps his view shifted just a little. Also, one of the teacher-training colleges told him I would just be wasted teaching English or Maths. He died during the summer before my second year at the RCM, where I had also won a Foundation Scholarship, so at that point, maybe I would have seemed to him to be on the 'straight and narrow'.

I had an unconventional time at the RCM. As a result of a stupid argument I had with Arthur Hutchings, they took me off the BMus. In those days, the college didn't have an independent music degree, so you had to study at a university at the same time, and because I had only studied Latin to O-Level standard at school,[9] and not Greek too, which most English universities then required, I had to apply to Durham, as this was the only university in the country that had 'compromised' its standards. Hutchings was the admissions tutor there. He might have been trying to be friendly, I don't know, but in the interview, he said, 'Don't you think it's a good thing that Mahler re-orchestrated Schumann's symphonies?' and I said 'No, I don't. I love Mahler, but I think Schumann

[9] 'O-Level' or 'General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level': the main subject-based qualification studied by schoolchildren aged ca. 14–16 years in England, Wales and Northern Ireland from 1951 to 1988.

knew exactly what he wanted from the orchestra and wrote exactly what he wanted in the score'. He replied, 'This interview is at an end'. And I left the room, and that was that. I got the next train home, and the RCM took me off the BMus course. Another life-lesson.

DB: How open were you about your sexuality in your RCM days, and as a young adult, and was the environment welcoming for queer people?

MF: For me, the RCM was a place to study, to learn, to gather musical knowledge. I wasn't a good 'mixer', and didn't even try. People gossiped about sex, and there were tutors to avoid. But no-one said very much to me: I wasn't outstandingly attractive, nor did I make myself 'available'. I always had other priorities, I wasn't interesting to 'the right' people, and old queens are not interested in 'clever boys'—they want someone who is docile, for sex, or just for company.

DB: Not argumentative ones?

MF: Certainly not! They don't want to chat about the 'Crisis of Capitalism' or what's wrong with the British economy, let alone Stockhausen or Xenakis, do they?

One's sexual orientation just wasn't discussed then like it is now. And I don't think I would have been comfortable talking about it either, back then. Perhaps this seems very 'closeted', but I don't think I felt inhibited or damaged by this. You see, I was focused on my musical training. Doubtless things went on—the AIDS crisis was fifteen years in the future—but I wasn't at college to have sex. Perhaps I was very unusual in that respect!

Not having had much previous training in composition, or in what one might call 'canonical' music history, I was painfully aware of how ill-informed I was about Palestrina and so on. I felt there was a lot of ground for me to catch up on, and sort out. On the other hand, I loved Bartók, Satie, Mahler, Szymanowski, Schoenberg, Berg and Webern, and none of the other students seemed to have heard of them or their wonderful music. I wouldn't have been interested in having sex with someone who knew nothing about contemporary music—supposing they wanted to make conversation afterwards? As a non-smoker I wouldn't have wanted to light up as one was supposed to in the cliché!

DB: So, you weren't part of a circle of queer music students?

MF: No. But again, I didn't socialise at college, I'm not that kind of animal. I think we were all too busy. To be honest, until recently, I have never really identified with a 'community', either gay or musical. Even later, Philip (my partner) and I never really went clubbing, even when we were in Brighton, and we hardly ever go to the pub. I was not reliably collegial amongst university academics. When a well-known British musicologist asked me where I was from, I replied 'I was born in London, near Brixton'—it was the wrong answer, they said 'No, no, what *university* are you from?'.

DB: You weren't aware of a queer circle that you were *not* part of?

MF: No. At the RCM, the singers tended to socialise together, and so did those who joined the cricket team. But otherwise, people didn't mix as far as I knew. These days, I will happily sit around a table with six other composers of diverse types, some of whom are younger than me, some older (although these days, not many are older than me!), but when I started out, that sort of mixing didn't happen, at least not to my knowledge. Perhaps the rich kids, without my financial constraints, had a different kind of experience, I don't know.

In perhaps my first or second year at the RCM, I met with a pianist from the Royal Academy of Music, I think we bumped into each other at a Society for the Promotion of New Music (SPNM) concert, and he asked if I would be interested in playing through Brian Ferneyhough's *Sonata for Two Pianos*. So, I booked a room with two pianos, and we managed to make our way through it. I think he eventually inherited a lot of money and disappeared. I don't think he was gay. If he was, he wasn't interested in me. I suppose that there might have been some sort of gang for those into serialism, which was the hot topic when I was at college, but I wasn't a card-carrying member of that group either. Is that what I should have done to 'get on'?!

