

ROBERT SIMPSON: COMPOSER
ESSAYS, INTERVIEWS, RECOLLECTIONS

Edited by Jürgen Schaarwächter

With a foreword by Angela Simpson

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Foreword

Angela Simpson

When I opened the parcel containing this 500-page marathon on Bob's music, I was overwhelmed by all the hard work that had produced this book. What comes through, over and over again, is the expertise and musical insight into Bob's creative life. I knew him as a man of humanity and integrity – he never felt he had to conform to the latest fashion and he always lived by his principles. I think he would have been very touched by all the understanding of the music and the man that this book reveals. Thank you all.

Preface

Jürgen Schaarwächter

Robert Simpson was a composer whose thinking sometimes was alarmingly uncompromising. Most straight in thinking, his sincerity did not always make him friends with those who thought they knew better. Hence it was not at all surprising when he took opposition to those who considered ‘avant-gardism’ the only solution to post-World War II compositional challenges, when he expressed himself loudly against BBC policy, when he was outspoken in his pacifism. It is well known that he was a keen amateur scientist and a passionate astronomer, and the dedications of several of his compositions display a man much more widely read than many others. His political and personal statements could be brusque but were always based on most profound knowledge. Interested in a vast variety of topics as well as musical repertoire, he had clear favourites in the music of the past, some of whose music influenced him deeply – we may but name here Haydn, Beethoven, Bruckner, Sibelius, and Nielsen; and without Robert Simpson the name of Havergal Brian might well much-less known nowadays than it is. Both as a broadcaster (particularly with his much-loved radio programme *The Innocent Ear*) and as a ‘communicator’ on music (both in public talks or as a writer of music), it was always his intent to widen the listener’s understanding of music. His programme notes for concerts were of immense scope, and are sadly not all preserved in the Robert Simpson Archive at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Also his own compositions sometimes deeply reflect his analytical approach to music by others. But of course they are far more – they are important utterings in a still far too much neglected history of late twentieth-century British music. Undoubtedly one of the core figures in the creation of both symphonies and string quartets during this era, his oeuvre was much more diversified and still offers ample opportunity for musicians, audience and scholars alike to uncover hitherto hardly known treasures.

In the present volume Robert Simpson’s music itself is scholarly assessed (complemented by an essay on his writings on music as well as several interviews and recollections of friends and companions, the largest part of the latter giving a kind of general introduction). Only thirty years ago the composer might have been somewhat

averse to being treated as a ‘historic matter’, though the research of the music of Robert Simpson has begun most carefully and non-speculatively. One of the earliest and keenest of researchers was Lionel Pike, who has, together with Graham Melville-Mason, been the instigator of the present book, which however took several years to reach its present form. The research of the music of Robert Simpson is still in its very beginnings, and it was especially Lionel Pike, a close friend of Robert Simpson’s, who has, in his capacity as Lecturer (and later Professor) of Music at the Royal Holloway University of London, not only conducted intense research in the matter himself, but also invited and encouraged several younger scholars to work on this subject, including Edward Green, Simon Phillippo, John Pickard, Martin Ratcliffe and the editor. Other authors, such as Matthew Best, Hans Keller†, Andrew Keener, Malcolm MacDonald, John McCabe, Kevin Norbury, Michael Oliver†, Jennifer Parkes, Harold Truscott†, John Underwood and Eric Wilson had been companions through some areas of life and often close personal friends of Robert Simpson’s. Finally we have some authors who had not known Robert Simpson personally, but who for one or another reason agreed to the editor’s invitation to contribute to the present volume, including Paul Conway, who did his doctoral thesis on late twentieth-century British symphonism, and Terry Hazell†, the editor’s predecessor as Chairman of the Robert Simpson Society.

Since it was clear from the beginning that we would not go for a more superficial survey of all areas of Robert Simpson’s music it was necessary to limit ourselves to only a comparatively small portion of his output – leaving a sufficient number of works to an equally deep discussion in the future. It is intended that a full bibliography on Robert Simpson be always available on the website of the Robert Simpson Society, so that any future research be facilitated.

We are particularly grateful to all authors, some of whose texts had only restricted circulation in *Tonic*, the annual publication of the Robert Simpson Society, available solely to members and hence, although frequently quoted in reference sources, not at all widely available. Several of these texts have been revised by the authors, some of them considerably, others were given extensive editing due to the restrictions *Tonic* required, particularly with respect to music examples. Also we would like to express our gratitude to the estates of Hans Keller (Milein Cosman Keller), Michael Oliver (The Michael Oliver Trust) and Harold Truscott (Guy Rickards) who have most kindly given permission to (re-)publish their respective texts. Angela Simpson has most kindly given permission to reproduce any musical or written matter included in this volume. According to German copyright law, music examples in scholarly publications are copyright-free; the (conjectural) reconstructions provided by Martin Ratcliffe remain the author’s copyright. Copyright of Robert

Simpson's printed music remains with his publishers, who are named in the Catalogue of Works. The music examples were typeset by John McCabe, Alan Marshall†, Mark Henegar, the editor and not least professional music editor Gal Hartman. Lionel Pike was the most thorough and encouraging of proof-readers imaginable, in spite of deteriorating eyesight, and David J. Jones most kindly prepared the index. But our gratitude goes particularly to the Robert Simpson Society without whose generosity the publication of this book would not have been possible.

It is hoped that this publication, long overdue and still only covering part of Robert Simpson's output, will help to a deeper understanding of the composer and his *œuvre*, and to inspire involvement in Robert Simpson's output on any conceivable level.