

TONIC

The Journal of the
ROBERT SIMPSON SOCIETY

Vol 19
Summer 2009

<i>Editorial</i>	1
Robert Simpson, <i>Orchestral Style</i> (1947)	3
Robert Simpson, <i>A Note on the Symphonies of Mahler</i> (1948)	21
Robert Simpson, <i>Debussy, Ravel, and Impressionism</i> (1946)	25
Robert Simpson, <i>Sibelius and musical movement</i> (1946)	30

EDITORIAL

On 23 February of this year I received an email from Graham Melville-Mason telling me that in his papers he had found a scrap book of Robert Simpson's, and he asked me what he should do with it. Since I had seen some of Robert Simpson's scrap books in the archive previously, I was certain that it might be worth looking at with the purpose of maybe including some material in *Tonic*. It turned out, when I received it, to be only less than half full and to contain, apart from some articles inserted but not pasted in, articles entirely from periodicals from the short span of 1946-8, all but one of which are reprinted here. The one I deliberately left out was published in *The Music Review* of February 1946, pp. 35-40 (*Bruckner and the Symphony*), simply because it was reworked by Robert Simpson much later in his own book *Bruckner and the Symphony* (London, 1960). Most of the others were published in the periodical *Disc*, in the years 1947-8 (detailed credits are given for each of them). The sole exception is *Sibelius and musical movement*, which opens the scrap book, published in 1946 in the short-lived periodical on literature, poetry, music and philosophy *Gangrel* (with four issues only, which were published in 1945-6), an article to which Simpson refers in his long article on *Orchestral Style*. The articles shed a very special light on a then young musician in his mid-twenties. In his articles, Robert Simpson clearly states his views and tends to provoke by occasionally exaggerating matters. The editor has refrained from commenting on all points where one might want to argue with the author since the arguments' freshness and vivacity are a joy to read.

Finally two more personal notes: It has been a joy to me that Angela Simpson and John McCabe have agreed to become our Patron and President respectively. Since the death of the late Sir Adrian Boult in 1983 we had no Patron, and who should be more suited to this position than Angela Simpson, who has always been most sympathetic and supportive to the Robert Simpson Society and its doings. Similarly John McCabe CBE, who has been actively involved in the Robert Simpson Society previously, has always been a strong supporter of the music of Robert Simpson and the committee is more than happy to have him as our new President.

Jürgen Schaarwächter

ROBERT SIMPSON
ORCHESTRAL STYLE

I: From Bach and Handel to Beethoven.

Before the main theme, two introductory definitions. They are of terms that must pervade this discussion.

(a) *Counterpoint* (adj: contrapuntal). In vital counterpoint each separate part retains its identity as a firm melodic strand, contrasting yet coalescing with its fellows.

(b) *Harmony*. The harmonic is the chordal or vertical view of music. It was originally the by-product of counterpoint, but later became independent. Counterpoint produces harmony, but is not present in pure harmonic writing, which is based upon chords, not combined melodies.

The musical history of the seventeenth century tells a fascinating tale of the slow emergence of harmony from pure counterpoint. At the beginning of the century, Monteverdi's use of chords to support a sole voice caused comment as acrid as that aroused by the "atonalists" in our own day. Gradually the struggle grew, while composers like Buxtehude, Corelli, Purcell, Pachelbel, Vivaldi or Veracini tried, perhaps unconsciously, to blend the two elements. Of these Purcell was the most gifted, and ten more years might have seen him throw off the shackles of the small dance-forms which prevented him from achieving designs large enough to digest together purely harmonic and purely contrapuntal ideas. Bach, Handel, and Domenico Scarlatti jointly solved the problem. Scarlatti wrote no important orchestral music, but it is notable that by a miracle his solution is framed in the tiny bejewelled shapes of his harpsichord sonatas, in exquisite nutshells. Bach and Handel showed that the creation of new and vaster architecture was the only method with unlimited possibilities for the future.

In the thick of all these exciting developments was the adolescent, part-formed figure of the orchestra. Still earning its pennies to support its domineering parents, the voices, it was quickly assuming shape and character. Its strings, particularly, were often used alone. Composers' ways of handling the orchestra were, of course, influenced by the vocal technique that had held sway for so long. Bach's method, in which he regards the instruments as voices of remarkable agility and range, shows him to be at once the culmination and the aftermath of his period. The "Brandenburg" *Concerti* are clearly based upon contrapuntal choral technique, making it possible for Bach to arrange the third movement of No. 1 as a chorus in one of the cantatas.¹ He finds himself free, in the

¹ The first movement can also be found as the Sinfonia of the cantata BWV 52, *Falsche Welt, dir trau ich nicht*. The third movement was used as the opening chorus of cantata BWV 207. [Ed.]

Concerti, to fling his orchestral parts about with abandon while he has the firm harmonic background of the *continuo*, the device by which a harpsichord plays supporting harmonies (indicated by a code of figures placed under a bass).

The constitution of the orchestra varied according to circumstances. Handel had in England massed oboes. Our modern ears, used to the silken tones of Leon Goossens, can hardly conceive such a sound as these must have made, especially since the oboe in those days was a harsh instrument and was said to “bray”. Trumpets and horns, without valves, acquired a fantastic skill that few modern players can rival. The variability of the orchestra gave another good reason for the use of the *continuo* which ensured that the harmony should be complete, whatever other parts might be missing.

Comparison of the orchestral works of Handel and Bach shows that the latter’s fastidiousness would not permit him to abandon a contrapuntal scheme once it was begun, while the former’s exuberant dramatic sense drove him to energetic alternation of contrapuntal and harmonic textures. If Bach starts with a fugue, as in the finale of the “Brandenburg” *Concerto* No. 2, he maintains the style throughout the movement. One can never tell when a fugal opening by Handel will be swept aside by massive harmonies and rhythms. Bach’s unpredictability is less obvious but perhaps more potent for those able and willing to penetrate the surface.

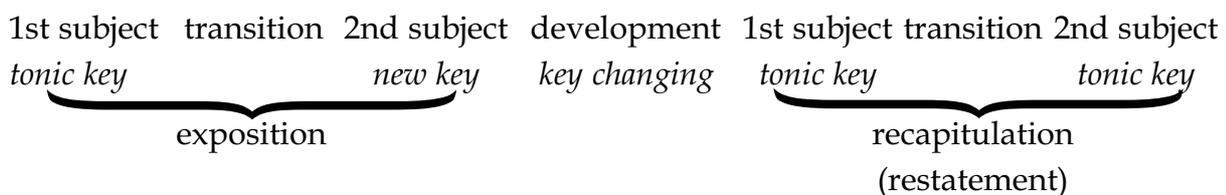
At this time the chief orchestral forms were, in order of importance, the *Solo Concerto*, the *Concerto grosso*, and the *Suite*. All sprang from the theatre. The last-named was merely an elaboration of a type of operatic overture, a solid first movement (slow-quick-slow),² followed by a series of dances. Such extended overtures to operas served the purpose of silencing the audience, whose chatter would eventually peter out as the music slowly bored into its thick skulls. Bach’s four concert *Suites* are the finest of their kind. Much more interesting is the *Concerto* style. The origin of the name is in “certare”, “to strive”, and the form derives from a type of vocal *aria*. Orchestra and soloist (or group of soloists, as in the *Concerto grosso*) are set in equal contest, the former holding the brilliant inventiveness of the latter in check by periodic interjection of its firm opening statement (*ritornello*). The competitive spirit in the first movement gives way to affectionate agreement in the central slow piece, while the finale usually sees that opportunities and honours are fitly and courteously shared.

While these essentially vocal arts were being perfected by Handel and Bach, new thoughts were growing elsewhere. So far it may be clear that Bach is the culmination of his epoch, but how can he be called its aftermath? It has been noted that Handel inclined to the neglect of contrapuntal for harmonic writing in his *Concerti*. The passages in which he drops his fugal manner will be found thoroughly instrumental in nature, unthinkable on voices, however skilled. In this Handel looks forward more than Bach, though never so much as the group of younger men who worked during and after the last dozen or so years of Bach’s and Handel’s lives.

² Simpson refers to the so-called French Overture which consists of a slow introduction, followed by a lively movement in fugato style, at the end shortly returning to the initial slow tempo by way of climax. [Ed.]

Bach was aware of this school, for his sons, C. P. E. and J. C. Bach belonged to it. They thought the old man outmoded, and with Sammartini, Gluck, Stamitz, and others, composed in a new manner, also theatrical in origin. Handel knew, too, and expressed fierce contempt for the noble Gluck, who, he said, knew no more counterpoint than his cook. The harmonic style had come. Henceforth the backbone of music was a fresh method of handling tonality. A change of key (tonality) was now a dramatic, forcible event, and the surface temperature of music rose sharply as composers exploited the effects of contrasted themes in contrasted keys, of dynamic *crescendi*, and of a new style of orchestration in which the brass became reduced to a substitute for the *continuo*. Haydn joined the upheaval and while most of his contemporaries had begun to stagnate in what was at last a new complacency, made the *Sonata* style serve his own gloriously eccentric muse. "Sonata" means "sounded on instruments" (as opposed to "Cantata" which refers to a *sung* piece). Its general use in the eighteenth century is symbolic of the uprush of instrumental music. Smug academicians wrote rules for what they fondly called "sonata form". Its plan may be indicated as follows.

Example No. 1.



This scheme, like all generalizations, is misleading. One rarely finds Haydn conforming to it, except in his early works. It is a common mistake to say that Haydn gradually brought order and regularity into what was experimental and freakish. He started by adopting orthodox methods, and his resource, humour and originality increased with his years. His amiability should not cause his more serious depths to be missed. In his middle period he wrote some very dark symphonies, strangely burning with startling prophecies of Beethoven. These are Nos. 26 in D minor, 44 in E minor, 45 in F# minor, 49 in F minor, and 52 in C minor. The only contemporary work comparable to these is Gluck's sublime overture to *Iphigenia in Aulis*.

