

Sean Polite interview with Ralph Titterton on the legacy of composer, Barry Gray.

1961, Kent (United Kingdom): A 6 year boy is sitting about his home in Capel-le-Ferne, a small country village between Folkestone and Dover. With frigid anticipation, he has witnessed what may be the first vehicular accident he's ever seen. A young French woman (of a sterling, timeless beauty) identified only as Venus, has been thrown off her vehicle; a "Jetmobile", avoiding a roadblock in her driving path. Her blood curdling scream hitting its crescendo, she has the attention of a nearby stranger. The stranger has the lined contours of a "Subterranean", a hostile alien with a pistol in his right gloved hand. While the shock of the scene no doubt stuns the little fellow; this moment literally fades to black. Yet the boy is still conscious, senses intact.

To add more eeriness to this scenario, the young man's ears are taken by the sounding of dramatic music incidentals - which hit on note as the helpless maiden crashes upon some nearby rocks. The year is 1961, and little Ralph Titterton is watching this transpire on his TV set, a well placed commercial break in place for the end of Act I of "Planet 46," of the Gerry Anderson TV series "Fireball XL5." The music, arranged and conducted by a man named Barry Gray, score a fantastic interlude in Ralph's life---an interlude which will follow acts of his life to come.

Barry Gray was a composer, an arranger---a consummate musician whose works have been adored by children and adults alike. Most famously, he contributed music to 13 television series in a grand creative partnership with British TV writer/producer/director Gerry Anderson. Their collaborations utilized (and more often not, pioneered) a number of innovations----most notably Supermarionation. Supermarionation was a filming style in which characters are played by marionettes, which are controlled by live puppeteers. As the Gray and Anderson show roster grew, the design of the puppets would evolve over time. This movement reach its zenith with the 1965 series "Thunderbirds." The show would become so popular with audiences, that 2 cinema movies would be released in 1966 and 1968. The appeal of the show would again resurface almost 40 years later, with an ambitious live action / computer-animated film version released in 2004.

The 30th September 2012 will mark the 47th anniversary of the premiere of the Thunderbirds series.

Other Supermarionation entries included the 1964 series "Stingray" (the predecessor to "Thunderbirds"), 1961's "Supercar," and the final serial, "The Secret Service" (which blended close ups of the puppets with long distance shots of their live action counterparts). Trey Parker and Matt Stowe (famously known as the creators of the animated series "South Park") would reintroduce the world to the Supermarionation style with their 2004 hit marionette-character film "Team America: World Police."

Barry's music would find its way into prime time, as Anderson took to the next decade with science fiction tailored for an adult audience in the forms of 1970's "UFO" and "Space:1999" in 1975 (Gray would only do music for the first year of the show)

Gray would have four feature length films to his musical name also. The Oscar-winning film "Dr. Strangelove" has a touch of Gray to it, for instance. World famous singer Vera Lynn had a song called "We'll Meet Again" in the film. Lynn, a long time vocal collaborator of his dating back to his musical theatre and studio session playing days, did a re-record of the song for the movie, its' having been a hit record of hers during World War II.

Having experienced a recent pop culture revival of its own, the long-running British sci-fi series "Doctor Who" had two movie releases in the 1960's. One of the more recognizable members of the titular character's intergalactic rogue's gallery is an alien race known (and eternally loathed) as The Daleks. They were the subjects of the two films, and their robotic menace was augmented by a fresh arsenal of "electro-musical sound effects" Gray came up with---dubbed as Musieffects by the man himself

These are but a few samplings of the legacy that Barry Gray left behind upon his death in 1984.

True to the Anderson series of lore, Gray's presence has been preserved by a team effort. Much like Captain Scarlet had Spectrum, Troy Tempest his Stingray, and the Tracy boys of "Thunderbirds" had International Rescue, the work of many hands has kept Barry Gray's name going in a 28 year wake. You're going to learn about said multitude from a key member of this squad.

While not quite 6 years old, the horns, bleeps, strings, and other toys in Barry Gray's treasure chest of stirring sounds still ring vibrantly through the ears of a slightly older Ralph Titterton.

