

Christopher Painter at 65

Out of the Mist



Christopher Painter

Across more than four decades, Christopher Painter has developed a substantial body of orchestral, chamber, solo, brass and wind music shaped by Welsh identity, landscape, memory and literature. Performed and broadcast in the United Kingdom and internationally, his music combines large-scale structural thinking with a strong sense of colour, atmosphere and dramatic momentum.

Programming and commissioning opportunities are available throughout 2027. Existing works, composer portraits and new collaborative projects can be tailored to festivals, ensembles and individual performers.

The Making of a Composer

Christopher Painter's musical roots lie in Port Talbot, where school music, brass bands and the encouragement of trumpet teacher Walter White first opened the door to composition. Music gradually displaced an intended career in civil engineering, and after further encouragement from Edward Gregson he went to University College Cardiff to study composition.

"Apply to Cardiff, Alun Hoddinott is there and he'll be good for you."

– Walter White, remembered by Christopher Painter

Alun Hoddinott – teacher, mentor, friend



At Cardiff, Painter's musical development was decisively shaped by Alun Hoddinott. Their relationship began as teacher and pupil and developed into a friendship and professional association lasting more than two decades. Hoddinott's teaching demanded discipline, structural clarity and an ability to justify every detail of a score. Painter later described him as his "musical father".

"There's no such thing as a good or bad composer, there are just those who give up."

– Alun Hoddinott, remembered by Christopher Painter

A widening musical world

Alongside his formal studies, Painter sought advice and encouragement from composers including George Benjamin, Edward Gregson, John McCabe, Robert Saxton and Robert Simpson, as well as visiting international figures Samuel Adler of the Eastman School of Music in New York and Polish composer Marek Stachowski. Parallel studies in conducting brought further perspectives through teachers including Christopher Adey and Alun Francis.

These encounters exposed Painter to widely differing musical languages and approaches without drawing him towards any single school or aesthetic. The resulting musical language has remained rooted in structure and craftsmanship while increasingly drawing on landscape, memory, literature and the natural world. Painter has described composition as a form of construction: taking basic materials and building them into a coherent whole. That combination of rigorous construction and imaginative response has remained central to his music throughout the succeeding four decades.

Orchestral Music

Christopher Painter's orchestral music has been central to his output for more than four decades, ranging from symphonies and concert works to scores shaped by landscape, literature and memory. Major collaborations have taken his music from Wales to Germany and Mexico, and into regular association with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

- **Invisible Cities** – National Youth Orchestra of Wales, 1999; part of the residency and performed across four concerts.
- **Forest of Dreams** – written during the Thüringen Philharmonie residency; broadcast on German television and later performed by BBC NOW under Jac van Steen.
- **Symphony No.3 "Fire in the Snow"** – premiered in Mexico City by the Orquesta Filarmónica de la UNAM under Alun Francis.
- **Furnace of Colours** – BBC Radio 3 commission, conducted by Jac van Steen with BBC NOW.

"A highly developed ear for orchestral sonority, a sure command of large-scale structure, and an ability to create music of real emotional and dramatic weight."

– Jac van Steen on *Furnace of Colours*



Painter's orchestral writing combines large-scale architectural thinking with a strong instinct for colour and instrumental character. Jac van Steen has also identified in the music a clear connection with landscape, memory and Welsh cultural identity – elements absorbed into a musical language that remains distinctly Welsh without being confined by national boundaries.

Chamber, Solo & Vocal Music

Alongside his orchestral output, Christopher Painter has developed a substantial body of chamber, solo and vocal music, ranging from sonatas and quartets to works shaped by Welsh poetry, landscape and myth. These smaller-scale works offer flexible programming possibilities for festivals, recital series and individual performers.

