

Musical Ancestry

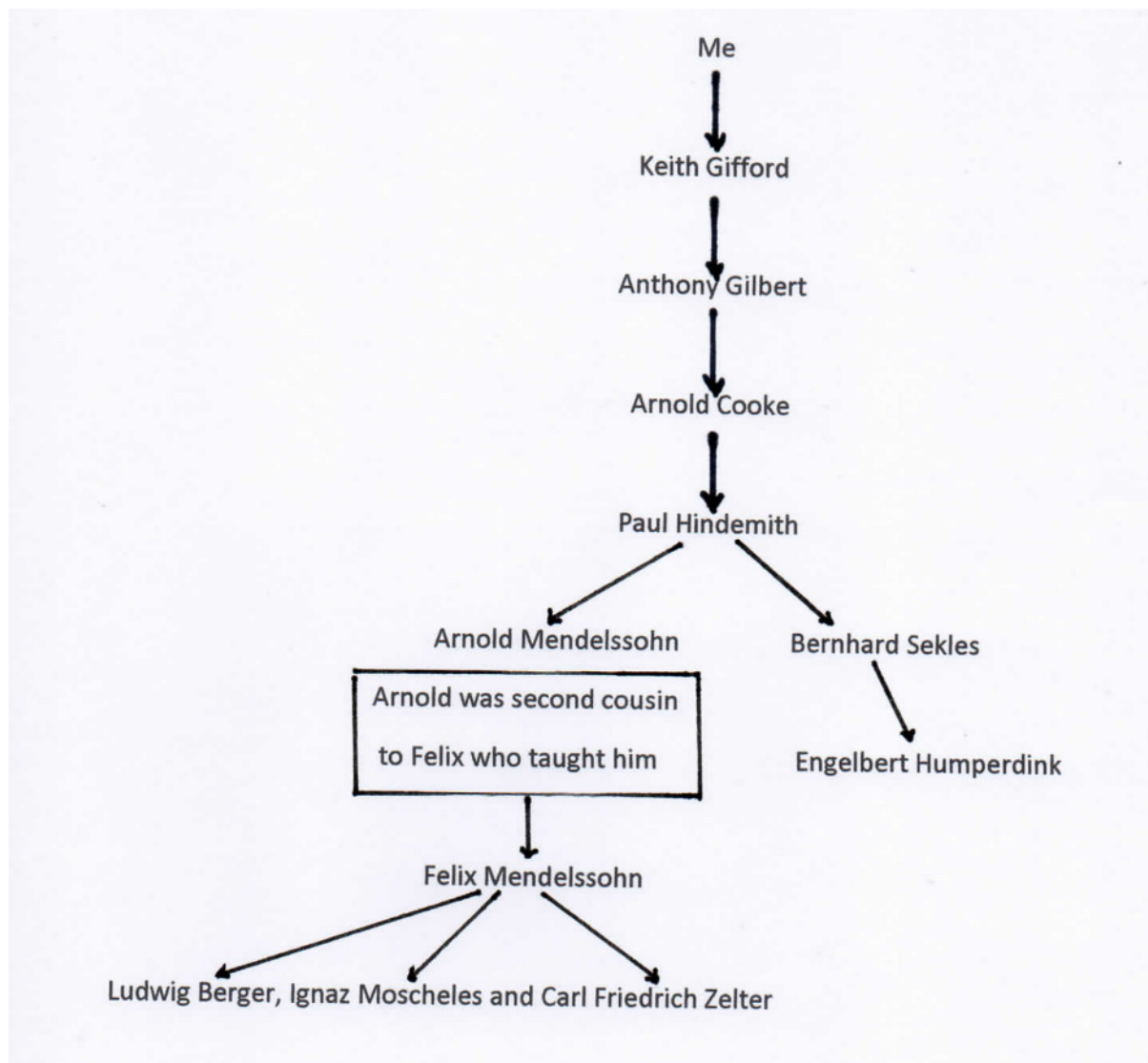
By Andrew Glover-Whitley



What have these three faces above got in common, and even, who are they? You may be able to name one or may be even two from the images but what links these all together? Well the answers are Musical Ancestry. The first image is that of Paul Hindemith, the second is Arnold Cooke and the last engraved image is that of Felix Mendelssohn. The thing that links these rather disparate composers is their lineage, and mine.

As a composer I have always been interested in where my ideas **may** have come from. Whether they are inherent, inherited or instilled through the teachers that I have had. My music sounds nothing like any of the above names and yet these three are in my musical lineage and therefore are part of my own unique inheritance as a musician. I have always felt that it is important for composers especially to know just where their roots lie. This is just a fascination for myself probably, but it also serves a purpose, that of finding out whether, as stated above, that there is any common thread through the teaching line. So far I have never found one but I am very proud to be able to say that my line is through the names that I have stated so far and to be able to say that you have Mendelssohn and Hindemith is quite a coup in its own right as well as other very auspicious names as you will see.

