TONIC

The Journal of the ROBERT SIMPSON SOCIETY

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THE ROBERT SIMPSON SOCIETY
COMMITTEE 1980–81

EDITORIAL

TONIC aims to promote the growth of a body of writing around the work of Robert Simpson. It will also carry news of the activities of the Robert Simpson Society, of concerts, broadcasts and talks. TONIC will act as an information source on the composer and his output by assembling complete lists of works, writings (if possible - the help of members would be appreciated here), publications, recordings (on the brink of expansion, we hope), and so on. Comments are invited, both from members and other friends, on the balance and content of TONIC, and we hope that readers' letters will become a regular feature.

This inaugural issue of TONIC contains, as the index shows, a profile of the composer by Robert Dearling, followed by a complete list of works with instrumentation, first performances with dates, and approximate timings; an article by Brian Duke on the early piano music; a note from John Brooks on the origins and aims of the RSS; and a regular column culled from RS's own writings, showing him in 'light but lumpy' mood. Over the years, RS's prose has been noted for its pithy style and pungent humour: since he has written incidental music to Milton's Samson Agonistes, we thought it not inappropriate that such a column should be headed Simpson Antagonistes.

One of the more noteworthy of recent events concerning RS must be his resignation from the BBC. Although this does not affect the aims of the RSS of promoting his music, those interested in the composer will want to read, if they have not already done so, RS's letter to The Times of 18 July 1980. Two sentences summarise its argument:

> 'When I first joined the Corporation nearly thirty years ago it was a wonderful and promising place to be at, with the Third Programme at the height of its achievement, the envy of the whole civilised world. Since the BBC's capitulation to the urge to compete on the lowest level with commercial broadcasting, values have degenerated; one can regard only with dismay the multiplying factors that impede the search for the best in the scramble for the ratings.'

We hope to publish a full list of members and their addresses in a subsequent issue of TONIC. Would anyone who wishes to be excluded please write to the Editor before the end of the year?

RS has asked if any member can help him with some information about Carl Nielsen:

> **(1) In his autobiography, Sir Henry Wood refers to performing a Nielsen symphony at the Queen's Hall Proms, but that he (Wood) could not get the music across to the audience. RS has been unable to trace which symphony this might have been: can any reader offer a suggestion?**
>
> **(2) In 1923 Nielsen conducted the London Symphony Orchestra in the Queen's Hall in a programme of his own music, consisting of Pan and Syrinx, the Violin Concerto (with his son-in-law, Emil Telmányi, as soloist) and the Fourth Symphony. RS would like to know who wrote the programme notes and whether anyone can supply him with a copy. (Letters care of the Editor, please.)**

Since we hope to promote performances in the provinces as much as in London, we would be grateful if members let us know whenever they get wind of any forthcoming or potential performances, of or any performers looking to enrich their repertoire.

The RSS must express its gratitude to two benefactors: to Lloyds Bank for offering to service our accounts free of charge; and to the publishers, Alfred Lengnick & Co., for their most generous offer to print TONIC for the Society. We are very grateful indeed.

We look forward to comments on this and future issues of TONIC, and shall always be pleased to consider material for publication.

MARTIN J. ANDERSON

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE ROBERT SIMPSON SOCIETY

The idea of a society to promote better knowledge and appreciation of the works of Robert Simpson had been in the minds of enthusiasts for several years, but RS himself was at first not in favour of the idea. However, his attitude has softened over the years, and the effective genesis of the Society was in August 1978 when a small group came together for preliminary discussions.

It was agreed then that the time to launch a Society was when RS's music was before the public, and the appropriate time emerged in the spring of this year when, in quick succession, there were broadcasts of the 4th, 5th and 6th String Quartets by the Gabrieli Quartet; the first performance of the 6th Symphony under Sir Charles Groves at the Royal Festival Hall; and performances of all eight String Quartets at Brunel University on successive Saturdays, by the Delme Quartet.

After letters had been circulated to known supporters of RS's work and to the musical press, the inaugural meeting of the Society was held at Brunel University on 21st June. Provisional aims and objectives were approved, and a committee elected, before the meeting adjourned to hear the first performance of the 8th Quartet by the Delme Quartet, in the presence of its dedicatee (and our Chairman), Professor J. D. Gillett.