- **Sonata for Harp** – Gregynog Composer Award; premiered by Elinor Bennett.
- **Clarinet Sonata** – commissioned by Peryn Clement-Evans, 1999.
- **Lunar Seas** – commissioned by the Lunar Saxophone Quartet, 2010.
- **Sonata for Alto Saxophone** – commissioned by Lara James, 2005.
- **Yr Hanes Swynol** – awarded the National Eisteddfod's Tlws y Cerddor, 2005.
- **Syniadau'r Serch** – song cycle for baritone, violin and harp; Tlws y Cerddor, 2010.
- **Images in the Mist** – commissioned and premiered by the Richards Quartet, 2012.
- **Caneuon Taliesin** – trumpet and piano, premiered at the International Trumpet Guild Conference at Columbus, Ohio, 2015.
- **Five Memorial Fragments** – piano, Lower Machen Festival, 2017.
- **Daughters of the Sea** – violin and piano; commissioned by the Fishguard International Festival of Music, 2019.

"We've commissioned several chamber works from Chris over the years, including music for education, the launch of a major venue and public performance. Always easy to work with, very professional and, ultimately, great music."

– Peryn Clement-Evans, Director, Ensemble Cymru

Whether written for a single performer or a small ensemble, Painter's chamber music retains the same concern for structure, colour and expressive trajectory found in his larger works. Its more intimate scale often brings his literary and landscape influences into particularly sharp focus.

"Many of Painter's works are inspired by nature and the basic elements - he has a fascination with the sea and with forests - and the mythology associated with them. Likewise, Welsh literature and history, especially the Mabinogi, have a strong presence in his music and he has been heavily influenced by the poetry of the Welsh metaphysical poet, Vernon Watkins."

– Christina Schaetz, "Komponisten-Porträt 2015" ("Composer Portrait 2015")

Brass & Wind Music

Brass and wind music occupy a distinctive place in Christopher Painter's catalogue. A brass player from his schooldays, he has written for the medium from the inside: from major concert works for brass band and substantial wind-ensemble scores to chamber music such as *Fibonacci's Dream*, commissioned by the Welsh National Opera Brass Consort.

These works reflect a lifelong familiarity with the sound, technique and culture of wind and brass playing, but they are not conceived as specialist repertoire in isolation. Painter approaches both wind ensemble and brass band as serious concert media, capable of sustaining large-scale musical argument, atmosphere and narrative. In this respect they form a natural extension of the structural and expressive concerns found throughout his orchestral and chamber music.

Wind Ensemble

Painter's works for symphonic wind band grew from a long association with conductor and wind-music advocate Timothy Reynish. All four works were commissioned by Timothy and Hilary Reynish, beginning with *The Broken Sea*, written in memory of their son William. Scored for full symphonic wind ensemble and lasting around 24 minutes, the work takes its title from a poem by Vernon Watkins and unfolds in five connected sections, moving from a cold nocturnal landscape through storm and grief to a renewed sense of elemental power.

The Broken Sea – commissioned by Timothy and Hilary Reynish in memory of William Reynish; premiered by the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama Wind Orchestra conducted by Timothy Reynish; published by Maecenas Music.

"One of the most imaginative and evocative pieces for Wind Orchestra written in the last decade... destined to be a 'wind band classic'."

– Maecenas Music

La Città Invisibile (Invisible Cities) – symphonic wind-band transcription, made at Timothy Reynish's request from the orchestral work.

Myrkviðr (Mirkwood) – symphonic wind-band transcription of the brass-band work, also made at Reynish's request.

Regatta – original work for symphonic wind band, written as a birthday present for Timothy Reynish.

The latter three works await their first performances and offer particularly attractive opportunities for festivals or ensembles interested in presenting new or little-heard repertoire.

Brass Band

Painter's relationship with brass bands reaches back to his earliest years as a player and composer. His mature works for the medium range from the ritualistic energy of *Ceremonies of Fire* to the mythic landscapes of *Mirkwood*, the commemorative *Lednor Variants* and the visual-art-inspired *The Elephant and the Dove*. His 2025 *Aelfgar - Spear of the Elves* continues this interest in history, myth and narrative. The medium remains an important part of his musical identity, though the works are conceived as serious concert repertoire rather than genre exercises.