The eighteenth century finds its deepest, most pathetic expression in the art of Mozart, the cry of one rebellious at his domestic serfdom as a musical chef, yet unable to find means of putting down the tyranny. With his operas, his most important contribution to the growth of music is his series of *Pianoforte Concerti*. Some critics of wonderful stupidity persist (in spite of Tovey's heroic efforts) in misunderstanding these works. Here Mozart searches the depths of the relationship between soloist and orchestra.³ The *ritornello*, that most distinctive part of the older form, is absorbed in a very plastic kind of *sonata* structure, in which the crucial section is the recapitulation, where Mozart organizes the whole design by combining the essences of the exposition and its predecessor the opening orchestral *ritornello*.

³ Cf. D. F. Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis*, Vol. III: *Concertos*, Oxford 1936, pp. 27-62. [Ed.]

Example No. 2.

ritornello (entry of solo) development  cadenza
exposition recapitulation

This restatement is the climax. In it there is always a moment when a free *cadenza* by the soloist is needed to restore the balance which the orchestra has been able to tilt in its own favour. Pianists usually snatch the chance to splash Mozart's beautiful design with a vast excrescence, deluding themselves and their audiences that they are supplying the movement with an imposing *coda* (i.e., "tailpiece"). This happens even in the cases of recordings by such fine musicians as Fischer and Schnabel, who evidently do not understand that in Mozart's case the *cadenza* is but a small component of a delicately poised restatement, and that anything like a *coda* must needs be a gross impurity. The remaining movements of a Mozart *Concerto* serve the same ends as those in the earlier type.

When Haydn was at his highest power, he met Mozart, who at twenty-eight had already written some of his greatest works. They became friends, and the interaction of their influences is an interesting study. The later symphonies of Haydn, created after Mozart's death, show that while he kept to his own capricious manner, he understood deeply the keen and graceful draughtsmanship of his friend. His own art gave Mozart's in return a new impulse, a richer sparkle that served only to enliven its undercurrent of deep melancholy. Both masters had a superb gift of orchestration. Mozart gave the clarinet its place, while the only instruments which suffered temporary eclipse were the horns and trumpets (used for harmonic backgrounds and for pointing climaxes) and the violas (often made to fill in the middle of the harmony with dull repeated notes).

This orchestra fell into the sinewy hands of Beethoven. From the first he used it boldly, and later with colossal force, adding to it the sonorous trombones, the shrill piccolo and profound contrafagotto, and extra horns and drums [i.e. timpani]. The great power of Beethoven's music arises from his rare blend of a will to daring experiment with an altogether unique sense of discipline. Thus his early works combine a Haydnish caprice with a Mozartian regularity of shape. Later, as his music snapped its ties with the eighteenth century, the audacity and strictness increased alike.

As Beethoven consciously broke with tradition, so he consciously philosophized in his music. His art was not to please humanity but to express it. He is the originator of the great orchestral "tone-poem", fathered by his great overtures *Coriolan*, *Leonora* (Nos. 2 and 3), and *Egmont*. The influence of specific moods (not programmes) shows itself in the *Eroica* and *Pastoral* symphonies, and even in his untitled works it is obvious that moods had never before been crystallized with such dramatic clarity. It is, however, futile to guess at poetic or other thoughts beyond the scope of words. It is more profitable to consider the nature of Beethoven's symphonic style in the light of previous knowledge.

In the opening movements of Haydn's symphonies there is a tendency to regard the recapitulation as a peroration in which the music seems to be rushing to its close, delayed only by a constant flow of surprising afterthoughts. Mozart's restatement is formal and

symmetrical and he normally expands its end into a flourish of trumpet and drum, though in his last symphony he adds quite a large coda to the finale. Beethoven's regular structures need a full restatement, but his matter is so weighty that there must be a coda of equal importance. In the *Eroica* symphony the coda of the first movement occupies nearly a quarter of the whole. Beethoven's use of this device has led to many false assumptions; one, for instance, that the whole of the second half of the finale to the eighth Symphony is coda. It is not, because that wonderful movement is alone in possessing two developments and two recapitulations, the second pair being always unnoticed and included in a hugely disproportionate coda. In a less obvious way, the movement is as unusual as that amazing mixture of variations and fugal style which crowns the *Eroica*.

Example No. 3.

exposition		restatement	restatement
	development	development	coda

Besides the new breadth and depth of his slow movements, there is another innovation. Haydn's quick, humorous minuet was elongated and accelerated into the now familiar *Scherzo*. First conceived, as its name suggests, in the form of a joke, its lightning thrust in the Third, Fifth, Seventh and Ninth symphonies becomes terrifying in its sheer energy.

Beethoven may well have seemed half-mad to his fellows. They thought they saw proof in the choral finale to the Ninth Symphony. It is delightful to know that even to this day that titanic creation is disliked by those critics who are frightened by it into impotent and childish bluster. A little careful study discloses the fact that the movement is subject to the same rigorous discipline as is all Beethoven's music, and is the logical outcome of the rest of the mighty work. The Ninth Symphony remained for a century the dominating influence in all spheres of orchestral concert music.

II: The Nineteenth Century

Almost all orchestral music of the nineteenth century vibrates from the shock of Beethoven. To this day, no European composer escapes the touch of that influence. Even those who expressly avoid it must needs be self-conscious to a degree that robs their music of its naturalness. Many modern Frenchmen, for instance, have degraded the human intellect to mere vacancy by their attempts to repudiate what they imagine to be "romanticism". That word, in fact, had better be killed. It is of no use to say "the rot started with Beethoven". That betrays a sense of personal impotence and a knowledge that comparisons are odious.

It is a common fallacy that in the work of even the greatest nineteenth-century composers, emotional utterance is more important than musical form. The "classic symmetry" of Haydn and Mozart is held against the "diffuseness" of Schubert, Dvořák, Bruckner, or Mahler, even when the finest works of the latter men are under consideration. A view that so misinterprets Mozart and Haydn will certainly be untrustworthy in

other matters. It demands, perhaps unwittingly, that a symphony shall conform to one pattern, regardless of the nature of its material. The oddest fact of all is that Beethoven, that rebel, is luckier. Having started the “rot” he is credited with tidily making the best of both worlds. He was, of course, concerned with making the best of himself, and it is unfair to one’s own intelligence to assume that any composer is trying to fit himself into some historical scheme. Schubert, who followed Beethoven, has suffered much from this silliness. He is complacently treated as a pathetic young genius who lacked time and money to study sufficiently, so that he might learn to wield his admittedly wonderful ideas in the terse and economical manner of Beethoven, by whom, if many sincere critics are to be believed, the great C major Symphony might have been faultily executed. Unfortunately, there is no space here to illustrate how Schubert explores aspects of sonata style that even his mighty elder did not touch; one of his chief innovations is, as Harold Truscott has shown, a new and subtle elaboration of the Transition and its dramatic possibilities in the recapitulation.⁴ This is mistaken by so fine a musician as Tovey for ill-controlled and wrongly-placed development.⁵

In so condensed a sketch as this, it is impossible to consider more than a few of the important orchestral composers with whom this period is densely crowded. The reader will not always agree with the choice, but it is hoped that no cardinal issue will be lost. One year older than Schubert was another first-rank symphonist, of less stature but still of high quality. Franz Berwald (1796–1868) was a Swede who spent much time in Germany, and whose symphonies are practically unknown here. Besides having remarkable architecture, these works teem with prophecies of the future. In them can be found harmonies that suggest Sibelius or Debussy, orchestration hinting at Mahler and Nielsen. His Third Symphony [in C major, “Sinfonie singulière”] is a fresh, virile masterpiece whose strength is clothed in polished grace. It is urgent that his best works be played in England if there is to be a clear view of musical history. And their value is far more than merely historical.

Schumann is another composer whose orchestral music has received less than its due. His sad helplessness as conductor caused him to score in a way calculated to prevent mishaps by rarely allowing solo instruments to stand out. The general effect can thus be muddy and thick if the performance is not clear and energetic; otherwise the nobility and forthrightness of the music is so marked that it cannot fail to impress. No composer has been more maltreated by that meaningless label “romantic”. Schumann is essentially manly; his large works are conspicuous for their power of sustaining vital action. The Second and Third symphonies in particular reveal great directional force and a keen sense of movement that is never impaired by the squareness of the rhythms. He was also one of the most perfect contrapuntists of his time, as is well shown in the fourth movement of the Third (*Rhenish*) Symphony, a very grand impression of Cologne Cathedral.

⁴ It is not at all obvious which text by Truscott, then possibly quite well-known, Robert Simpson refers to. [Ed.]

⁵ Cf. D. F. Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis*, Vol. I: *Symphonies*, Oxford 1935, pp. 205–211. [Ed.]

Mention of Schumann invokes a point of great moment. Before Beethoven the finale-problem did not exist. Haydn and Mozart did not conceive the finale as a climax, for the emotional content of their works is spread evenly throughout. In such symphonies as Beethoven's Fifth and Ninth, the finale relieves an emotional crisis, and nearly all subsequent symphonists found themselves faced with the embarrassment of having absorbed Beethoven's tendency without his tremendous ability to express it. Sometimes the problem is solved excellently, more often the result is dismal. Schumann usually secures a happy effect by regarding his finale as an enormous coda. That of the Second Symphony is hardly comprehensible as anything else with its continual peroration around the tonic, and if this movement is played with a relentless rhythm and a very fast tempo, it is electrifying. Those who approach Beethoven most nearly in this matter are Schubert and Brahms. Schubert's failures are fewer than is generally supposed. Berlioz, too, although not on the same level, succeeded brilliantly because, as Tovey points out, he was a "born perorator".⁶ Hardly another master has written so many vivid culminations, decked with such exuberant orchestration. The title of his Fantastic Symphony seems the more appropriate if one knows that it was composed in the same year as Schubert's C major Symphony. The originality of Berlioz ensures that even his least successful works shall be interesting.