The Society already has sixty members, and applications are still being received. Sir Adrian Boult, the dedicatee of the 1st Symphony, has kindly consented to become our Patron, and well-known musical members include the Delme String Quartet, Dr Vagn Holmboe, Lady (Susi) Jeans, Lawrence Leonard and Ronald Smith. Additionally, interest has been expressed by Harry Newstone, Patrick Piggott, Stanley Pope, Alan Ridout and Ronald Stevenson. **We should also like to take this opportunity to thank the firms of Alfred Lengnick & Co., and Unicorn Records for practical help and excellent advice, and David Brown, the Secretary of the Havergal Brian Society, for wise and effective counsel based on his own experience.**

We have often been told, sometimes in astonishment, that this is the first time a society has been founded in Britain to promote the music of a living composer. (It appears that the pre-war Delius and Sibelius Societies were essentially subscription arrangements for the sale of

records created by the companies concerned). We can only wonder why the idea has not been tried before: there would appear to be a need for it in several other cases.

In these days, when musical tastes and fashions seem to switch from the electronic to the aleatory and back again via the dodeca—cacophonic, the serious composer of music in the traditional instrumental forms, using the normal symphony orchestra or chamber groups, is at a disadvantage. When a composer's work is based firmly on the long-cherished arts of harmony and counterpoint, and is expressly tonal, and when in addition he has never written the kind of pieces - short piano works and songs - that make a composer accessible to the amateur performer, then that composer has some difficulty in reaching the larger public because of his work's lack of fashionable novelty on the one hand and of ready accessibility on the other.

This appears to be the situation with RS's music. It generates great enthusiasm among a substantial body of musicians and music—lovers, who see it not only as well-wrought, intellectually convincing and emotionally satisfying in itself, but also as an affirmation that there is still much to say in the traditional extended instrumental forms used by composers from Haydn and Beethoven to Rubbra and Shostakovich. It is not only splendid music; it is also vitally important in the history of music. It is in this knowledge that we have formed this Society, and we ask for the support of like-minded musicians and music-lovers.

Some members have pointed out that our official statement of aims excludes 'publication'. This is deliberate. We are glad to say the publication of RS's music requires no support from us; virtually all of his works have been - or are in the process of being - published, either by Lengnicks (see outside back cover), or, in some cases, by other firms. Details can be found in the complete list of works in this issue.

Similarly, other members have suggested that we include RS's books in our purview. Again, this does not seem necessary: the well-known studies on Nielsen and Bruckner have recently gone into second editions and the Pelican double volume on the symphony is still available, as is the little handbook on Beethoven's symphonies.

The committee has already appointed a sub-committee to make detailed proposals for performances and recordings, and for the raising of funds to cover these; progress will be reported in future issues of TONIC. Meanwhile, comments from members and other sympathetic readers will be most welcome.

JOHN BROOKS

SCORES: SALE AND LOAN

We are delighted to inform members, and others interested, that we are establishing a lending library of miniature and study records of RS's music, with the kind and much-valued assistance of Alfred Lengnick and Co., the publishers. We are also in a position to supply scores for sale to members at appreciable discounts. Anyone interested should contact John and Sylvia Brooks (Joint Secretaries) at 3 Engel Park, London NW7 2HE, for details.

PERFORMANCES

Saturday, 29 November 1980
8.00 p.m.
Farnham Maltings, Bridge Square, Farnham, Surrey.
ENERGY
Besses o' the Barn, cond. Roy Newsome
Tickets: £2.75, £2.00, £1.75 from the box office (tel. 0252 725887)

TALKS BY RS

Thursday, 20 November 1980
6.15 p.m.
St John's, Smith Square, London SW1
RS will give a talk before a concert given in St John's by the BBC Singers under John Poole of works by Rubbra (Lauda Sion, Five Madrigals, Festival Gloria) and Howells (Requiem [1st perf.], Inheritance, Take him, earth, for cherishing).
Tickets: Free to concert-goers from the box office (tel. 01 222 1061)