Ceremonies of Fire – commissioned for the National Youth Brass Band of Wales; ritualistic, elemental and dramatic.

The Elephant and the Dove – three-movement work inspired by Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera; lyrical, colourful and rhythmically vivid.

Myrkviðr (Mirkwood) – atmospheric concert work rooted in mythic landscape; one of the most substantial works in the brass-band catalogue.

Lednor Variants – reflective variations on material from *Gwahoddiad*, written in memory of Painter's close friend, Christopher Lednor.

Aelfgar - Spear of the Elves – commissioned for the Elgar International Brass Band Summer School; a historical and narrative work drawing on Elgarian references.

"A complete breath of fresh air... The musical language is sophisticated, yet the loose programmatic concept makes it highly accessible."

– David Childs, *Brass Band World*, on *Mirkwood*

Brass Chamber Music

Fibonacci's Dream – brass quintet, commissioned by the Welsh National Opera Brass Consort.

Fanfare for St Nicholas – 4 Trumpets; 3 Trombones; Tuba; Timpani; 1 Percussion; Organ, commissioned by BBC Wales

"Grounded in tradition yet open to exploration; accessible yet thoughtful; rooted in community yet artistically ambitious."

– Finlay Anderson, *The Brass Band Music of Christopher Painter*

People, places and beginnings



"You don't give your life to music; it IS your life. You don't choose it, it chooses you"

– Alun Hoddinott, personal recollection



Christopher Adey



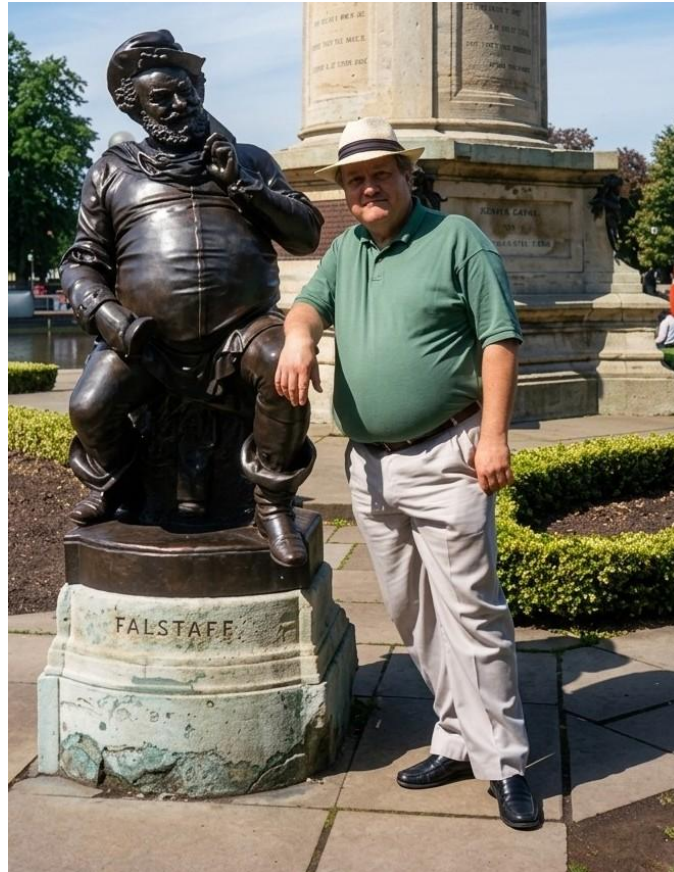
With Alun Francis, following the
Forest of Dreams premiere

"I love puzzles. I love working out how things come together."

"I feel a natural affinity to orchestral writing and love having the big canvas to work with."

"Things like that affect me. Poetry and painting also affect me."

– Christopher Painter, interview with Peter Reynolds



Stratford-upon-Avon — with Falstaff. Identification withheld.

"There was an awareness that work was what you needed to do to get by, but that culture was the important thing."

– Christopher Painter, interview with Peter Reynolds