For what worth Barry Gray's prolific career has, and how overlooked it has been due to the combined sweeps of time, technology, generations, and attention spans, orchestrating Venus' crash music for a kid named Ralph may unknowingly have been his masterstroke. In turn, Mr. Titterton has repaid Gray in spades. He is the official archivist for Mr. Gray's catalogue. But he will tell you that he is not alone in his efforts. The following is an interview with Ralph about his work with the Barry Gray estate. You'll be happy to hear that he had the pleasure of meeting the man behind the music quite a few times as a fan. He also organized a World Premiere concert celebrating the works of Mr. Gray through film and television, letting millions revisit their childhoods through the sonic window of the many series long gone by. And just as well, he is an extremely generous man, with a patient and loving lady at his side, kindly following suit in this passion of his which has gone strong for over 40 years. And now, on to Mr. Titterton:

What is the nature of your work with the Barry Gray estate?

My role with the estate is purely related to Barry Gray's music. In 1993 I agreed to collect all the 600 plus studio audio reels, and other related material; including a Revox tape deck which we still use, and Barry's Ondes Martenot (which has been fully restored and is back in use professionally). Since that time all the music has been indexed, catalogued and transferred to a digital format. In 1997 I set up a deal where it was agreed that all the ownership of physical tapes would become the property of the owner of the ITC television library (at that time PolyGram Films) and in return the estate would get a financial return from their commercial exploitation; an agreement that continues to this day.

Since that time a series of original soundtrack CD's have been made for both the fan and commercial markets worldwide, and these continue with more titles planned this year. I have also produced a World Premiere Barry Gray Centenary Concert at London's Royal Festival Hall in 2008 with the Philharmonia Orchestra and actor Brian Blessed.

Since the Concert I have been focusing on Barry's original hand written music manuscripts, scanning these to a digital format and exploring how they could be commercially exploited. This is currently ongoing.

As Mr. Gray has long since passed on, what's happened to his physical estate? (Perhaps it is a national landmark registry?)

Not a question I can answer. Barry ended his days living on the island of Guernsey, one of the Channel Islands off of England's west coast. He was survived by his wife Joan until 1992, and his two children, Simon and Amanda. As they both live in England I assume Barry's house in Guernsey has long since been sold.

Did you ever get to meet Mr. Gray?

Yes, I was very fortunate to meet him three times. Once in a hotel in London in the late 1970's, where we recorded an interview for a small local radio station. It was at this meeting that I met two other fans of Barry's work who have since become lifelong friends, David Hirsch and Theo de Klerk. If I can make a plug, part of that recording is available on a CD "A Tribute to Barry Gray" exclusively available through the Barry Gray website, www.barrygray.co.uk

The second time was at the Fanderson Convention in 1982 when Barry was one of the guests of honour. Two things I remember about this convention in particular. The first is the fact that I wrote a brief one page biography on Barry, and sent it to him to check the text. Barry re-wrote the whole piece

in his beautiful stylish handwriting (a prized possession) and recorded the whole piece to tape. That biography document has gradually been built on year by year, to a much, much larger document we have now. The definitive biography on Barry, and his career.

That recording is also on the "Tribute" CD as is Barry's session at the convention. He was meant to be supplied with a grand piano, and for some reason it never appeared. So he ad-libbed the whole thing!

The other memory from that convention is that within 20 minutes of arriving at the event, even though I was on the organising committee, Barry had me at the bar and was trying to drink me under the table. Barry won!

My last meeting was on Guernsey itself, when we meet in a local cafe for lunch. How could I have known back then that a few years later our lives were to become so incredibly linked?

If you could sum up his character and influence in a few choice lines, what would you say?

Barry was a gentle, hard working, professional who was in the main self taught. He had a wonderful sense of fun and humour. He loved gadgets and working with the latest technology, be it music related or a nice car. Very generous with his fans, always answering personally all fan letters, and often sending out samples of his work. He was very well respected by the musicians he worked with, and he in turn was loyal to the various players he employed.

Some of his personal work could be very simple and naive which reflected his own sense of fun, yet at the same time capable of writing the incredibly powerful scores we all know, and love. Barry also had a love of calligraphy, and drawing humorous cartoons, often reflecting life around him.

Could you mention some of the artists/creators Barry worked with?

To be honest Barry did not work with many artist / creators. He was a jobbing composer, working for various music manuscript companies for a lot of his early career. During the 1950's he was a musical arranger for the famous British vocalist Vera Lynn, which would have been prior to him joining Gerry Anderson and all that followed.

What's your favourite Gray composition?

That is a VERY difficult question, as I like so much of Barry's music. I am very fond of what Barry would call "radio music". These were incidental themes, often with a Jazz / Latin-American influence that would often play in the background of a specific scene, or be heard coming from a car radio in a scene. Whilst only a few bars may be heard, Barry would often write a full piece, and record it in its entirety. Likewise, I very much like the jazz themes associated with UFO.

