

# Oscar Bettison

oscarbettison.com

## Long Bio:

Bettison's music lives, thrillingly, on a razor's edge between unpredictability and a groove wrought of full-bodied play.

Born off the Normandy coast of France on the United Kingdom's Channel Islands to Spanish and British parents, Bettison began composing at an early age, fascinated by the interplay between the "weird, hazy, tenuous aural image" in his imagination and the wild effort to wrestle it onto the page. His earliest music training began as a violinist at the Purcell School, the oldest specialist music school in the United Kingdom. From mornings spent singing Hungarian folk songs to afternoons studying 16th-century counterpoint, Bettison was gathering the means of forming a new language comprising countless cross-pollinating strands.

Soon the rebelliousness of his teenage years took hold, and the routine of violin practice was replaced with the visceral pleasure of rock 'n' roll percussion, the demands of competition with the liberating study of iconoclast composers, from George Crumb and Steve Reich to György Ligeti and Igor Stravinsky. His early compositional voice blossomed, culminating in his winning the first BBC Young Composer of the Year award in 1993 at age 18.

Though he would continue his studies in the United Kingdom at London's Royal College of Music, it was his move to Amsterdam to study at The Hague with Louis Andriessen and Martijn Padding that was a decisive turning point. It was there that he developed a philosophy of music-making that characterizes his music to this day: to embrace creative discomfort, to shun pre-planning, and crash through challenges with fantastic, imaginative twists. As Bettison has said: "It's not that refinement is a bad thing. But there are times when it can get in the way."

In 2005–2007, after his move to the US to finish his PhD at Princeton University, Bettison would compose a breakthrough work, the evening-length *O Death* which grafts popular musical styles, including blues, onto the requiem structure. Based on a folksong of the same name, the towering piece asked the Dutch sextet Ensemble Klang to add to its standard instrumentation with a banjo, harmonica, recorder, Jew's harp, melodica, plus flower pots and wrenches.

Bettison continued challenging boundaries with adventurous works that attracted attention from press and audiences, such as *B&E (with aggravated assault)* and *Livre des Sauvages* for large ensemble, and was recognized with a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2017. To this day, Bettison is breaking free from his own molds—he is composing more for orchestras, with the recent world premiere of *Remaking a Forest* for Oregon Symphony (2019) and *Pale Icons of Night*—his first violin concerto—for Courtney Orlando and Alarm Will Sound in 2018, as well as *Lights in Ashes* (an orchestral reimagination of a movement from *O Death*) premiered by the New World Symphony in 2017. Bettison's first opera, *The Light of Lesser Days* premiered in September 2021 in the Netherlands with the Askō|Schönberg ensemble.

He currently lives in New Jersey and is a Professor of Composition at John Hopkins University's Peabody Institute, where he teaches composition and instills in his students the fearless, resourceful spirit to build upon the techniques of the past, or to forge new ones entirely.

—Alex Ambrose, for Boosey & Hawkes  
December 2019

# Oscar Bettison

oscarbettison.com

## Short bio:

Bettison's music lives, thrillingly, on a razor's edge between unpredictability and a groove wrought of full-bodied play.

Born on the United Kingdom's Channel Islands to Spanish and British parents, Bettison was fascinated from an early age by the interplay between the "weird, hazy, tenuous aural image" in his imagination and the wild effort to wrestle it onto the page. After studying in Amsterdam with Louis Andriessen and Martijn Padding, he learned to embrace this creative discomfort, crashing through challenges with fantastic, imaginative twists. As Bettison has said: "It's not that refinement is a bad thing. But there are times when it can get in the way."

Watershed ensemble works like *O Death* and *B&E (with aggravated assault)* drew attention from press and audiences for their free-spirited play and integration of popular musical styles. Bettison was recognized with a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2017.

Bettison continues to find inspiration in experimenting with different forms of music, composing more for orchestra in recent years: *Remaking a Forest* for Oregon Symphony premiered in 2019, *Pale Icons of Night*—his first violin concerto—for Courtney Orlando and Alarm Will Sound debuted in 2018, and *Lights in Ashes* (an orchestral reimagining of a movement from *O Death*) was premiered by the New World Symphony in 2017. Bettison's first opera, *The Light of Lesser Days* premiered in September 2021 in the Netherlands with the Asko|Schönberg ensemble.

Bettison currently lives in New Jersey and is a Professor of Composition at John Hopkins University's Peabody Institute.

—Alex Ambrose, for Boosey & Hawkes  
*December 2019*