Mendelssohn's method does not tackle this problem, for he is spiritually allied to the previous century. Except in a few instances, the influence of Beethoven is not good for him. His is no heroic disposition, and his finales are simple quick movements that complete his symphonies in the same way as those of the eighteenth-century composers. His greatest contribution to the development of orchestral style are his brilliant Scherzi, which have much in common with those of Berwald in that the woodwind is used with a new virtuosity and delicacy almost rivalling that of the strings.

With Schubert, the greatest of the symphonists who can be regarded as direct followers of Beethoven was Brahms. He was not, like Berlioz and Wagner, intent on increasing the variety and weight of the orchestra, but was content with the same combination used by Beethoven (with the addition of a single bass tuba in the Second Symphony) carrying his conservatism so far as to restrict himself mainly to the "open" notes of the brass in spite of their now having valves that enabled them to play complete chromatic scales. The music itself is far from conservative. In all of his symphonies there are bold strokes, one of the most magnificent being the conflict of E major and C major in the slow movement of the Fourth Symphony. And the enigmatic quality of the Third remains intriguing to this day. Brahms's symphonies are often badly played, causing him to be blamed for turgid scoring. Beecham's recent superb performance of No. 3 [on 3 April 1947] should have done much to clear the air; his lively tempo for the first movement was a relief, and he did not commit the usual sin of noisily changing to a lower gear for the second subject of the finale. Close to Brahms must be mentioned the lovable and often impressive

⁶ The editor has been unable to locate this quotation from Tovey.

Dvořák, whose orchestral technique moved Prout to call him the greatest living master of the orchestra, and whose D minor Symphony [Op. 70] shows his full powers.

The biggest crisis of the nineteenth century came with Wagner. The chief problem of opera resided in the fact that music moved naturally much faster than stage action. Beethoven in the *Coriolan* Overture suggests in ten minutes the complete impact of a drama that would take some hours to enact on the stage. In all opera prior to Wagner, except in parts of Berlioz, the music is continually completing short designs of its own while the plot slowly unfolds upon the stage. Wagner was the first man to obtain absolute success in creating music slow enough to pace stage action, so that his musical forms are fully as gigantic as his stage dramas. This, with his enlargement of the orchestra and his extraordinary harmonic imagination made him the founder of a new school. Many others sought to apply his technique to independent orchestral works. The efforts of Liszt to achieve this great slowness in his "Symphonic Poems" resulted, as Tovey puts it, in "introductions to introductions".⁷ *Les Préludes* is an ironically apt title.

The first master to gain control of this immensely difficult style was Anton Bruckner. The task was hard because he had to make his music grow with vast gradualness but without the prop of a stage plot. The power with which he forged his own individual expression while doing this places him among the giants of music, and only long study of his symphonies reveals the profound intellectual strength that enabled him to fulfil himself. His orchestration is massive and involves the use of strings, woodwind, and brass as separate choirs, sometimes blended in climaxes of astonishing grandeur. Although his orchestra is similar to Wagner's, his style is utterly different and he never uses percussion instruments other than the timpani (the cymbal clash in the slow movement of the Seventh Symphony is not Bruckner's but the deposit of some meddler⁸). He found that he needed to create new symphonic forms, unrelated to sonata form and varying considerably with the subject matter of each symphony, of which there are nine.

Let it be known that there is no such composer as *Brucknermahler*. Gustav Mahler was in some sense a follower of Bruckner, but his music is of another cast. His orchestration is almost incredible in the skill and originality of its aptness. Every instrument is a free individual, the most colossal orchestras becoming simply expanded chamber-music groups. Mahler never adds to his scores to make more noise, but wishes to increase the subtlety and sensitiveness of his tone-colouring. He occasionally strains his forms to danger point, but his last works are miracles of pure style, belonging rightly to the twentieth century. Accordingly he will be mentioned again in the next chapter. Also in the wake of the Wagnerian school, and, like Mahler, athwart the two centuries, are the Englishman Elgar and the German Strauss, both of whom will be considered later.

It remains to note two more nineteenth-century trends. Liszt's "Symphonic Poem" became a craze, from which grew a few masterpieces like *Romeo and Juliet* (Tchaikovsky), *From Bohemia's Woods and Fields* (Smetana), *The Noonday Witch* (Dvořák), or *Thamar* (Bala-

⁷ The editor has been unable to locate this quotation from Tovey.

⁸ The situation is far more complicated than here described by Simpson. [Ed.]

kirev), but most composers drowned music in pictorialism. From Liszt also arose the tendency to write symphonies in so-called “cyclic” form, in which a few themes or even a single phrase are supposed to “unify” three or four movements. Excellent composers such as Tchaikovsky and Franck have not hesitated to devastate fine symphonies by this means, doggedly hammering out some blatant “motto theme” in the middle of some unprovocative slow movement or grabbing a beautiful, fragile phrase by the scruff of its neck and howling it forth on the brass in the finale. Such lapses are comic in ill-bred minor composers but regrettable in men of genius.

This period also saw the birth of conscious nationalism in music. Led by that original man Glinka, the Russians soon made a clear path for themselves. The use of national folk songs and the invention of similar tunes was coupled with the development of a scintillating style of instrumentation and harmonization. For the most part their works were constructed in a delightfully ramshackle way, with colour predominant. Balakirev, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Cui, Moussorgsky, Glazounov, Liadov and others belonged in different measures to this sect. In Bohemia Smetana and Dvořák and in Germany, Weber, Marschner, Schumann, Raff, Kiel, and a host of composers of varying calibre showed similar native characteristics. Clearly defined French and English cults did not appear until after 1900. Austria was represented less consciously by Schubert, Bruckner and Mahler.

There is no space left to deal with the great number of notable composers of the period, whose works are sadly neglected. English concerts would be enlivened by the names of Berwald, Bruckner, Mahler, Bruch, Joachim, Kiel, Marschner, Lortzing, Raff, and more which no doubt occur to the reader. This hurried sketch must seem perfunctory, although it is perhaps fortunate that lack of space prevents the inclusion of nineteenth century English symphonists.⁹ The next section will show how English music has rescued itself from the bog, and will also discuss general orchestral trends of the present time.

III: The Older Moderns

Brahms called Mahler “the King of Madmen”. When, in 1888, the latter’s First Symphony was composed, Brahms had finished all his major orchestral works, Bruckner his Eighth Symphony and Dvořák his great D minor one. Mahler had a strange new idea of orchestral sonority. All previous methods of scoring employed the invariable formula of Top, Middle and Bass, the Middle providing a firm filling to the sound. Through Mahler’s series of nine symphonies, the solidity of the Middle is gradually reduced, until the chief characteristic is a remarkable transparent luminosity. The style becomes thoroughly contrapuntal. Even Bach, with his *continuo*, does not dispense with the Middle. No wonder that Mahler’s orchestration sounded queer and almost diabolical at times. Five years

⁹ Simpson was, due to lack of substantial musicological research until the 1940s, anyway incapable of writing adequately on 19th century British symphonism; such research was carried out only since the 1990s by the editor. [Ed.]

older than Sibelius, he shows himself in his Fourth Symphony to be more than five years ahead of the Finn, whose comparatively cautious First was written at the same time. Each successive Mahler symphony is freer and more contrapuntal in manner until in the wonderful Sixth Symphony (the first really great and perfect one – 1904), the linear treatment of each instrument results in utterly new harmony. This treatment of the orchestra has become typical of this century, and Mahler must be regarded as the first master of the new order. It is a mistake to dub him the last decadent remnant of “romanticism”. The most fruitful composers are those who are independent of their contemporaries but not of tradition. Nothing could be truer of Mahler, whose greater awareness of tradition enabled him to dare more than his fellows without losing his balance.

Also five years younger than Mahler was Carl Nielsen, the Dane. His work is unknown in England, but in Scandinavia he is rightly regarded as at least the equal of Sibelius. He died in 1931, at the height of his powers. At first composing in the older way, owing much to Brahms, he gradually found his true style. Hearing his instrumentation, it is hard to imagine that he could have been ignorant of Mahler’s work, for there is clearly the same disregard for convention and a similar type of counterpoint. His invention, however, is completely different. His six symphonies are among the best attainments of our time. Some have names, No. 2, for instance, being called *The Four Temperaments*, No. 3, *Espansiva*, No. 4, *The Inextinguishable*, and No. 6, *A Simple Symphony*. The naïveté suggested by these titles is not in the music, and that of the last symphony applies only to the first theme. Symphony No. 3, in a recording by the Copenhagen Radio Orchestra, was recently broadcast on the B.B.C. Third Programme. The first movement of this is one of the deepest and broadest structures in all modern music, and the terrific sweep of its mighty opening paragraph will come as a surprise to those who think Sibelius the only front-rank Scandinavian master. In the slow movement of this *Espansiva* symphony, voices are introduced as instruments with grand effect, and the finale is based on a massive tune with a daringly simple shape. The last climax is most stirring. Mention should also be made of the lovely Violin Concerto, of which Henry Holst has lately broadcast a fine performance.

Where Mahler and Nielsen often dispense with the Middle, Strauss, Elgar, Sibelius, Reger, Pfitzner and Tovey never do this. In this respect, these composers are less modern than the former pair. Strauss is a Wagnerite, turning his tremendous orchestral skill to illustrative purpose. He is the most brilliant exponent of the *Symphonic Poem*. His humorous remark that he could, if necessary, imitate a spoon in music shows his fundamentally materialistic attitude. The finest of his *Symphonic Poems* are *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*, *Don Juan*, and *Don Quixote*, each of which deals with a central and somewhat fantastic personality, expressed with great sharpness. Strauss’s essays into philosophy in *Also sprach Zarathustra* and into autobiography in *Ein Heldenleben* reach no more than high-flown language, which in the latter case performs several power-dives. Of late his music, exemplified by the very beautiful *Metamorphosen* for strings, has deepened considerably. The complexity of this work is no longer merely decorative, but is the outcome

of profound contemplation. Elgar, in his style of orchestration and construction, is a Wagnerian Teuton, his Englishness being occasionally evident in sudden withdrawals into reserve. Sometimes, determined to be aggressively nationalistic, he displays the lack of taste typical of his environment, but never is his vitality in question. In *Falstaff* he created one of the profoundest human studies in any art. This, with his Violoncello Concerto, is his most perfect orchestral work. The Violin Concerto, while possessing a sublime slow movement, has unfortunately an ill-balanced finale.