I immersed myself in the London alternative-world centred on Better Books on the Charing Cross Road, and it was host to the London Film-Makers' Co-Operative. I was not making films, so I was peripheral, but I watched the films that they screened, and learnt what I could about the way they were put together. I wasn't a novice in this area, as my dad was interested and well-informed about cinema. (I still use the vocabulary of 'editing' and 'montage' in my own work.) Some of the films were openly homosexual, even occasionally pornographic. Yes, I was excited by how free they were. Film-art can be intoxicating and is as provocative to a composer as poetry or painting. The American Underground (Brakhage, Markopoulos, Warhol) were as significant for me as Cage or Feldman were for other people.

Anthony Milner once took my study group at the RCM to the rehearsal of the first performance of Tippett's *The Vision of St Augustine*—fantastic! But I was probably the only one in the group who gave the experience any credibility at all. Yes, I knew about Tippett's relatively open homosexuality, but did that piece depend on that aspect of him? I didn't think to question it in that way, I was too excited by what it sounded like. Maybe I was more stupid than the students who dismissed it as 'rubbish'. I thought it was overwhelmingly beautiful. More than 'beautiful'. Visionary. Transcendent.

DB: No one else in the group saw it as a worthwhile experience?

MF: If they did, I don't remember anyone mentioning it. I was fascinated by how it was possible to be that great a composer, far more than I was in what it meant to be a homosexual.

DB: As a result of your argument with Hutchings—which must have been upsetting—you left the RCM without a degree. Was your time there well spent, do you think?

MF: The incident with Hutchings was unnerving. Scary. But yes, my time at the RCM was worth it. I wrote loads of music. I learnt how to be a good teacher from Bernard Stevens. There was nothing he wouldn't talk about, so I had very free-wheeling conversations about masses of stuff. I even learnt who Palestrina was! Hated his music. Hated it. But no matter. There is always something else to try. Why didn't they introduce us to Byrd or Gibbons or Robert Carver?

I also spent my three years at the RCM researching 'marginality', 'deviation' and being 'transgressive', and how to *achieve* these qualities in my composing. In Cocteau's words, how to know how far to go *too far*.

DB: Would it be fair to say that the link between your compositional practice and your queer identity is via the marginalised art that inspired and excited you at the time?

MF: Well, yes, exactly. You see, the transfer from Technical High School to Grammar School for sixth form had already made a cataclysmic difference: from learning technical—and essentially repetitive—skills, without applying much individual imagination, to confronting creative thinking at a high intellectual level and activating one's imagination. Quite a difference. I was not aiming to shut my eyes or my mind ever again.

I started going into London. I listened, read and watched voraciously, and mostly *serendipitously*. Isn't it 'natural' to find role models reassuring and confidence-building?

I'd been awarded a 'Classwork Prize' in December 1959: *Erik Satie* by Rollo H. Myers; and my Auntie Rosie presented me with *Composition with Twelve Notes* by Josef Rufer on my fourteenth birthday in 1960. I was a regular at the Whitechapel Art Gallery and saw Rauschenberg's work in 1964 and the *Drawings for Dante's Inferno* in 1966. I saw Hockney's early prints, then described as 'op' or 'pop'. These artists were gay, even if, at that stage, I didn't know—it wasn't spelled out in large letters. I also bought *Evergreen Review*, published in the USA. I discussed what I'd found with my gay school-chums: pre-1967 we kept our secrets to ourselves. We were under-age 'shirt-lifters', 'botty-bandits', an endangered species. I played 'The Alcotts' from Ives's *Concord Sonata* for my audition for Kent County Council's music awards for further study at the Royal College of Music. They refused on the grounds that the County Music Advisor could not tell whether I was playing the right notes or wrong ones—I'd offered him a copy of the score, and he declined, thinking I was being cheeky! So, you see, my musical life was as risky as my *sexual* life. One learns to cope and survive by looking over one's shoulder and being circumspect.

I was trying to make sense of myself, as a sort of 'rebel', in an environment which might have seemed benign, but could at any moment become extremely hostile. That is still the case.

