

George Lloyd and PTSD: A Psychiatrist's Reflection

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Severe trauma affects us in various ways: for some, it causes irrevocable destruction of the psyche and the body, for others a middle way is found, while for yet others it can spur healing creativity and recovery, even though this process is sometimes prolonged. In the course of my career as a psychiatrist, I have been privileged to care for many survivors of trauma - military and civilian alike. The condition most commonly seen after trauma is referred to as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but PTSD is far from being the only outcome. Depression, suicide, misuse of drugs and alcohol and myriad physical problems are seen too. Increased rates of heart disease, dementia and a reduced lifespan are all believed to be consequences.

I became interested in how exposure to trauma in war affected musicians, and have written about several famous composers who served in action in World War I. Of the seven individuals studied, some died young and suffered from impairment in their creativity, beset as they were by chronic pain and alcohol problems. Others, notably Sir Arthur Bliss, succeeded in overcoming PTSD through specific forms of composition, while others, e.g. Ralph Vaughan Williams, were less affected overall by their wartime experience and their creativity continued uninterrupted.



George Lloyd conducting Iernin at the Lyceum 1934

We know less about the experience of composers during World War II, and of the effect of exposure to combat or other horrors. Some, like Benjamin Britten, left home shores for the security of North America and were thus spared the worst. Others volunteered for service, of whom George Lloyd was a notable example. In the 1930s, Lloyd was a promising young British composer, with great prospects lying ahead.

However, when World War II intervened, he volunteered with the Royal Marines, to await the horrors of combat, which affected him badly and derailed his musical career for many years. His life and career, and his struggles with post-traumatic stress, have been written about in detail elsewhere (*Jonathan Davidson. When the Composer has PTSD: Examining the Life of George Lloyd, 1913-1998. Music & Medicine 2018; 10(1): 39-44.*)

George Lloyd's life, together with the devoted support of his wife, Nancy, are a tale of courage, faith, discipline and hope, which should inspire us all. This account is intended a brief supplemental tribute to my above-cited article. *

In World War Two, Lloyd served as a bandsman on the cruiser *HMS Trinidad*, which was deployed on the Arctic patrol. He had other duties too, in the Transmitting Station, keeping watch and monitoring wind, swell and ship speed. On March 29, 1942, near Murmansk, a torpedo malfunction put Lloyd in grave danger of losing his life, as he witnessed the deaths of seventeen of his colleagues, who drowned in the rising levels of fuel oil as they were trapped far below the waterline. Lloyd climbed up the ladder to safety and was the last man to escape.



Royal Marine Bandsmen in the Transmitting Station, calculating gunnery.

These harrowing experiences left Lloyd with unmistakable symptoms of PTSD, and he was hospitalized for several months with little prospect of recovery according to his doctors, who diagnosed Lloyd as having a psychoneurosis. George's wife was determined to see her husband recover and did not buy the doctors' pessimistic prediction. She took matters into her own hand, removing him from hospital against medical advice and proceeded to devise, with George's participation, a regimen to return her husband to better health. She devoted the rest of her life to doing all within her power to ensure George's wellbeing.



Switzerland 1939



West Wittering 1943



Chateau D'Oex 1945

Among the various therapeutic interventions were hypnosis, the use of affirming imagery, catechisms and mantra, vigorous daily exercise, the taking of Bach Flower Remedies, and drawing on [Frederick Bailes' inspirational writings](#). It is quite remarkable how Nancy and George applied these approaches, most of which were unknown to the community of professionals tasked with treating psychoneurosis or PTSD. In some respects, she was 50 years ahead of her time, as it is only in the past decade that some of those techniques have found a place in managing PTSD. That she was able to find and incorporate them in a systematic and disciplined way, and that George was also able to practice them on a daily basis for so many years is astonishing.

By 1946, George had begun to regain the capacity for serious composition, and composed Symphony #4. But it was an uphill struggle, both because of his condition and because the music world no longer found a place for his style of composition, thereby exposing him to repeated rejections. But George and Nancy never gave up hope and in 1976, a breakthrough came with the broadcast of Symphony #8, which was followed by an enthusiastic public response. The support of a limited, but influential, number of musicians such as John Ogdon, Sir Charles Groves and Sir Edward Downes also brought Lloyd to the wider musical world. For almost twenty years, George Lloyd had been a musical outcast, as he and Nancy made a (successful) living as market gardeners, raising mushrooms and carnations. Yet throughout this phase of their lives, George would rise early and continue producing symphonies and other works, despite not seeing them performed. With the breaks that finally came George's way, he and Nancy were able to sell their gardening business and move to London, where George could concentrate on music.



By 1987, Lloyd considered himself to be largely recovered: over 40 years after the onset of PTSD. He undertook additional projects, learned about new digital recording techniques, established his own recording company, and maintained prolific output. He was invited to Hong Kong and to the United States, where he gave performances of his works as principal guest conductor of the Albany Symphony Orchestra. By the end of George

Lloyd's life in 1998, he had surmounted enormous obstacles and enjoyed a late life productivity and recognition. We must salute the way in which George Lloyd was able to overcome the devastating effects of war trauma, and admire the fortitude, optimism, persistence and devotion that characterized George and Nancy Lloyd in that quest.

***Note:** For copyright reasons, the full text of the original text of Prof. Davidson's article is available only to subscribers to the George Lloyd Society, (click [here](#) to subscribe) or subscribers to *Music and Medicine*: <https://mmd.iamonline.com/index.php/musmed/article/view/566>