Sibelius is one of the most original of all composers. He is the antithesis of Mahler, whose expansive contrapuntal style contrasts with the younger man's concise harmonic manner. Sibelius's highest achievement lies in the field of musical movement; he has forged a blend of two opposing elements, the athletic energy of the classical sonata and the immense slowness of Wagner and Bruckner. His symphonies are the successive stages in which this power is developed and perhaps a quotation from an earlier essay will help to make this point clear.

"Sibelius's now wonderfully plastic technique has its finest triumph in the Seventh Symphony. In one continuous movement, the work combines all possible elements of pace. In some twenty minutes it contrives to convey an impression of immensity hitherto beyond the scope of all but the bulkiest works. Wagner or Bruckner wrote no slower music than the opening few minutes of this symphony, and Beethoven nothing more swift than the torrential onrush which so mysteriously appears and disappears at intervals. Sibelius's art of transition is here so consummate that no first hearing reveals the exact moment when a huge slowness becomes a tremendous fount of energy, or when fierce impetuosity is swallowed instantly in a vision of vast, superhuman spaces."¹⁰

Reger and Pfitzner represent the older generation of modern Germans with Strauss, from whom they both differ in that their outlook is more solidly classical. Reger is a contrapuntist who, unlike Mahler, scores with a very full Middle.¹¹ His death in 1916 was a tragedy, for he was astonishingly rich in natural genius. Of his orchestral works, the noblest is undoubtedly the *Symphonic Prologue to a Tragedy*, Op. 108. His masterly orchestral sets of variations with fugues on themes by Hiller and Mozart are also among the most important of their kind. Pfitzner and Franz Schmidt are both masters of the orchestra, the former mainly in connection with opera and the latter in four symphonies, the last of which is a remarkable work. Starting with a quiet trumpet theme, it moves through many complex and beautiful developments before dissolving itself once more into the original trumpet solo.

The English composers Tovey and Havergal Brian are sadly neglected. Tovey, the great scholar, was also the author of music whose conservatism is the result of an almost superhuman discipline by which tremendous designs are executed with unerring precision. The prelude to his opera *The Bride of Dionysus* is one of the greatest passacaglias by

¹⁰ Sibelius and Musical Movement, *Gangrel*, 1946.

¹¹ This does not refer to Reger's personal appearance.

any Englishman (or Scot), and his extended Violoncello Concerto may well be recognized one day as the most important of all concerti for that instrument. It is high time, too, that his Symphony in D major were published.¹² Of Brian it is impossible to speak, since his music is never seen or heard, but the finest judges who have known it have said that his vast symphonies are of the highest significance.¹³ While at the turn of the century Parry, Stanford and Elgar were rousing English music from its stupor, Vaughan Williams and Holst were maturing. Their interest in folk music was all they had in common. Holst's work is cold and brilliant, absorbing non-European influences as well as homely English elements. His natural frigidity is a real asset in *Egdon Heath*, a spine-chilling piece beside which Sibelius's *Tapiola* seems almost tropical in its warmth. Vaughan Williams made a deep impression in 1910 with his *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, for strings. The wonderful antiphonal effects and the depth and power of the modal harmony were then startlingly fresh. The *Sea Symphony* (1910) is not so happy as a whole, the finale lacking cohesion, but it is a work of some stature, sometimes mistakenly mentioned as the first entirely choral symphony. In this it was three years later than Mahler's Eighth. Vaughan Williams' first three symphonies are all inspired by external ideas. No. 2, *A London Symphony*, is excellent but is weakened in places by the influence of Ravel, when the action is hampered by the composer's undue interest in mere texture. It may be observed that in this symphony a stiff country breeze disperses the usual London fogs.

The Third Symphony, the *Pastoral*, quietly settles his final mastery of large form. Mysterious and full of hidden power, it often fails to impress on first hearing, but contemplative though it is, a magnificent still tension holds it together. Vaughan Williams's gentleness is deceptive, and the Fourth Symphony in F minor came as a shock in 1935. No fiercer piece of music has yet been written. Such concentration as this stamps him as one of the greatest of modern symphonists. The orchestra is handled with a contrapuntal freedom that recalls Mahler, but while Mahler expands, Vaughan Williams contracts in a way that even Sibelius does not surpass. The climax comes with the terrible *Epilogo fugato*, livid with volcanic fury. In 1943 came the beautiful Fifth Symphony, serenely reminiscent of Bunyan, not "easy-going," but severely sure of its own tranquillity. As he ages, Vaughan Williams, like Bernard Shaw, gains energy with wisdom, and the Sixth Symphony, which has yet to be played, is impatiently awaited everywhere the news has penetrated.

Younger, but still of the senior generation, is Arnold Bax. At first influenced by Strauss, he acquired a marvellous orchestral technique that serves any purpose he follows. He combines a rare melodic gift with the ability to erect very strong and unconventional structures, often misunderstood by critics who persist in relating them directly to sonata form. Such a view misses, for example, the point of the first movement of the Third Symphony by imagining its opening *Lento moderato* to be an introduction. If that

¹² Tovey's Symphony was, together with the *Bride of Dionysus* Prelude, released on CD only in 2006 by Toccata Classics. [Ed.]

¹³ Simpson was to become most prolific as a BBC producer to promote Havergal Brian's music. [Ed.]

passage is appreciated as a real beginning, the rest of the design falls accurately into place. The return of the slow tempo (Fig. 29 in the score) with a new theme on muted strings, instead of appearing to be a diffuse “second subject” (as it is often construed), is then clearly a perfect foil to the following entry of the first material, cloaked in amazingly original orchestration (Fig. 39). The way in which this recapitulatory section merges cleanly into a finely organised coda is evidence of deep thinking and high powers of composition. The Fifth Symphony is even superior and its end as trenchant and deeply founded as could be desired.¹⁴

Two other groups may be noted in this part of the sketch. First there are those composers who, whatever their conscious aims, are in reality fascinated by new orchestral textures. In this list come such diverse names as Debussy, Ravel, Delius, Stravinsky, Bartók, Kodaly and Respighi. Varying in intellect and stature, all these have vivid tonal imaginations. The Frenchmen, Debussy first, found an untried kind of illustrative music, concerned chiefly with light effects and strikingly capable of refined sensuous expression. Delius, the dreamer, has a languid melodic style from which he sometimes awakens to startling action. His harmony is the result of an unbiassed, almost dangerously innocent attitude to the subject, and his genius creates magical sounds where a lesser musician would have produced a swamp. Delius does not always escape this, but his best moments are truly valuable. Stravinsky and his followers, extracting novel barbaric cries from the orchestra, made an impression of inventiveness that has somewhat lessened. Stravinsky has himself ably demonstrated three times that it is impossible to construct full symphonies from the coughing rhythms of *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Of the two Hungarians, Bartók was the more ardent experimentalist. Both rarely succeed in controlling big forms, for they frequently allow passing colour to distract them. Exceptions from this criticism are Bartók’s *Concerto for Orchestra* and Kodály’s *Variations [on a Hungarian Folk Song]*. Kodaly is less intellectual than Bartók but more natural. Folk music influences all their music. Respighi’s invention is less distinguished than his scoring, which gives distinction to his least tasteful work by its brilliance and variety.

Lastly, must be mentioned the “Atonal” school, which, headed by Schoenberg and his sensitive disciple Alban Berg, seeks to banish tonality (key) from its compositions. Most members of this group are unaware that what has been pushed out of the front door has come in at the back. [...] ¹⁵

¹⁴ Later Simpson was to change his opinion of the music of Arnold Bax substantially. [Ed.]

¹⁵ The following paragraph, which has been deleted here, was intended solely to prepare the final instalment of Simpson’s articles. [Ed.]

IV: The Concerto after Beethoven

This part of the essay is parenthetical. So far it has been possible to mention *Concerti* of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries only in passing. A short retrospective interlude is needed.

With Beethoven the *Concerto* reached its utmost dimensions. In the first chapter (Ex. 2) the following diagram gives the rough scheme of the concerto first movement as Mozart left it: –

Example 4.



A higher degree of organization is impossible, and Beethoven works on a larger and simpler plan. At first, as Tovey demonstrated,¹⁶ he confused concerto with symphony and his first two Pianoforte Concerti show little grasp of the real problem. In Mozart the *ritornello* is the proposition on which the whole is based, while the recapitulation is the crux of the argument, combining elements of both *ritornello* and exposition. No coda, or tailpiece, is needed, for the movement has already produced its own intellectual dénouement. A coda would be as absurd as a tail attached to a snake. Beethoven's recapitulation is regular, usually ignoring the *ritornello*, which is left over to be dealt with by a massive coda. The clearest mature example of this can be seen in the first movement of the Fifth Pianoforte Concerto [in E flat, Op. 73]: –

Example 5.



Thence Brahms launched his great Concerti. Both Beethoven and he explored new sonorities between soloist and orchestra. Tovey describes how Beethoven “treated the pianoforte much more constantly in full harmony, and this inspired him with the possibility of accompanying it by very incomplete harmony in the orchestra and so producing numberless wonderful effects that can be heard under no other conditions”.¹⁷ The point to remember about the masterful chain of concerti by Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms is that they all employ, with full subtlety, the orchestral *ritornello*, realizing its great architectural power when handled perfectly.

¹⁶ Cf. D. F. Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis*, Vol. III: *Concertos*, Oxford 1936, pp. 64–75. [Ed.]

¹⁷ The editor has been unable to locate this quotation from Tovey.