DB: I don't think I fully appreciated how broad the artistic influences on you were, especially the non-musical ones, and how much you immersed yourself in queer art. Is there a difference, do you think, between, let's say, 'normal' musical innovation on the

one hand, and I suppose what might be termed more deliberate, transgressive deviance that aims (for example) to offend, on the other?

MF: Firstly, one indeed doesn't have to be deliberately transgressive, or deviant to be an innovator. I think one has to be *fearless* and do what one considers to be *truthful*. Whatever those words actually mean. I believe Tippett to be—within a broad musical context—relatively truthful and relatively fearless in his composing, considering his upbringing, training and location in the UK (an anti-intellectual, relatively unsupportive, conservative and unimaginably dumbed-down environment).

Secondly, different general contexts would surely give different general results. Each case, even within one composer, could be different. Stalin had quite an impact on Russian music, and some of his thoughts about Modern Art continue to get regurgitated here in the tabloid press. Schooling, religion, sociopolitical circumstances, supportive or combative intention, can—perhaps even must—impact on the results.

I would hesitate to generalise about the influence of gender, ethnicity, or sexuality on someone's choice of a single *note*. But when it comes to the enactment of a musical process or structure, it is a different matter.

DB: A criticism sometimes made is that we perhaps too readily or too straightforwardly associate 'musical deviance' with 'sexual deviance', particularly with historical figures who have contested or patchy biographies. Surely the relationship between composer and composition, or between artist and art, must be more nuanced than that?

MF: I assume so, but I don't interrogate 'historical figures' about their sexual adventures. I might speculate about the how, and the why, of the music they wrote: like why A♭ and not A♮? But I disappear into myself when I am composing, I think I become, as I believe Giacinto Scelsi put it, a kind of vessel through which *music* passes. I work with an instinctive, almost unconscious, sense of what is musically interesting (exciting, desirable, involving), what is just about technically conceivable on the instrument I am writing for. But one note at a time, sometimes pitch first, sometimes duration first. It is an enormously fascinating, almost totally preoccupying process, but also frequently frustrating, and it can also be depressing. I do not believe in shortcuts: I enjoy spending time with my musical thoughts. I can sit for hours on end working away at one note, and not being aware of time passing.

DB: You've mentioned Tippett favourably a few times in this interview, which makes me wonder: what are your views about his contemporary fellow Englishman, Britten, whose approach to public life as a homosexual was rather different, some might even say problematic?

MF: I have never found Britten's music particularly interesting, and I dislike what seems to me rather too self-assured and glib about its sound-world. Also, the persistent and strenuous advertising by its supporters made me suspicious of the actual product.

But maybe I should fill out that statement and tell the story of Benjamin Britten as it was presented to me, and how I understood it, as a trainee composer, aware of my sexuality, and aware that at least some of the implications of being 'one of those' were going to hold for my future employment. Also, the timing and psychology of the plot and characters struck me as peculiar and interesting.

As one eventually learns, two promising young 'classical' musicians heroically return in 1942 to a dangerous, bombed-out England, after forsaking the safety of North America, and even visions of Broadway success. They are actually a gay couple, one half of which, a composer, was already well on the way to widespread acclaim and, eventually, a preeminent position in British music. This should not suggest at all that the 'other half', the singer Peter Pears, was of less significance, or less the sophisticated, dynamic and lasting influence, sometimes even driving force, in their long relationship.

So, what else was really at stake here? A general mid-century sense of mediocrity and under-achievement in British music? A general absence of technical skills and forward-looking imagination? A perceived absence in England (and elsewhere?) of great *opera* composers? A composer who could stand proudly alongside Stravinsky, or pick up the threads left dangling by Puccini?

Whatever it was, it took shape in a war-weary and bankrupt little island, whose vast and profitable empire was coming apart at the seams. A great white hope—a musical genius, a saviour, a figurehead, of the stature of Bach, Beethoven or Mozart—might restore cultural confidence. And conditions did improve.

But disregarding the musical values, and given some of the more private qualities of the chosen personnel, how would this 'Britten' enterprise flourish, and not be perceived as a gruesome and insulting masquerade—of denial, lies and deception? The criminality of homo-sex, and the chances of another Oscar Wilde debacle, and unsavoury connections to people in 'high places', had to be kept well out of the picture. So, a firewall went up. But this also served to increase speculation, inevitably matched by increasingly exaggerated refutation of the 'rumours'.