Friday, 9 to Sunday, 11 January 1981
Annual series of lectures given at Missenden Abbey Adult Education College. This year the subject is J. S. Bach, and RS will treat, among other topics, Bach's musical language, the fugue, the concerto, the keyboard, the instrumental sonata and the human voice. The residential places for the course are now full, but non-residents may still attend. Details from Missenden Abbey, Great Missenden, Bucks., HP16 OBD. (tel. Great Missenden (02406) 2328)

COMPOSER OF OUR TIME

One of music's truly remarkable occasions took place in London's Royal Festival Hall on May 3rd, 1973. Andrew Davis, noted for his expert championing of new music, conducted the London Symphony Orchestra in the first performance of Robert Simpson's Symphony No. 5. The audience seemed aware that it was present at the appearance of a work destined to become regarded as one of the greatest symphonies of the 20th century, and as the music closed the pent-up excitement of the listeners was released in a dense wall of enthusiastic applause. As the composer walked on to the stage to acknowledge the tumult, even the experienced and not easily moved London Symphony Orchestra stood to add their acclaim.

It was a night - and a performance - in a thousand, and was duly noted as such in Desmond Shawe-Taylor's Sunday Times review, a review that bore the striking heading: 'The Power of Robert Simpson'.

As the composer recalled that event more than six years later, he mentioned that the Fifth Symphony came about as the result of commission from the LSO. I asked, in all innocence, how many times they had played it, after having greeted it with such enthusiasm at its premiere. 'Not once since then. The Symphony has not been performed again at all in this country although it has been given, once, by the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra under a conductor called Nohejl. Somebody in Czechoslovakia seems to like what I write. But the LSO have not played it since, and there are no plans for performance that I know of.

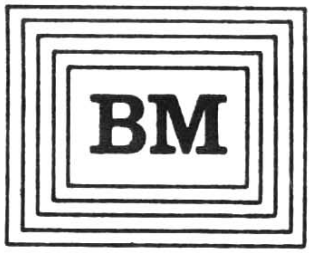
'No, it doesn't depress me. Of course, I would like to hear it performed occasionally, but think of Beethoven - how litte acknowledgment he got. His Fourth Piano Concerto was performed only once during his lifetime and that's when he performed it himself. No-one else played it, but now it is one of the most popular works in the whole repertoire. If that could happen to Beethoven, who am I to complain?'

Robert Simpson was born in Leamington on March 2nd, 1921, the son of a British father and Dutch mother. When a young man he studied the trumpet with George Eskdale: 'I was a very good trumpet player', he remarked in passing, and those who know the soaring trumpet lines in the First Symphony of 1951, once recorded by Sir Adrian Boult and the LPO for EMI, will recognise that they are written by a musician with an intimate understanding of the instrument's capabilities and the commanding effects it can produce. 'I'm still interested in brass. I wrote the test piece for the 1971 World Brass Band Championship. I called it Energy, he said, smiling at the appropriateness of the title. 'I've written the one for the National Contest this October. It's a ten-minute piece' - the smile broadened - 'called Volcano. Just imagine hearing a piece called Volcano twenty times. A bit shattering. I've not heard it all yet - you don't, you know, until they come out and play it. In a competition the composer isn't allowed in to rehearsals. No single band can be said to have the benefit of the composer's presence. I'll hear it for the first time in October'.

A work that Simpson failed to mention was the brooding, mesmeric Canzona of 1958, written for four trumpets, three trombones and tuba, which has the distinction of being the most frequently recorded of all his works: twice, to be precise, once by the Locke Brass Consort on RCA RL 25981 [re-issued as GL25308 - Ed.] and again by the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble on Ace of Diamonds SDD 274.

That piece, like all of Simpson's music, relies strongly upon tonality. Although it is difficult to needle the composer into speaking ill of anyone, a devoted needler might conceivably succeed if he were to concentrate upon the subject of Schoenberg and the twelve-note composers. They do not attract Robert Simpson, and his remarks forecast the eventual demise of the concept: 'Twelve-notery has had its day. It is barren. Moribund. Tonality is one of the great natural resources and a composer abandons it at his peril because he deprives himself of a powerful means of expression'.