If there was one specific series, it would be Fireball XL5. At the age of six it was this series that got me totally hooked on the Gerry Anderson programmes, and started an influence on my life that has continued to the present day.

Could you discuss the tribute's concerns for him and his work?

At the start of the film of the Barry Gray Concert there is a caption that says "Not everyone knows the name "Barry Gray", but everyone knows his work". Likewise, whenever I mention the name "Barry Gray" to anyone I get a blank look. When I mention "Thunderbirds", straight away everyone knows the music. It would be good if I could get this British composer more publically recognised, and if anything this has become my lifelong mission.

Is his work with Gerry Anderson his lifelong signature?

I would say yes, it is certainly what he will be remembered for in the fullness of time.

As he has a compilation of his commercial music works, would you say that he had renowned for his jingles/ad sports? (And did you do any production on them)

Alongside his career with Gerry Anderson Barry had a second career, composing jingles and commercials over a 20 year period from the mid-1950's onwards for television, film and radio. We had a pile of tapes with samples of his many commercials on them, but it has only been in the last few years that I have been able to properly explore the content of these. The result of this work was a totally unique CD produced for a company called Trunk Records, called "Stand by for Adverts".

Listened to in its entirety is a unique experience, and highly recommended! Trunk Records have their own website, and this CD can be purchased online. We have a collection of Barry's cartoons and commercial storyboards, and I still need to explore if there is a way to get these into the public domain.

How long did it take for you and your wife to go through the Gray archives?

I haven't married her yet, even though we have been living together since 1991! My partner, Cathy Ford, has been incredibly understanding of everything we have ended up being involved in. Although she was a Gerry Anderson fan when we meet, when we decided to live together there was no way she (or I) knew what was to come, and I could not do it without her.

When the boxes of tapes first turned up in 1993 they were all in damp cardboard, and most were covered in mildew. You can probably imagine the smell, and the tapes and other materials took over the whole house.

It took five long years to sort all the tapes, document their content and get them into series and episode order. During this time it was Cathy who devised a library system for the tapes, a system we still use to this day. She has also researched Barry's life and career during this time, and I will say that with the materials we have available to us she has become the world authority on Barry Gray, bar nobody. Whenever you see any background notes on anything that we are involved in relating to Barry's music, it is Cathy who will have put those notes together.

Take a minute and talk about the people you've worked with at the Gray estates

I am very lucky in as much as Barry's children, Simon and Amanda, trust me totally to look after their interests with Barry's music. Something I very much appreciate and I hope that I can continue to maintain that trust.

A lot of people have been involved in assisting me over the years. The most important of which I have already mentioned, my partner, Cathy.

I would also like to specifically mention...

Tim Mallett of Kindred Productions. Without Tim, none of the CD's would have happened. He and I have co-produced these releases, Tim handling all the technical aspects; not always the easiest of jobs, whilst I have handled everything else according to the need of each release. It is a relationship that has worked well, and continues to do so.

Fanderson – The Official Gerry Anderson Appreciation Society. The first CD was released by Fanderson in 1998. "Supercar and Fireball XL5" became the benchmark release for the quality standard we wanted to achieve. Further releases have been made exclusively for Fanderson, some of which have been re-released in cut-down versions for the commercial market. New titles are always being explored, with a new title currently going into production.

Silva Screen Records, and my contact there, David Stoner. David was responsible for getting a series of Barry Gray CD titles into the commercial market over a number of years. Some of such have been re-licensed for the French and Japanese markets. Initial discussions are currently taking place regarding a new project later this year.

Francois Evans or Doctor Francois Evans, to give him his full title. Francois is a Doctor of Music, a composer, a music tutor, a good friend, and my business partner. Francois shared my dream when I wanted to produce a Barry Gray concert in 2008. He became my Musical Director and Conductor,

handling all aspects of the music side of that concert, whilst I handled the production side. Since that time we are working together on all aspects of Barry's music manuscripts as discussed above.

And finally, Len Davies. Len is an independent film producer who filmed the Barry Gray Concert, and edited together a film to broadcast standard. Despite a lot of technical problems, Len has created an incredible piece of work which we are currently trying to get into the public domain.

Did you hear any of his commercial work growing up? If so, what are some of the ads you remember?

The adverts I remember most are the various ones for Lyons Maid ice lollies. Zoom, FAB and Seajet to name but three. Each featured characters from the various TV series and were little mini-adventures. Likewise, there were a series of breakfast cereal commercials where you could collect badges from the different series. The music scores from many of these commercials have appeared on various Fanderson and Silva Screen CD release.