While Brahms followed Beethoven, he had before him a fashion started by Mendelssohn, who, evidently not appreciating the purpose of the *ritornello*, abandoned it as superfluous. His famous Violin Concerto, which was imitated by hundreds of lesser composers, opens with a simple sonata movement, led by the soloist. Virtuosi, often unable to orchestrate effectively, chose this method of writing works for themselves to play, creating unfortunate things that can rightly be called degenerate mutants. Since Mendelssohn's time, concerto composers have fallen into groups: those who understand and use the *ritornello* successfully (Schumann in the Violin Concerto, Brahms, Joachim, Dvořák, Elgar): those who avoid it for reasons best known to themselves (Schumann in the Pianoforte Concerto, Bruch, Tchaikovsky, Saint-Saëns, Sibelius, Delius, Prokofiev, Walton, etc): those whose forms are quite new or improvisatory (Delius in the Violin Concerto, Schoenberg, Berg, etc.). Saint-Saëns began an even simpler type of *concerto* consisting of a slow movement, a scherzo, and a moderately paced finale (sometimes not moderate, but fast). This plan was adopted by Prokofiev in his First Violin Concerto and by Walton in the works for viola and for violin. The Walton Viola Concerto affords an astonishing parallel with the Prokofiev Violin Concerto No. 1.

V: The Younger Moderns

Here there will be much generalising, since most of the younger modern composers are too near at hand to be observed comprehensively. General tendencies are more evident than the relative merits of individuals. The reaction against the nineteenth-century spirit of "romanticism" took its most violent forms in the "Twaddling Twenties", when many writers, particularly of orchestral works, strove to outdo each other in the manufacture of cacophony. Men in America and Italy, Russia and France, became obsessed with the notion of expressing "The spirit of the age". This spirit was conceived in terms of noises, the noises of machinery, war, offices, streets. The louder, the more nerve-racking and provocative the din the more seriously was it taken by certain groups. In various countries there were quite serious concerts of "expressive noise" in which the orchestra consisted of such noble and pathetic instruments as the pneumatic drill, the electric bell, the vacuum cleaner, the typewriter, the siren, the rifle, the motor horn (electric and bulb varieties), the circular saw, the anvil, and presumably in chamber music, the aeroplane engine. In some circles it is now regretted that these concerts went out of fashion before the atom bomb. The audience's expressions of opinion, couched in terms commensurate with the number of decibels emitted by the "orchestra", often required severe though undoubtedly sympathetic police restraint. A rather more ambitious master wrote a symphony for the factory sirens of Baku; the work was conducted from the top of a high building by a proud man with two flags. To hand there is no report on the reactions of the audience, who, no doubt, accepted it dutifully as an example of True Soviet Music For The People. All these cases would not be worth recording but for the fact that they show the extreme futility of too much self-consciousness in art. The artist who expresses the

spirit of his age does so naturally; no amount of self-conscious theorizing will help him to that end.

The above digression must not be thought to suggest that most modern musicians have had a share in such hysteria. Even while that was at its height, many sane individuals carried on the evolution of the true art. Apart from the older composers of settled reputation and habit, there was and is a rich crop of younger artists, the steadiness and high quality of whose output augurs well. The most noteworthy fact that emerges is that contrapuntal thought now predominates over harmony as it did in the choral music of the Sixteenth century. The rule of harmony with its consort, rigid rhythmic structure, has now ended, and musicians are now composing works that derive their rhythms from melodic rather than harmonic sources. It may well be that after a couple of hundred years of this Second Polyphonic Era a new systematization of harmony will occur. Comparison with the first Age of Counterpoint shows, of course, that whereas before 1450 music was embryonic, present-day composers have behind them a vast background of fully mature masterpieces in many different idioms. For this reason the prevalence of counterpoint is not so complete as it once was.

In Europe to-day there are two main influences, not the only ones, but the strongest. At a time when Mahler and Nielsen were giving the orchestra a new, transparent kind of contrapuntal texture, Sibelius was extracting new meaning from old harmonic effects. Thus it is Sibelius and not Mahler who is the chief and most original master of the old guard, for his work is based on chordal thinking and though counterpoint is used, it is rarer. One has only to compare his First Symphony (1899) with that of Nielsen (1892) to see that it is Nielsen who looks forward while Sibelius breathes new life into old substance. Therefore it is not surprising to find that those younger men who are not still feverishly lapping the last drops of Wagner and Strauss, or employing the orchestral tricks of the French "impressionists" (ugly, meaningless word!) or attempting to scale the blank wall of atonalism, are either absorbing the principles of Sibelius or, taking the hints left by Mahler, Vaughan Williams and Nielsen, are turning to pure counterpoint. (The so-called neo-classicism of Stravinsky is merely a self-conscious affectation which has deflected more than one gifted artist from his path.) Examples of symphonists who derive much of their predominantly harmonic styles from Sibelius may be found in Walton, Atterberg, and Dag Wirén. Polyphonically inclined are such composers as Hindemith, Rubbra, Tippett and Schuman, the American.

Composers influenced by Sibelius have not, as a rule, so much promise as those of the other type. The orchestral style of that master is easy enough to imitate, but no other musician has succeeded in breathing life into it. Nearest to it has come William Walton, and his comparative success in the Symphony is due to his own vivid individuality. The work does, however, suffer from a severe tendency to overcrowd the harmony with unessential notes. Walton's harmonic manner incorporates rhythms derived from strange bedfellows, Elgar and Stravinsky, fused into a thoroughly independent style. The effect of Sibelius does not encourage one of Walton's kind to disentangle overloaded harmony

into clear part-writing. In this respect it is useful to compare the clogged texture of much of his Symphony with that of the Fourth of Vaughan Williams. Both are fierce utterances dating from 1935, but nothing could be more essentially “modern” than the brilliant clarity of the older man’s counterpoint, whereas the more 1935 recedes the plainer is it that the Walton Symphony is an aftermath, not of the later, but of the earlier Sibelius, which is in turn derived from Tchaikovsky’s conception of the symphony. Walton’s technique shows its furthest limits in the very much better Viola Concerto: beyond that point it cannot go in its present condition: if this composer is to grow he must evolve new ways of thought, not divorced from the old, but capable of exploring new aspects of his genius. This suggestion applies also to other composers under the shadow of Sibelius.

Hindemith is one of the few German composers who has a clear sense of direction; some remain beneath the spell of the now fulfilled line of Wagner, Strauss and Pfitzner, others cannot free themselves from Reger’s influence, while a few continue to ape Schoenberg. Hindemith himself writes clear, expressive counterpoint and orchestrates in a clear style that is quite his own. He is, without doubt, one of the most significant of living orchestral composers. Rubbra’s symphonies, four completed, show a powerful grip of architecture based on polyphonic methods and a characteristic use of graded dynamics. He does not dispense with plain harmonic writing, and his novel handling of old chords has excited much interest. The surface beauty of his music does not seem to interest him as an end in itself, but the general effect of his dour style is very moving. When not at his best, Rubbra writes turgidly, but his most notable works are distinguished by an ability to create paragraphs of great length, complexity, cogency and expressiveness.

Tippett’s music is more tenuous in texture. He draws much of his technique (as does Rubbra also) from the Elizabethans and from Purcell. His most striking characteristic is rhythmic and the complete freedom of what may be called his “madrigal rhythms” makes his orchestral music very difficult to play. So far he has written but one symphony, full of rare refinement and restrained power. His reliance on polyphony is almost complete. Tippett has none of the mechanistic qualities of Schuman who shows yet another facet of modern contrapuntal technique. If Rubbra is not primarily concerned with the surface of his music, Schuman appears to ignore it completely. His melody is angular and his part-writing bare and harsh: there is a brutal strength in the sheer energy of it. This intellectual energy also informs the work of his compatriot Roy Harris: both these are able to erect structures of skyscraper-like, rectilinear toughness. In Samuel Barber’s work there seems to be a sign of mellowing things in American music.

Mention of more than a few names has been impossible here. Those few are to be regarded as illustrations of the main argument; they are not intended to stand out as the most important figures. There are other schools of composers, some of whom are describable only in political terms, a feat the writer, a mere musician, does not propose to attempt. At best this final chapter oversimplifies matters; it gives but a few hints in the hope that those who have had difficulty may now begin to distinguish the varying cross-currents in the music of our time; it must suffice to say that the reader can, if he wishes,

investigate further for himself. Among many other things, he will find that the influence of the individualist Mahler has reached the U.S.S.R. and shows itself, grossly inflated, in the work of Shostakovitch, England, where it has assumed an unbecoming sophistication in Britten's music (there are passages in the *Sinfonia da Requiem* that might almost be in quotation marks), and possibly America, where Mahler's music has lately been heavily romanticized. He will see how French orchestral composers are apparently struggling to extricate themselves from the emasculating effects of "Les Six" and the ear-ticklings of Stravinsky, how a true American style is growing, how in Scandinavia the more vital artists have learned from Nielsen and the more imitative types from Sibelius, and how in Britain there is an encouraging abundance of independent minds. He will notice that economic conditions tend to make composers use smaller orchestras, and that since 1900, except for some eccentricities, the full orchestra has remained fairly constant in personnel. Above all, he will become aware of a sense of drama in watching future developments, in conjecture and perusal. To do all this he needs to keep his head clear, to be slow to condemn and quick to see genuine effort, for without such listeners composers are helpless.

In *Disc 1/2*, Spring 1947, pp. 55-62, *1/3*, Summer 1947, pp. 101-7, *1/4*, Autumn 1947, pp. 146-52, and *2/5*, Winter 1947/8, pp. 25-32.