If only Britten's *music* had been as shocking and 'immoral' as the gossip suggested, I might have been a bit more interested. Instead, its conflicted moments (dealing with Grimes, Peter Quint, Billy Budd, or Aschenbach) seem nervously restrained or rather anaemic reflections of Berg, Janáček, Mahler, or Mussorgsky.

In the fake, mass-produced 'Tinseltown' modernism and clever antics that pass for the real risk-taking of independent composition, it is often difficult to see the face behind the mask. Perhaps all the dishonesty that insulated, and supposedly concealed, Britten's true sexuality, eventually became a burden, possibly only to be exorcised by writing music. Living the lies that prevented him from being beaten-up, or worse, in prison.

It was still too soon to admit everything in 1967. So, he might seem a rather problematic model for gay men to follow in 2025—or, with current intrusive social media, should people be able to choose?

DB: Thank you. I'd certainly agree he's a problematic figure, rather than a plausible role model for queer people. Who do you consider to be your main role models, queer or otherwise?

MF: Let me take this opportunity to distinguish between, firstly, composers who have been forerunners and major influences *on my musical compositions*, broadly speaking for their rhythm, harmony and texture. And, secondly, my role models for 'creative practice', and awareness of and sensitivity towards their fellow human beings and the world we live in.

So here are the forerunners: starting with Ravel, Bartók and Chopin, hitting the pre-teen 'big time' with Satie and Charles Ives when I was listening to the radio and Antony Hopkins's *Talking About Music* on Sunday afternoons, and then in secondary school finding Berg, Schoenberg, Varèse and Webern in record libraries nearby.

Since then, there have been loads of others, momentary but more or less significant encounters, maybe still residing somewhere in my subconscious.

When it comes to 'seismic' encounters—starting from my teenage years—my *creative* role models have been, and remain David Hockney and Robert Rauschenberg, or more precisely their drawings, paintings and assemblages; first encountered at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, and both 'gay' as it happens. Then somewhat after my father's example, Vivian Maier, whose work (so-called 'street photography') I only know from books and television.

What these artists share is constant and considerable productivity, responding to, and revealing the sensational beauty of what they might chance upon, but also exposing the everyday realities of rather unexceptional contemporary living. I find their work *in toto* aesthetically and philosophically pleasing and satisfying.

The most significant impact on my *structural thinking* came from the avant-garde (American Underground) art-films of Stan Brakhage, Gregory Markopoulos, Jack Smith and Andy Warhol, the last three also 'gay' as it happens.

Perhaps more accessibly, but equivocally, from Pier Paolo Pasolini and Derek Jarman (both 'gay' as it happens) and Jean Luc Godard. And by 'as it happens', I mean that I did not seek these artists out, and explore their work, because they were gay, even if I knew that at the time.

DB: Some might be surprised at your admiration of Charles Ives, given the claims of his homophobia…

MF: I still admire, revere, and love Charles Ives's *music*. I was already passionate about his compositional vision and technique when I was in my early teens. For example, his ability to abruptly juxtapose conventional functional-tonality and conventional serialism, in ways I found technically and emotionally exciting—or perhaps 'feisty and intoxicating' would be better words. His music was plain speaking, not 'subtle', or just a clever trick. I had no idea he was homophobic, and that he might have hated me for being gay. With that knowledge, I wouldn't particularly want to meet him, but it does not stop me listening to his *music*. I like Gesualdo's music—he was a murderer! Ives's homophobia is not the whole story. Surely one must take historical contexts and prejudices into account?

DB: I suppose we should note for balance that some dispute that Ives was homophobic.

MF: It seems to be on record that he disapproved of Henry Cowell's behaviour, maybe with some justification. I wasn't there to speak for the defence, and, at this distance, it would seem irresponsible to play at being the jury. But he disapproved strongly of the Henry Cowell incident.

DB: Do you find it easy to separate the man, Ives, from his music?

MF: Well, some people despised and rejected Tchaikovsky because he was homosexual, maybe others were complicit in his death for that reason. Do I erase Ives's music from my mind because he was allegedly homophobic on at least one occasion?

Nothing would make me betray Charles Ives's music, which I continue to find astounding and deeply moving. I learnt so much from it. His music is like my dad's photographs, which is what I find so interesting about it. It is, to me, a living, breathing entity. Indeed, as are Emerson's and Thoreau's writings. His music transcends mere mechanical perfection, and it has never sounded, to me—however it is actually imagined and constructed—as if it is *contrived* to be good 'professionally polished' writing, designed to impress the (supposed) cognoscenti.