Are there any conventions/events planned in the Gray estate's honour?

Nothing planned at the moment; however I am totally open to approaches as regards further concerts, events, or television broadcast of the Barry Gray Concert film, plus we are starting to explore if there is anything we can do for the 50th anniversary of Thunderbirds in 2015.

Ralph Titterton

3rd October 2012

For the fan conventions, YouTube reels, and nostalgic awe that Gray's work has provided for people like Ralph, his status as a well skilled composer has been under. As you may tell, Ralph alludes to much work which has not reached the awareness of the masses. He intimately knows in his passionate research.

The beauty of international syndication has given the TV shows he worked on an extended lease, reaching countries well beyond the native United Kingdom. For example, The Sci-Fi Channel (now Sci Fi) aired "Stingray" and "Captain Scarlet" shows during its early 1990's "Cartoon Quest" block. Digital technology has shed fresh light on Barry's impressive body of work. In the mainstream, the compact disc was in its infancy when Gray passed on in 1984. However, the great archiving capabilities of it would prove useful in extending the life lease of the content of the 600 plus reels of studio tapes that he left behind.

Fanderson (www.fanderson.org.uk) has provided its members with many exclusive CDs of Gray's Supermarionation music, all professionally produced. The British independent music label Trunk Records released the compilation called "Stand by for Adverts"---an 82 track collection of Gray's commercial jingles. The album features Gray's Pied Piper-like rhythms and hooks, gracing ads for everything from banks, dishwashing fluid, and coffee. Each piece demonstrates a savvy side to Gray's musical skills, which advertisers wisely sought him out for.

His eternal affiliation with Gerry Anderson aside, Barry Gray has worked with other distinguished partners, all decorated vocalists and instrumentalists in their own right. One person he worked with in his session days was an Emmy winner---the late, great vocalist of colour (in every sense of the word), Eartha Kitt. He was requested to captain high company (accepting offers to conduct the National Philharmonic Orchestra and Rank Concert Orchestra doing medleys of his tv/film compositions) and to entertain high class of audience (Her Majesty The Queen, by composing the Royal Fanfare at a 1980 engagement at composer Sidney Samuelson's request). Yet above all, his connection with the fans and contemporaries reigns supreme.

Of note is that while Gerry Anderson has received an Order of The British Empire, Gray has not.

But the true commendation is in the memories he arranged in the ears, minds, and hearts of fans all over of the world—including one Ralph Titterton.

While Ralph has admitted that his work with Barry's music has been a labour of love, it is not the only labour he's lived by. He's done most of the archiving work himself, and it has been an amazing balancing act. Like the heroes in the aforementioned series, Mr. Titterton knows that life is a precious thing. For over 30 years, he worked as a senior nurse specializing in Critical Care. It was in 2009 that he opted for early retirement, so that he could focus his work on the Gray archive, in addition to other media projects. Keep in mind that a year earlier, he was working as a full-time senior nurse while producing the 2008 Barry Gray Centenary Concert, which took place at the illustrious Royal Festival Hall in London. Without any prior experience in the production field, Ralph captained the event to well-received praise. As with Mr. Gray, these details mentioned are but a small part of Mr. Titterton's tale.

It is at Ralph's kind request that I'm going to tell you about me. My name is Sean Polite, and I too am a fan of Barry Gray. Back around 1990, I rented a videotape from the local rental store, and was expected to be treated to some episodes of the claymation series Gumbly. While that part was true, I was not aware of the surprise that lay for me at the end of the tape. As the credits on the tape faded to black, a peaceful scene faded into view. It was an ocean, lapped up by a gorgeous blue sky. As this serene scene settled into my mind, my synapses were blown by an explosion mounting from the water. I should also mention that upon the opening of this scene, a voice I'll forget uttered the words "Stand by for Action!" The producers of the video tape were smart to put in the opening sequence for the series "Stingray," which served some 22 years as one of the best trailer sequences I've ever seen.

I too am grateful for Mr. Gray's works, and with Ralph's guidance (and the many fans across the world), I am digging deeper into the catalogue of the man who stunned the ears of a young fellow in 1961. He, I, and a team of many dedicated people, are working to give tribute the gifted genius that the world received all too briefly in Mr. Barry Gray.

Many thanks to those who read this piece, and in doing so, let the memory and magic of the Barry Gray sound experience live on.

-Sean C. Polite

4th October 12

For further information regarding Barry Gray, to be kept informed of the latest news relating to his music, or to contact Ralph Titterton directly, please visit: www.barrygray.co.uk