ROBERT SIMPSON
A NOTE ON THE SYMPHONIES OF MAHLER

One of the few real similarities between Mahler and Bruckner is the fact that each bends his art to the expression of his own philosophy in a manner that remains consistent throughout his life. All that changes is the refinement and subtlety of the means employed. Bruckner's series of symphonies gives vent to his unshakeable faith in God and the Catholic Church; he himself said so, and as he grew older the music became profounder and the treatment of the orchestra more masterly. With Mahler the philosophy is different and the music accordingly so, but there is that same devotion to one dominating ethical purpose, in his case a search for a belief that should be valid for all experience. Although Mahler was a Jew who afterwards became a Roman Catholic, he never at any time possessed a serene religious faith: always was he wandering and searching, Faust-like, for things closer and yet closer to the fundamental. Together with this restless introspection went a tendency towards a typically "romantic" self-dramatization that was, at times, almost theatrical, exacerbated by a passion to attain a detachment almost impossible to a man of his egoistic temperament. That he eventually achieved something like this spiritual freedom in his Ninth Symphony is an enduring tribute to the extraordinary power of concentration he brought to bear on his creative work as it progressed from symphony to symphony. For his symphonies mark the successive surges of effort by which he sought his solution.

During the process he stumbled over many stones and was often prevented from consummating an effort; his arduous life as the greatest conductor of his time sapped his vital energy, usually leaving him only his summer holiday, during which he needed rest, to compose his immense works. This fact goes far to explain the signs of haste and the occasional crudenesses to be found in his earlier symphonies; ideas which he seemed to throw, pell mell, into otherwise fine music would no doubt, have been recast had he allowed himself a moment's detached thought, away from the fever of his living. Usually, however, it becomes clear that most of these flaws in his earlier works are the first stirrings of new and startling discoveries, to take shape later. Consider, for instance, the way in which an almost exasperatingly trite theme is practically bludgeoned to death in the opening movement of the Third Symphony, as if the composer is struggling painfully to hit on some new, exciting treatment that hammers at the back of his mind, eluding him nevertheless. It rises at length, and with magnificent clarity, in the Rondo Burleske of the Ninth Symphony; the later passages, with their amazing transparency and power, can hardly have been possible without the previous labourings in the Third; so it is with many a stroke of genius in the last four symphonies.

In all great art there is an inevitable and inextricable relation between its expressive meaning or significance and those of its elements that can be described in its own technical terms. It thus follows that if a great artist both practises assiduously the technique of his art, and at the same time enriches his spirit by constant and honest thought, it will be possible to trace a complete parallel between his philosophical and artistic developments. The gradual clarification of style, the increasing translucence of the orchestra that Mahler produced with each work, together with a paradoxical growth in sheer complexity of texture, are plain signs of the spiritual conflict within him. Between Mahler and Bruckner is all the gulf that separates the intellectual from the seer; the elucidation of growing intricacy absorbs and troubles the intellectual, both in art and life. Bruckner, the serene visionary, reconciles the world's contradictions (which he does not fail to see) within the frame of a large and simple faith; his Ninth Symphony is his ultimate musical Allegory.

The vividness and originality of Mahler's genius is already clear in his First Symphony (in D major). Surely no composer's first symphony begins more magically than this? The scoring alone is astonishing, the long-held A in the strings ranging from the highest harmonics to the deepest bass while "nature-sounds" (cuckoo calls and remote trumpetings) emerge from among the woodwind instruments. The first movement, while it has some big climaxes, is for the most part delicate and airy, based on a folk-like tune which Mahler had already used in a song. The second movement is a peasantly scherzo, very Austrian and with a graceful trio. In the third movement, Mahler shows again his novel approach to orchestral sonority; it is a mock funeral march, based on a picture by Callot, where animals are seen escorting a hunter's funeral, their attitudes indicating that their tears are anything but sincere. Mahler begins with the grotesque whining of a solo double bass, a sound that had rarely, if ever, been heard before in orchestral music. The finale contains both the best and the worst of early Mahler; the former in its wonderful stormy outbursts and the latter in a long and very weak "second subject".

The Second, Third and Fourth symphonies form a distinct group. Like Bax after him, Mahler thinks of his symphonies as a coherent series, each work following the previous one with deliberate philosophic relevance. The central problem behind his impulses is that of death; where this is hinted at in No. 1, it is brought clearly to the surface in the next three, all of which employ voices and words. No. 2 in C minor opens with a gigantic funeral march, developed on the grandest possible scale. Through a succession of shorter movements, each serving to delay its crux, the symphony arrives at an enormous finale, depicting the End of the World and the Resurrection. Elaborate arrangements are made for the sounding of the Last Trump and the whole ends with a resounding choral section. Although much of the finale is impressive, Mahler has not sufficiently mastered himself to give it cogency, and often he falls into commonplace. The same criticism applies also to much of the giant Third Symphony, in which the composer turns to contemplate Nature. Funeral sounds are again heard at the beginning (indeed they recur in nearly all his works), but are followed by a theme said to represent the uprush of the irrepressible life force. This theme it is that receives proper musical treatment only in the

third movement of No. 9. The best part of the Symphony No. 3 is its beautiful final slow movement, representing Universal Love; here Mahler shows his amazing and inimitable power of sustaining very slow melody; the slow movement of No. 4 provides a similar example. In this group of symphonies, No. 4 is by far the best; in it the mind is directed to a more childlike attitude. The whole work has a felicitous lightness of texture, the more fascinating because of the undercurrent from which it springs. Even in this symphony, humour sometimes turns without warning to bitterness: immediately before the recapitulation of the first movement a muted trumpet throws out what is to become a wild funeral blare at the beginning of the Fifth Symphony. The last movement of the Fourth, originally intended as part of the Third, employs a soprano voice, which sings to the loveliest imaginable music a folk-poem describing a child's conception of Heaven. At the end, anticipated by a passage in the preceding slow movement, the music moves softly into E major; the main key of the work is G, and Mahler (as also in No. 2) thus shows the world new aspects of tonality. To do this in a symphony he was not quite the first. Nielsen's First Symphony, three years senior to Mahler's Second, has its first movement in G minor, but ends in C major; its tonal scheme is more subtle than that of Mahler No. 2, for its very opening is purposely deceptive.

Mahler's Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh symphonies may also be grouped. They are completely instrumental. From the childlike mood of the Fourth, he turns to heroic struggle, at times exultant, at times desperate. Nos. 5 and 7 begin tragically and end in exuberant major keys; each starts in a minor key and ends in the major key that lies a semitone above. This device does not, as has been so often asserted by partisan writers, begin the "decline" of tonality that culminated in its "abolition" by the "atonalists". Mahler could not bring off his tonal effects without the firmest possible grasp of their very definite meanings. The Sixth Symphony stays rooted about one key, a dark and terrible A minor. This is his most tragic work and (for those who regard him as a pessimistic composer) the only one of the nine that ends in the minor mode. Bruno Walter has well described the "dismal power" of the music, and it is in this symphony that Mahler first achieves perfectly his wonderful and characteristic blend of complexity and transparency. This work more than any of the others would, if it were frequently and well played, show the English public the true extent of Mahler's power; it leaves an indelible impression even on those who dislike it.

The brightening at the end of the Seventh Symphony is more convincing than that of the finale of No. 5, which seems too elaborate and forced to be really triumphant, and it leads Mahler logically to the vast outburst of faith that is his Eighth. Once more voices are demanded; the resources are again increased to the size of those in the last movement of the Second. As passages in the Third suggest sketches for the Ninth, so parts of the Second anticipate the Eighth. In the latter the composer's grip is now far stronger and the first part (the whole is divided into two parts), a setting of the Latin hymn *Veni, creator spiritus*, is in itself one of the greatest choral works of its period. The second part, in which the final scene of Goethe's *Faust* is used, is also tremendously impressive. The entire

symphony (most of it remains thoroughly symphonic in design and texture) is set in the majestic key of E fiat major. To at least one listener, however, the faith expressed in the work does not seem completely genuine: in spite of the overwhelming effect of the whole, it leaves a suspicion that it is not fully characteristic of the mind that created it. Perhaps the truth is that no one work reveals every side of Mahler.

Whatever may be said about the Eighth, it has rarely been suggested that the Ninth is not typical. Opinion as to which is his finest work is usually divided between the Eighth Symphony, *Das Lied von der Erde*, and the Ninth Symphony. If a choice must be made here, it will fall straight upon the Ninth, in which, confining himself to the orchestra, Mahler achieves such concentration as never before. The work is the sum of all his previous efforts; its orchestration is clearer and more powerful, its counterpoint both more natural and more original, its tonal architecture more subtle, and its expression of Mahler's philosophy more nearly complete than in any of the earlier works. The first movement, an epic in itself, contains some of the most profound things in modern music, things which are at the root of many of the most fertile present-day developments. It is this magnificently contrapuntal manner, with its tenuous yet powerful scoring, that offers such promise for the future. Had Mahler not been cut off at the age of 51, he might now have been 88, an age at which he might have been able to look back on fourteen or fifteen symphonies. It is certain that he would have remained among the boldest spirits of the age. But the thought is too tantalizing: it were far better to concern oneself with the actual achievements of the man. The B.B.C. has recently broadcast all the symphonies. Unfortunately the general standard of performance (except in the Fourth, Sixth, and Ninth, which were recorded by foreign orchestras) was too low for the works to have a real chance of recognition. As in the case of the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra's essays at the Fifth and Seventh symphonies, nothing but the most harrowing dullness can result if the players (as individuals) do not throw themselves into the music with real fanaticism. Fanaticism does not, apparently, show itself in the ranks of any British orchestras; the Englishman does not approve of it. But it is necessary in music, and above all in Mahler, who was a complete fanatic in his own devotion to the art. Players cannot, of course, be expected to show such an attitude until they know the style and can feel it naturally. It can only be hoped that they will be given the chance to do this under the direction of men who understand the music, its traditions and its living force.

In *Disc 2/7*, Summer 1948, pp. 121-7.