Leaving aside Schoenberg with relief, having established that he is one of Simpson's most unfavourite composers -'I should like to maroon my greatest enemy on that over-populated desert island with the music of Schoenberg, but I suspect he might enjoy the experience' - Robert Simpson gave some thoughts about other 20th-century composers. 'I



THE BRITISH MUSIC SOCIETY

BRITISH MUSIC IN A WIDER CONTEXT

Robert Simpson can be counted amongst some of the more fortunate British composers who have societies dedicated to their music. The majority of British composers have no dedicated following and little hope of their music ever being performed. Some argue that much British music is not worthy of performance, and the best place for it is to gather dust on some library shelf. This argument may sound only if the person making it has had at least access to all the material he dismisses. There does, however, seem to be a need to make music available for discussion and performance before it can be dismissed. The British Music Society aims to provide that service by promoting our musical heritage.

Recently formed, the British Music Society has already established a place for itself with its much acclaimed Journal which highlights forgotten composers. The Society's Newsletter keep members informed of happenings in the world of British Music. This season the Society has been instrumental in promoting no less than thirteen concerts and recitals. If you would like more details about the activities of the B.M.S. and full membership details, send a stamped addressed envelope to:

Ian Bown,
Membership Secretary,
British Music Society,
65 Royal Oak Road,
Bexleyheath,
KENT.

dislike a lot of Mahler but I appreciate him most when he composes really vigorously. Some of his Scherzos are very concentrated. Shostakovich is an important figure but not a great composer. He owed a lot to Mahler, but when you take the most Mahler-like of Shostakovich's movements and compare them with the real thing it will be found that Mahler's are the more concentrated'. Of living composers, Sir Michael Tippett, created a Companion of Honour in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in June 1979, drew unstinting admiration from Simpson, as did Edmund Rubbra - 'There is no attempt to play to the gallery. His language is uncompromising and deeply impressive' - 'the very gifted' John McCabe and Ronald Stevenson, 'and, of course, Vagn Holmboe'. For the rest, Simpson, in a characteristic phrase, put his finger on what he feels is lacking: 'The alienated pseudo-intellectual fashions of the present day tend to reduce many artists of all kinds to anonymity'.

Robert Simpson will probably never write an opera, although he is by no means opposed to the form. His god is Beethoven, and of course Fidelio is his favourite, others he admires being those of Mozart and Berlioz, and Verdi's Falstaff; but it is The Mastersingers that he singled out for special comment. 'Wagner was in the middle of The Ring when he stopped to write The Mastersingers, and all his egotism seemed to disappear. It is an incredible masterpiece'.

Simpson has a problem with setting words. 'They scare me. I don't want to spoil them. It's the same for opera and for songs. If I feel deeply enough about a text or a poem (and I would have to feel deeply to be moved to set it in the first place) I would be afraid that anything I could do to words would spoil their effect. And if they are great words they don't need music anyway. Oh, yes, I wrote a Motet a few years ago, but I wrote words for that myself: Media Morte in vita sumus, which means "in the midst of death we are in life".' While philosophers thrash out the significance of that one we will note in passing that the chorus in this Motet is accompanied by brass and timpani only, a spareness, cleanness and forthrightness of scoring and concentration of form typical of the majority of Simpson's works. In fact, his economical scoring and concentration of form are closely paralleled in his conversation: let your attention wander for a moment and you will miss statements of vital importance.

He speaks softly, precisely, choosing his words with care and yet maintaining fluency, surely a mark of deeply-considered, clear-cut philosophical conclusions. His dark, rather intense eyes can be a little unnerving as they gaze penetratingly at his listener, yet there is a reserved warmth and humanity in them that is reflected in his philosophy, his beliefs and his hopes.

'Yes, I suppose I am in accord with Scandinavian culture' agreed the composer of the incidental music to Ibsen's play The Pretenders, the author of the standard book in English on the music of Carl Nielsen and the holder of the Carl Nielsen Gold Medal. 'I am attracted to the humane attitude of the Scandinavians. After all, they were the first to abolish capital punishment. They have a severe climate to conquer, yet they have conquered it and gone on to become the most humane and nearly civilised people in the world. Humaneness is of prime importance'. It was a statement of ultimate fact. There was appended to it no qualifying or weakening '...to me'. The conclusion had been arrived at, one felt, through long torments of study upon what we so-called humans do to each other. 'The way we behave towards each other is

vital. Nothing we do disappears: therefore, everything we do, however trivial it seems, is important. We are changing each other just by sitting here and talking now. Whoever we are, when we die we leave behind the effects of everything we have done - so in a sense we don't die. That's what's meant by Media morte in vita sumus. Unless the human race produces enough individuals of the requisite quality, it is doomed. I hope it will: I do my best to be optimistic but I'm also sceptical. The only faith I have is in quality and the belief that humanity's greatest gift is the ability to ask questions'.