III.

DB: You mentioned earlier that you were twenty-one when homosexuality was decriminalised in England and Wales. Do you think society became more accepting at that point?

MF: No, I wouldn't have said so. Homosexuality was only partially decriminalised in 1967. It still carried a huge stigma. The dark cloud of Oscar Wilde's trial still loomed large. I think intelligent, let alone sympathetic, responses to any kind of 'difference', be it sexual, racial, or aesthetic, are still very slowly emerging. Perhaps such responses are never going to be 'natural' in human-beings, where the competitive gene is so strong. We are more likely to feel threatened by change.

DB: Were you aware of the change in the law at the time?

MF: Yes, but not immediately. After a while word got around. But like I said, I don't think it changed anything much.

DB: Did you, as a young gay man, ever experience homophobia, or predatory attention, either at the RCM, or afterwards in the music world?

MF: Yes, but not frequently. I work on my own, at my desk, but not completely in professional isolation. Of course, people make lists of composers whose work they don't personally like. If your work is on somebody's list, it might not be on anybody else's. Sensational news doesn't need to be accurate to be relished and acted upon.

DB: Do you think your sexuality has had a negative impact on your career?

MF: I don't think so. Not definitively. But then I wouldn't especially know, because nothing is said or brought into the open. No one ever tells you you're not getting a job because you're gay. There are more devious ways of doing it.

I think the absence of family money, inherited wealth or position and influence, has had a much bigger impact on my career. Money and social position grease the way. If you have easy money, people can easily be bought. So much can depend on where you went to school, what college you went to in Oxford or Cambridge. The 'reformers' of the mid-17th century, Gerrard Winstanley and others, already tried to explain and change this situation. But that is still the way the world is here, with rare exceptions.

DB: This issue of elitism leads us nicely, I think, to your widening-participation and mentorship work, Contemporary Music for All (CoMA) and so forth. The first time I came across your music was in the ABRSM *Spectrum* series. How did these sorts of collaborations come about?

MF: My father's 'Socialism' extended to believing that the Arts were for everybody, and that artists could, and should, find the way to enable this to happen. So, there was already a political element to my inherited musical aims. Neither my dad nor I were prepared for the massive rise in commercial exploitation of popular musics, which probably began with rock 'n' roll in the mid-1950s; and subsequently the segregating of 'pop', 'jazz' and 'classical', and the 'protective' factionalism that followed.

In sixth form, I had joined Beckenham Theatre Centre. A friend from school was involved in a 'Brecht Evening', and I went along and accompanied the Kurt Weill songs, had a wonderful time with wonderful music, and made actor-friends, both male and female. This progressed to becoming involved in a production of John Arden's play, *The Happy Haven*. The play had a clear political slant and was quite vigorously outspoken. I wrote the music. The cast liked it, John Arden didn't. A bit later, a few of us went to see John Osborne's *A Patriot for Me* at the Royal Court Theatre in London. It had to be under 'club conditions' to avoid prosecution—the patriot was homosexual, George Devine and other actors appeared in drag. It was quite a riot, but I didn't think much of the actual play. Jean Genet's *The Screens* also had a London outing under similar conditions. Thereafter, my

bookshelves welcomed the addition of *all* of Genet's novels, plays and poetry, mostly in translation.

The juxtaposition of sensuous Baudelaire-rich imagery and almost-pornographic sex and violence was a very potent influence. No topic was off-limits. Peter Brook's Artaud-inspired 'Theatre of Cruelty' came and went. Art—or at least viscerally extreme film and theatre—was *engagé* and clear in its direction.

My own commitment to a fresh, idealistic and revitalised conception of the world, liberty, equality, fraternity and the rest, also had distant (if rather dusty) links to the London Workers' Music Association and Bernard Stevens's interests in amateur music-making—originating in the inter-war and immediate post-war years, both here and in Europe. After something of a lull, and despite the growth of Thatcherism, the East London Late-Starters' Orchestra appeared in the mid-1980s, and in a plea to avoid music about goblins and fairies, I wrote them *East London Heys* (1985–86). The break-away group, CoMA, started in 1993 and I wrote *Plain Harmony* for them and several other subsequent pieces. I taught at several of the Summer Schools that followed, and pursued the 'music for everyone' ideal. At some point during the three years that followed that first Summer School, Thalia Myers started campaigning to get the ABRSM [Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music] to publish *Spectrum*, which was eventually launched in June 1996. Further volumes followed, always with some difficulty, and I contributed to most of them.