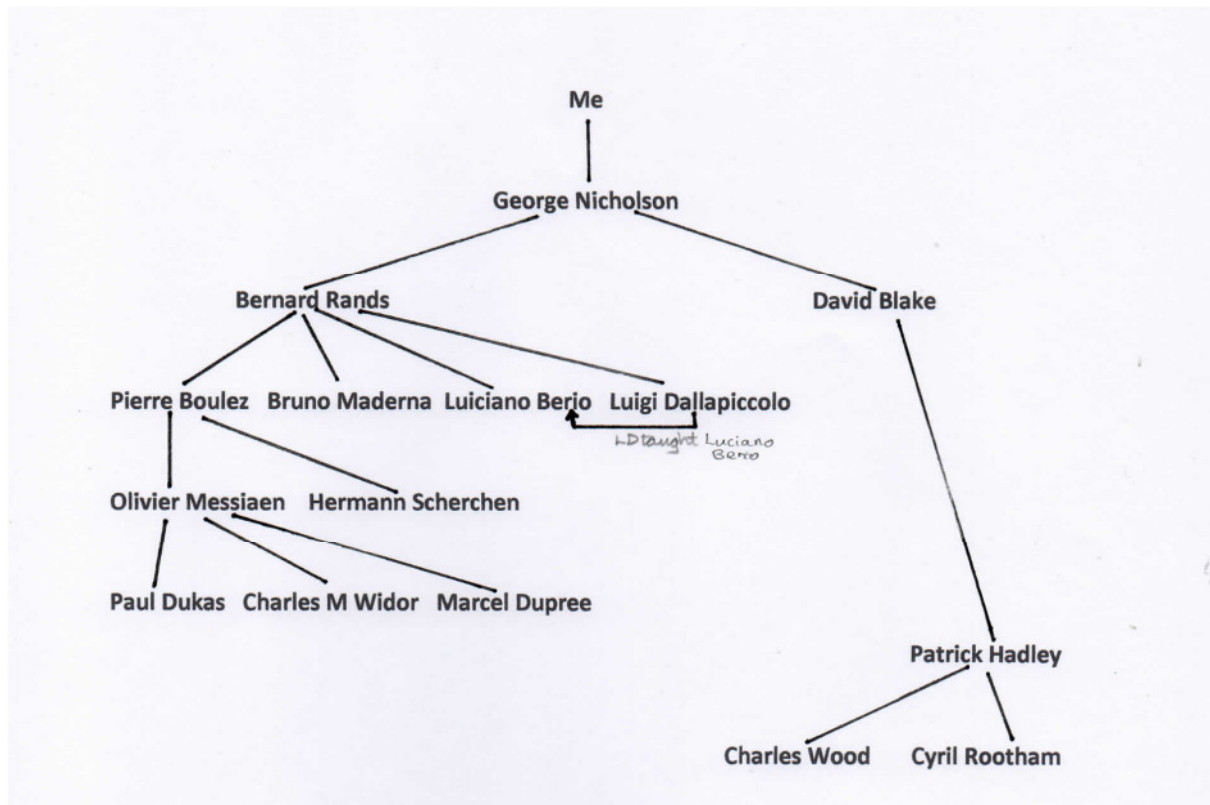
I actually have two lines that I can follow and in some cases composers can have as many as six or seven lineages to follow through. Many will in the end become so entangled and cross referenced that you would be able to claim descent musically from nearly every composer that ever lived in the western world since Perotin and Adam de La Halle. This is of course stupid and not of any influence or benefit on what a composer would write, unless they are pastiching a style of a former period of musical history. My own actual lineage from the names mentioned runs as below.



A rather nice lineage of names to be proud of. Everything from highbrow German art music to the slightly lighter style of Humperdinck. This is a rather loose list of course as there were hundreds of composers that have similar lineages through the ages. Another lineage of mine is even more interesting, if a bit shorter in time scale, but just as influential on me due to the style of teaching I undertook and the types of musical works that I studied and took to over the years.

<https://youtu.be/8Fm60b0X51c>

Humperdinck "Hansel und Gretel" Overture



Not a bad line of inheritance when you look at it in this way. In fact the entire two lines of Musical Ancestry reads like a who's who of German and French Schools with a smattering of the English pastoralists thrown in for good measure.

<https://youtu.be/iti300j129k>

Widor "Toccata" from the "Organ Symphony No.5"

<https://youtu.be/xay9K45mAU0>

Patrick Hadley "My Beloved Spake to Me"

There is a link in the above list that I have missed off as it is almost too much of a boast in normal conversation, but I will say it here. Patrick Hadley also was taught for a while by the great Ralph Vaughan Williams, my great musical hero, then of course RVW was taught by both Charles Villiers Stanford and Hubert Parry and so the line continues back via Germany. My line can now be traced back to the beginnings of the English Musical Renaissance of the late 19th century. I am personally very proud of the fact my musical blood is imbued with this ancestral line as I have always considered myself to be nothing more than a British composer, one in a long line.

I could claim that my leanings are very much orientated this way, but by saying this it is almost as if I am trying to fit my knowledge of these lineages to my own academic leanings when in fact they have absolutely no musical relevance or bearing on what I write or research. They are useful to be aware of and also to be proud of when someone asks where you come from. When this question was asked I usually used to say from Birmingham but occasionally I will answer “Mendelssohn and Messiaen”, “Humperdink and Widor” or “Vaughan Williams and Stanford”. That usually throws people as they don’t expect this type of answer.

Does this have any influence on a composer at all? I am not sure that it ever does unless their teacher was such a tyrant or an influence that they write like them, ape them or even pastiche them. I have known composers who have studied with some very great composers but then wrote like their teachers due to the forcefulness of these teachers and the strong egos and characters they possess. In most cases though a truly good composition tutor will allow you to write in whatever style, or whatever way you want and guide you as best they can, even if what you are writing is totally the antithesis of what they write themselves. They will guide you and suggest things, and in some cases the examples they will use will be from their own musical lineage and by doing so imbue that lineage into you, thus continuing this musical ancestral journey with you being the next in the long process and line. Enjoy this fact, and be proud of **your** Musical Ancestry. I know I am.