ROBERT SIMPSON
DEBUSSY, RAVEL, AND IMPRESSIONISM

The school of painters called “Impressionists” – Manet, Monet, Degas, Renoir, etc. – set out to express what they felt to be the truest possibility of their art. At its height in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, this group acted upon a creed which said, in effect, “we record the true impression produced on us by the impact of light from objects. Others try to paint what they cannot see.” There is little interest in the solidity of objects, and it is felt that painting should exclude, as far as possible all influences not strictly visual in origin; in contrast to other types of graphic art, Impressionism lacks massiveness and hardness of outline. If Monet portrays a tree, he bases his picture on his visual sensations and leaves out of account his previous scientific knowledge of what a tree is actually like. Since the eye cannot appraise the whole of the tree at once, it is the magical, diaphanous, glancing vision that Monet recaptures. Art is not photography.

Contemporary with and sympathetic to these painters is the “Symbolist” school of poets, Verlaine, Mallarmé, and other followers of Baudelaire, believing that poetry must suggest rather than describe. The chief characteristics of both these movements are an outward refinement and restraint of manner, and an inner sensuousness, almost voluptuousness.

Debussy, deeply affected by the work of the Symbolist poets and the Impressionist painters, friendly with some of them, and himself having some skill in imitating Verlaine’s poetry, has been unquestioningly classed as a musical Impressionist. In view of this, it may be useful to find out how far this word “Impressionism” can be applied to music. Unlike painting and poetry, music must achieve its end without direct reference to the composer’s environment. If the work has a story or programme for its foundation, it must still be considered a failure if the literary background is absolutely essential to its clarity as music. Beethoven’s *Les Adieux* sonata and Strauss’s *Till Eulenspiegel* are both magnificent works because one can be thrilled by them without being aware of any definite programme behind them. Beethoven remarks, in connection with his *Pastoral* Symphony that music is “more an expression of feeling than of painting.” It cannot, therefore, like Mossolov’s *Symphony of Machines*, concern itself with mere imitation without becoming any more than sheer noise. It follows that programme music, like Impressionist painting, must deal solely with the emotional response to sensation or impression. But the very nature of music makes it capable only of aural imagery, all other suggestion being attained by means of subtleties beyond the ken of painting. To realise this one has simply to imagine a painter trying to suggest sounds. Music having its origin in external scenes or events must needs be more “Impressionistic” than painting.

It will be seen that the art of painting has in it the undeniable contrast between impressionism and "realism," artists who are "realists" putting on the canvas what they know and remember, rather than what they actually see. Since all programme music must be impressionistic, this particular division cannot exist in musical art, unless the term "realistic" is to be applied to non-illustrative works, patently an absurd notion if the word is to be opposed to "impressionistic." Every good piece of programme music from Kuhnau to Bax bears out the law that music, like Symbolist poetry, suggests rather than describes. No doubt it is clear at this stage that the restriction of the word "impressionistic" to one small branch of programme music is erroneous. Debussy and Ravel are not the fathers of this school. Into this category fall Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony, Sibelius's *Tapiola*, Strauss's *Don Quixote*, Dukas' *L'apprenti sorcier*, Schubert's song accompaniments, Smetana's *Moldau*, Bach's *Capriccio on the departure of a brother*, Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*, etc., etc. Nothing would be gained by using the term "impressionistic" for "illustrative" in connection with music, and it would be an immense advantage if its present harmful function were stopped. Its association with Debussy and Ravel would seem to exempt them from the need to organise their works. The loose criticism that assumes this, afraid that analysis will destroy their fragile beauty, takes care to ignore such structure as can be found in the best designs of these two masters.

Debussy's French delicacy and the nebulous vagueness of outline in his work are partly responsible for the confusion that has arisen around his "impressionistic technique." He is, first and last, a composer of programme music, and it so happens that the subjects which excite him to music all partake of elusive, indefinable qualities. The sea, clouds, rain, goldfish, wind, the mysterious submerged cathedral, all are concerned predominantly with light and movement. The "atmospheres" of these things are not suggested by firm, hard line drawing without a disturbing sense of effort. Where the Impressionist painters shed new light on old subject-matter, Debussy's proved to be the only possible method of illustrating his chosen topics. He is distinguished by the ability to convey an impression of light effects better than anyone before him.

Other creators of descriptive music are equally impressionistic in ways adapted to different ends. The vigour and clarity of the human dramas that attract Richard Strauss demand the use of sharp, clear definition. Strauss therefore writes clean-cut melodic forms. The converse of this statement is also true, and it might be said that the tradition of which Strauss is an adherent involves the use of themes suited for symphonic development, and that he naturally casts about for plots compatible with his musical style. The gulf between Debussy and Strauss is not the same as that between Impressionism and Realism. It is that which separates the artistic ideals of France and Germany. If it were the former, it would be more impressionistic to paint clouds than to paint a house. If the *March to the Scaffold* in Berlioz' *Fantastic Symphony* were "realistic," only a lunatic would wish to endure it twice.

The individual style of Debussy is remarkably free of other musical influences. In common with Berlioz, the later Mahler, Sibelius, and few other men, he has the power of separating himself from his predecessors. Although some of his harmonic inflections had

been anticipated by Purcell, Bach, Berwald, Wagner, Bruckner, and more, he was the first person to enlarge upon whole-tone scales and chords. The importance of this in both Debussy's and Ravel's music has been exaggerated, but the whole-tone scale does flavour much of it. The scale itself is easily found on the pianoforte (C, D, E, F#, A flat, B flat, C, or D flat, E flat, F, G, A, B, D flat), and it will be noticed that if all its notes are played simultaneously, the effect is not nearly so dissonant as might be expected. The wash of colour thus obtained is the seasoning of Debussy's and, to a lesser extent, Ravel's compositions. This view of harmony reveals its purely sensuous side. Discords do not need to resolve but are enjoyed for their own sakes and pass happily into other equally unacademic and delightfully rich chords. Debussy does not think naturally in terms of combined melodies and rhythms (counterpoint), as does Wagner. His textures are nearly always based on chords (harmony). Most prophecies of his harmony by other masters were, curiously enough, the accidental result of counterpoint. This fact explains why his system was not discovered before. Contrapuntal composers are not usually interested in harmony for its own sake, or in inventing new chords, and composers whose bent was chiefly harmonic wrote in an idiom derived from contrapuntal thought. An interesting earlier and perhaps unconscious use of the whole-tone scale can be found in Glinka's overture to *Ruslan and Ludmilla*. Nothing could be more misleading than the suggestion that this scale holds vast promise as the starting-point for a new harmonic system. It is useful only for colour effects. The language of Debussy is not the medium for musical architecture.

Debussy is dominated by the gorgeousness of his harmony. Consequently he is pre-occupied with the invention of interesting textures in sound. It is noteworthy that he draws most of his inspiration from inanimate subjects. The random list given above contains but one living thing, a goldfish, and that is treated simply as a flash of fluid colour. His handling of harmony and instrumentation invariably makes them give the sense of texture and colour, severed as completely as possible from human emotion. He shares with Manet and his followers a tendency to allow his interest in texture to oust formal requirements, but, be it noted, this bias exists in the work of such men as Corelli, Smetana, Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky, or Kodaly, none of whom is often called "impressionist." Debussy exceeds them all in poetry and force, and the originality and beauty of a masterpiece like *La Mer* is such as almost to counterbalance any sketchiness of form. There is, however, no effective denial of his looseness in structural matters, and attempts to excuse him on "impressionistic" grounds invariably reveal an abysmal ignorance of the meaning of that unfortunate word. One who is composing on so large a scale as that of *La Mer* ought not to be content with mere rough symmetry. Movements like *Fêtes* (from the *Three Nocturnes*) or *Jeux de Vagues* (from *La Mer*) show a power of climax and an inevitability of sequence rare in Debussy. These movements are to be treasured for they are among the most wonderful in French music. He excels most in his shorter pieces, rich splashes of iridescence. Walter Gieseking's superb recordings of his pianoforte Preludes should not be missed.¹⁸

¹⁸ This last sentence was deleted by Robert Simpson in his scrap book by hand. [Ed.]

It may fairly be said, without implying a parallel, that the difference between Debussy and Ravel is fully as great as that between, say, Vaughan Williams and Bax. Debussy showed irritation at attempts to set up the younger man as his rival; far from being jealous, he realised that the little that he and Ravel had in common was not enough to justify competition. Ravel is also an illustrative composer, but the topics which attract him are quite unlike those of the other. He does not detach himself from human feeling as does Debussy. There is in his output nothing like the mysteriously impersonal *La Mer* or the elemental *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest*. Rather is he drawn to the actions and emotions of human figures. These creatures are not the robust heroes of Richard Strauss and Wagner, nor the peasant stock of Smetana, Dvořák, or Vaughan Williams. They are delicate fantasies of the imagination, Beauty and the Beast, Hop o' my Thumb, Daphnis and Chloe: characters in fairy tales and myths. Ravel is at his most evocative in sketching such a being as the elusive and demoniac *Gaspard de la nuit*. His musical material is clearer-cut than that of Debussy, as would be expected, since the ephemeral quality that so exquisitely suggests gardens in the rain would be unsuitable for the delineation of character, however slight. The atmosphere of Debussy's *Pelléas and Mélisande* is dream-like and unreal and the pathos expressed by the opera has a strangely pervasive quality that makes it impossible for it to be confined within the personalities of the unhappy pair. Compared with Pelleas and Melisande the people in Ravel's *L'heure espagnole* are robust and real.

The effect of Ravel on modern English music is striking. There is a passage in the slow movement of Vaughan Williams's *London Symphony*, which might deceive any hearer into placing it as part of Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloé* (the second suite, before the beginning of the *Danse Générale*). Howells, Bax, Moeran and Goossens all show traces of his influence. Debussy, too, leaves his fingerprints. His string quartet has a slow movement that is the precursor of the type of beauty to be found in Howells' fine *Elegy* for strings. John Ireland's pianoforte music often barely succeeds in maintaining its individuality against the surge of Debussian mist that sometimes threatens to envelope it. Cyril Scott's music shows a development parallel to Debussy's, the more interesting because it was begun before its author knew of the Frenchman. Scott, too, has shown an interest in similar subject matter and is impelled towards kindred methods of composition. This fact earned him the title of the "English Debussy," yet another symptom of the prevalent and unreasonable desire for labelling everything and everybody. Even Germany has not been impervious to the sound of Debussy's Gallic voice, for Max Reger, in his subtle *Four Tone-poems after Böcklin*, uses a style of orchestration which strikes a middle course between the extremes of Strauss and Debussy, while he achieves a degree of organisation beyond the scope of either.