I joined the Executive Committee and then accepted the Chairmanship (1990–96) of the International Society for Contemporary Music, founded in 1922 by twentieth-century composers of the stature of Berg and Schoenberg, and first chaired by Edward Dent, Bernard Steven's tutor at Cambridge. Meanwhile, I was also teaching at the Royal Academy of Music in London, the University of Sussex, and the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium. The demands and the stress of all this almost inevitably led to a bout of angina pectoris, and—at the turn of the millennium—open heart surgery. I then settled for nineteen years of teaching at the University of Southampton.

DB: In the years between the end of your studies at the Royal College of Music in 1967, and your appointment at Southampton in 1999, there were wins and setbacks for queer rights. The AIDS pandemic struck during the 1980s; at the end of that decade, you composed *Unknown Ground* (1989–90), which includes testimony from AIDS patients. How did this work come about?

MF: A decade of Gay Liberation and some sort of *partial* security had followed the *partial* decriminalisation of homosexual acts in 1967. I was also busy fighting for New Music. In 1979, Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, promoting 'Victorian values', closing things down, and approving Section 28.[10]

[10] 'Section 28': Section 28 of the UK's *Local Government Act 1988*, which prohibited local authorities and schools from 'intentionally promot[ing] homosexuality or publish[ing] material with the intention of promoting homosexuality', or 'promoting the teaching … of the acceptability of homosexuality as a

I had moved to Brighton in 1985, largely because I was taking on more work at the University of Sussex covering for Jonathan Harvey. My partner, Philip, joined me in 1988. By this time, I had already heard about 'the virus' from a doctor friend in Paris, which she was helping to investigate and treat. When the news eventually broke here, the British tabloids quickly declared a 'Gay Plague', and the UK Government was slow to respond, only belatedly launching a public information campaign.

Through my colleague at Sussex, David Osmond-Smith, I found out about the AIDS Centre in Brighton, where I offered help. I met the playwright John Roman Baker, who was raising awareness, interviewing men who had contracted the virus. We decided to create a kind of 'documentary' as a fundraiser. John visited the interviewees alone. I selected from the material he had gathered. I saw my work as a compassionate extension of his, and as evidence in the courtroom, heightened by music. Some have since said it was exploitative; apparently, the BBC thought it too upsetting to broadcast. The people John interviewed had wanted their experiences to be known; I felt we were accurately and thoughtfully recording history as it happened. It was raw and upsetting, but music can't always make things better—like a bunch of flowers or aspirin.

At some point in this journey, we learnt about the appalling state of AIDS treatment in Russia. John suggested expanding the scope of the project to include poetry by Russian writers, and I copied the instrumentation of Dmitri Shostakovich's *Seven Romances on Poems by Alexander Blok*, op. 127!

Overall, *Unknown Ground* might be thought of as a 'sung monologue', an 'autofiction' recounting four people's reactions to a virus that is killing them, alongside three more general reflections on love.

DB: The first performance was at the Marlborough in Brighton?

MF: Yes. We had applied to the Brighton Festival for it to be included in their programme for 1990, but it wasn't. It was premiered on May 15, 1990, at the Marlborough Pub Theatre, a venue well-known to gay men. Richard Jackson, with whom I had worked before, sang, my composer-friend, Roger Redgate, played violin, and his sister-in-law, Julia Ryder, played cello. I played the piano. There was a huge audience, and the response was overwhelmingly positive and extremely emotional.

DB: Thank you. Would you say that your politics and sexuality also influence your approach to teaching and mentorship?

MF: Politics presupposes the organising, and administration, of human beings, to whatever small or large extent. My principal initial role at Southampton was to formulate, in discussion, a PhD course in musical composition, to follow on from already

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pretended family relationship'. The legislation was introduced by the Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher, on the false premise that children were being indoctrinated into homosexuality. It was repealed in Scotland in 2000, and in England and Wales in 2003; it did not apply to Northern Ireland.

established undergraduate and master's courses. Then to teach them, or to participate in the teaching of them with others. I based my course formulation on what I had observed, researched and participated in elsewhere.

Nothing very radical, at least nothing *planned to be radical*. Composers were considerably outnumbered by musicologists. Also, I already recognised that one-to-one composition teaching is uneconomical, and composers are—on good evidence—not easily employable *as composers*. The undergraduate courses were open to commercial composition, and various types of popular-entertainment and jazz idioms. Essentially, one must accept that any person's creative abilities are unique to them, they can be guided, but cannot in fact be *taught*, not in what I understand to be the way they are in mathematics or the sciences. Musical composition can assume a long and still highly respected history, and, to the student's benefit I believe, this history can be outlined and drawn upon, in parallel with the guidance of a freewheeling imagination, by a sensitive tutor. It should not be assumed that learning ever stops, or that music exists in isolation. As universities here in the UK become more and more like formulaic 'Employment Exchanges', these fanciful notions of learning may become obsolete.

In a teaching situation, I would not raise any issue of sexuality unless specifically requested to do so by the student. I would primarily advise the student to find the acknowledged and standard literature on this topic, and to be aware of comparable research and commentary in the literary, visual, choreographic and cinematic arts. In my experience it is mostly female students who have raised these issues, most typically regarding gender bias. I caution myself to beware of generalisations and stereotypical responses.

DB: Do you consider that you have a particular responsibility as a queer composer?

MF: Yes, of course, I have a sense of responsibility, both artistic and ethical, to the community, and any audience, *in general*. But unfortunately, music is not—and perhaps cannot be—generally discussed in the same way as literature or the visual and kinetic arts. Musical discourse, and even its surface topicality, is less 'legible', less immediate in declaring its content, than a novel, a film, or a painting, particularly from the perspective of the 'quick fix' or 'popular' culture. I believe my responsibility is to be honest, perceptive, broad-minded, and generous. But I am neither a saint, nor a polymath. Outside of the metropolitan centres, New Music seems to be off-radar.

My work has been thought challenging and confrontational—qualities I consider essential, but so often lacking, in artistic creativity. Am I to follow the Stalinist and tabloid-press edicts: dumb-down and emasculate the work?

DB: What do you mean by 'emasculate' in this context? What would be removed from your music if it were to be 'emasculated'?

MF: I mean to neutralise, to remove its life force, its energy, its strength, its sense of humour, and irony, its resilience, its lawlessness, its anger, its risk-taking, its

confrontational aspect, its scariness, its ambiguity, at least some of which qualities may no doubt be perceived as stereotypically 'queer'! But what is *life* without concomitant *suffering*, and being beaten about the brains?

DB: Indeed. Finally: what would you like your legacy to be?

MF: I don't want to try and control whatever my legacy might be, or how it might be perceived. I keep the majority of my manuscripts. I try only to write what I need to, and what excites me at the time of researching and memorising, in notated form. That in itself is sufficiently manipulated, and manipulative. Creative people must live with rejection, in all likelihood more frequently than acceptance. Bigotry and intolerance continue to fuel most news broadcasts. Not us, not composers and musicians, this time. But next time? Recall Section 28, in the lead up to which some MPs in the Conservative Family Campaign were advocating that gay men and women essentially be decorated with pink triangles and forced into ghettoes. Are the then-MPs Dame Jill Knight, Elaine Kellet-Bowman, or Geoffrey Dickens still around? Leaving their *legacies* behind? Are the tabloids or their mass supporters interested in conserving anything 'artistic' in the sense that you, David, and I, or our readers, understand it? Obviously continuing genocides, ethnic cleansings, wars and natural disasters eradicate cultural material—it's 'collateral damage'.

The protection of artworks probably depends on some committee conferring degrees of 'significance'. Is contemporary music of sufficient merit or significant enough to whoever is in control?

During the AIDS crisis, I realised that it was important to take sides. I hadn't been asked to take sides before, but when I needed to, I took the one that was the most honest and truthful for me to take. And I didn't write that Wikipedia profile, but I'm very proud of it ending that way, because it immediately puts the shoe on the other foot, doesn't it? It's like, if you disagree with this, that's your problem, it's against the law to discriminate now,[11] so think carefully, or just fuck off!

Note on Contributor

David Bretherton (he/him) is an Associate Professor of Music at the University of Southampton and an active trade unionist. He has published articles and book chapters on Franz Schubert, Heinrich Schenker, common-practice tonal theory and queer theory.

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[11] The UK's *Equality Act 2010* made discrimination based on sexual orientation unlawful, albeit with a small number of exemptions, e.g. for religious organisations.

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