Debussy's harmony and Ravel's instrumentation have combined to serve the purposes of many inferior composers, all of whom have been said to employ an "impressionistic technique," even when their aims have been entirely non-representational. So narrow has the use of this term become that the creator of a modern symphony has only to make play with the whole-tone scale and to orchestrate in pastel shades to be dubbed

an “impressionist.” Because Bax’s symphonies are scored by the same man who wrote *Tintagel* and *The Garden of Fand*, they have often been thus called. Comparable remarks have been applied to the Fourth and Sixth symphonies of Sibelius, those of Roussel, Moeran, Goossens, and Dukas, the Violin Concertos of Szymanowski, and many other works. The description is first wrongly confined to a mere fraction of those qualifying for it, and then applied to any others who show faint influences of this group, whether or no they have any aims compatible with the classification itself. It would be as sensible to call Bach “The Religious Composer „ and then say that an atheistic contrapuntist is employing a “religious technique.” Impressionism is not a technique; if anything it is a philosophy of illustrative art.

In *Disc 1/1*, Winter 1946/7, pp. 11-8.

ROBERT SIMPSON
SIBELIUS AND MUSICAL MOVEMENT

Three of the Sibelius symphonies are now almost “popular classics.” The rest are widely accepted as masterpieces, though not so hugely enjoyed by the public. Surprisingly, there is little true understanding of the works. It is therefore profitable to try to define the achievements of Sibelius as a symphonist.

One of his outstanding gifts is his ability to handle tempi in a new way. To make this clear it will be necessary to discuss first some aspects of musical movement. The awakening of a high sense of motion by music is always attained, not by a stutter of demisemi-quavers, but by the logical statement of a large number of pregnant thoughts in a short time. Clock time, it will be seen, measures the size of musical shapes. A big shape occupies a large slice of time. But gigantic size may not be actual but may be suggested by subtle proportions, created by an apt regulation of the pace. Hence the adage that in a work of art “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

Now it will be realised that there are two extremes in movement. One can travel very fast or very slow. Since the control of pace is the first essential for fine proportions in music, it follows that the integration of very divergent tempi in a single design is a task needing both experience and concentration. Bach is able in his Overtures to alternate a steady tempo with a whirling *Allegro*. The effect of this is satisfactory because it is usually a symmetrical arrangement, and there is no interaction between the two elements. They are contrasted rather than united. With the coming of the eighteenth century symphonists the sonata style (the dramatic nature of which is so brilliantly demonstrated by Tovey¹⁹) made a considerable power of movement normal even to the most conventional composers. The culmination of this period in Beethoven brings forth works which pack more thoughts into shorter spaces of time than any before them, except those of Haydn. Conversely, Beethoven expands his slow movements to the farthest limits of sheer size permitted by the sonata style, which even here retains its dramatic instincts. Within these dimensional bounds he also invents superb new forms, such as the *Grosse Fuge*, Op. 133, in which widely different speeds are made to contrast and complement each other within a single organism. But such designs are comparatively rare in this epoch. Composers mainly confined their various tempi to separate movements, in each of which a uniform pulse is felt. Beethoven will, even in such a piece, alter his rate of thought while maintaining the original pulse. Consequently it is never necessary to fluctuate the tempo in performance to “make expression”. This point is almost certainly not understood by those conductors who give temperamental “readings” of classical symphonies.

¹⁹ The editor has been unable to locate this reference to Tovey.

To his contemporaries Beethoven's slow movements must have seemed to represent the slowest possible music. But Wagner precipitated a crisis. His musical thought moves no faster than his stage drama. He thus achieves a "new low" in musical speeds. It was not long before composers sought to apply this technique to absolute music. At first Liszt's symphonic poems were thought to have succeeded in this. But this was not the case, and Bruckner was the first to give life to pure instrumental music on a scale similar to that of Wagner's Music Dramas.

The difficulty of integrating this new extreme with the classical sense of flight was now enormous. Composers wrote either in one style or in the other, but never in a convincing mixture of both. Wagner's and Bruckner's discoveries exerted so great an influence that one finds, even now, that an ability to write a true allegro is all too rare. Not until the later works of Sibelius do we find a perfect fusion in terms of the highest art.

The first of Sibelius' symphonies, in E minor, Op. 39, written in the last year of the nineteenth century, shows few signs of his subsequent tendencies. It is thoroughly in the older tradition, and does not indicate that the composer had the faintest interest in writing music of a Wagnerean slowness. But its first movement gives exciting proof of his opposite powers, and already stamps him an important figure. Much of the symphony, however, is derivative, and shows less originality than some of his earlier music. Two of its themes are strongly reminiscent of Tchaikovsky, and its finale, in which too much space is occupied by the expansive but uneventful Second Subject, must be rated far below the fine opening movement. Sibelius is not alone in showing caution in his first symphony, and, as a whole, it is an interesting and rousing work.

The Second Symphony, in D major, Op. 43, is bolder. Much misunderstanding of it has been fostered by Cecil Gray's inaccurate handbook, which states that an entirely new form has been created in this symphony. This is not strictly true, since sonata principles are operative in both the big flanking movements. True, the first movement is most unusual in its exposition of the chief subject matter, but it is orthodox to the extent of modulating virtuously to the dominant for the second group. Sibelius' way of letting out fragments of melody in apparently disconnected jerks seems to have deceived Mr. Gray (as in many other instances) into supposing that fundamentally novel forms were in question. Tradition governs the underlying principles which brace the Second Symphony. Its originality lies in its remarkable subject matter (particularly in the first movement and scherzo), and in the exploitation of new possibilities in the old form. Of great interest here is the *Andante, ma rubato*, whose processes are almost slow enough to be Wagnerean.

In Symphony No. 3, in C major, Op. 52, Sibelius looks both backwards and forwards. Its first movement is full of the classical spirit, and displays a greater impetus than almost anything earlier in his work. The surprising slow coda of this piece should be noted. This is not composed of new material (pace Mr. Gray), but is derived in a strikingly obvious manner from the end of the exposition. In the form of the finale, Sibelius breaks entirely new ground for the first time in his symphonies. This strong utterance depicts the rushing together of chaotic forces, until they are marshalled into order by a

firmly rhythmic theme that pounds its way to an overwhelmingly energetic climax. The device which unifies this curious structure is a long held C, absent only during a short transitional passage. The movement is so inimitable that it is often thought to be a type frequently used by Sibelius. In fact, this and the finale of the Fifth Symphony, are the only two examples which bear a remote resemblance to each other.

The Fourth Symphony, in A minor, Op. 63, is Sibelius' first great symphony. Its four independent sections are indescribably powerful and original. The immense slowness of the first and third movements is at the furthest possible remove from the terrifying swiftness of action in the other two. Within a single work, his tersest and grimmest symphony, Sibelius achieves both extremes of pace. But they are still kept apart.

The first real fusion takes place in the Fifth Symphony, in E flat, Op. 82. The first movement opens with a process as cloudy and gradual as anything in Wagner, and merges eventually into the fastest *Prestissimo* imaginable. The manner in which Sibelius slips quite suddenly into a new speed is imperceptible, magical, and inexplicable. The Fifth Symphony, however, still falls into separate sections. So does the Sixth, in D minor, Op. 104, which, though less ostentatious, is perhaps even more subtle. The first part starts as a slow cloudscape, but sees periods of intense activity: the finale is very energetic but flows away into the sky at the end like a wraith.

But Sibelius' now wonderfully plastic technique has its finest triumph in the Symphony No. 7, in C major, Op. 105. In one continuous whole, the work combines all possible elements of pace. In some twenty minutes it contrives to convey an impression of immensity hitherto beyond the scope of any but the bulkiest works. Wagner or Bruckner wrote no slower music than the opening few minutes of this symphony, and Beethoven nothing more swift than the torrential onrush which so mysteriously appears and disappears at intervals. Sibelius' art of transition is here so consummate that no first hearing reveals the exact moment when a huge slowness becomes a tremendous fount of energy, or when fierce impetuosity becomes swallowed instantly in a vision of vast, superhuman spaces.

In *Gangrel* 3, 1946, pp. 46-8.

THE ROBERT SIMPSON SOCIETY

Patron:

Angela Simpson

President:

John McCabe

Vice Presidents:

Phil Lesh
Graham Melville-Mason
Lionel Pike
Ronald Stevenson
Matthew Taylor

Committee:

Jürgen Schaarwächter (Chairman & Editor, *Tonic*)
Pamela Bacon (Vice-Chairman)
David Jones (Secretary)
Gary Jobsey (Treasurer)
Martin Anderson
Terence Hazell
Robert Hill
Rosemary Hill
Donald Macauley
Graham Melville-Mason
Lionel Pike

Editor Jürgen Schaarwächter, address see below · *Printing* Greenhouse Graphics Limited, Unit 12 Cufaude Business Park, Cufaude Lane, Bramley, Nr. Basingstoke, Hampshire RG26 5DL, e-mail sara@greenhousegraphics.co.uk.

The authors of the articles printed in this journal have asserted their rights to be so identified in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

General communications to the Society and contributions for TONIC should be addressed to Dr Jürgen Schaarwächter, Amthausstr. 16, D-76227 Karlsruhe, Germany, e-mail j.schaarwaechter@t-online.de. Enquiries about membership should be addressed to David Jones, 42 Tiverton Way, Cambridge CB1 2TU, e-mail djones3@btinternet.com, and enquiries about archival matters to Terry Hazell, 5 Sispara Gardens, Southfields, London SW18 1LG, e-mail hazell1@btinternet.com.