Robert Simpson had until recently a demanding position as a BBC Music Producer [RS set out the reasons for his resignation in a letter that appeared in The Times on 18 July 1980. -Ed.], and he is in demand for lectures and courses, including the yearly, popular courses at Missenden Abbey. The rest of his leisure time is taken up entirely with composing. In addition to seven Symphonies ('An Eighth is buzzing around in my head at the moment'), a Piano Concerto, a Violin Concerto, Incidental Music, piano works and his brass band pieces, there are several important chamber works, among them a Clarinet Trio, a Quartet scored (uniquely) for horn and piano trio, and a Clarinet Quintet.

After the first three String Quartets (1952-4) there was a gap of nearly twenty years before Simpson returned to the form, and then it was to tackle it in an original way, so original, in fact, that he was obliged to explain to me several times, with infinite patience, precisely what his intentions are. The 4th, 5th and 6th Quartets of 1973-5 are modelled upon Beethoven's three Razumovsky Quartets. The structures of Beethoven's works have been analysed, not by thematic allusion but by 'feeling my way into them and trying to produce musical analogies in my own language. It is a dangerous thing to attempt, but I learned a lot by doing it.' It is my guess that the listener who thinks that he knows the Razumovsky Quartets will also learn a lot.

'No, I don't compose at the piano. I'm a bad pianist. I admitted this years ago to Dohnányi. "But you can't compose unless you play the piano", he said. "What about Berlioz?" I objected: 'He didn't play the piano". "Berlioz is not a composer", said Dohnányi. End of conversation.'

As a member of the British Astronomical Association and Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, it seemed unlikely that Simpson's earlier comment about his leisure time being taken up entirely with composition was strictly true. When tackled on the point he made characteristic light of his own achievements and promptly turned the spotlight on to someone else: 'Yes, I'm interested in astronomy. I like to try to find out where I am. My idol is Einstein. What a man. Get a photograph - look at his face. The generous humility in those eyes.'

The recording companies have not dealt kindly with Robert Simpson, and, for that matter, the BBC, which possesses tapes of many of his works, seems reluctant to broadcast them. It is understandable, I suppose, though regrettable that the BBC must avoid appearing nepotistic towards one of its own staff. Simpson's position there militated against, rather than in favour of, performances. [Now, of course, this does not hold true, and the BBC, with broadcasts of the Second Symphony and the First and Fourth String Quartets, has begun to remedy this omission. -Ed.] In addition to the Boult recording of the First Symphony and the discs including the Canzona for brass already

mentioned, only three other works have reached the record shops, and all via the artistic perception of John Goldsmith of Unicorn: the First String Quartet of 1951, a most rewarding and approachable work, well played by the Aeolian Quartet and nicely recorded on Unicorn UNS 234, the Clarinet Quartet on the same disc, for which Bernard Walton joins the Aeolian Quartet, and the Third Symphony conducted by Jascha Horenstein on Unicorn UNS 225. [Symphony No. 3 and the Clarinet Quintet have been re-issued on UNS 262, and Energy and Volcano have also been recorded.-Ed.] Initially a forbidding work, Symphony No. 3 has about it a tense tonal logic that, once one begins to glimpse the workings of the composer's mind, falls into sharp focus, removing the forbidding element to leave a sharp-edged structure of polished granite, cold but brilliant and with overwhelming strength. If the Fifth Symphony were to be heard again, perhaps someone connected with records might sense its even more powerful message and bring this vital music to a wider public. Alternatively, perhaps Artium, the valuable BBC series of discs, will overcome the corporations's false modesty and do for Simpson what it has already done for Daniel Jones (his symphonies Nos 8 and 9 are on REGL 359) and promises to do for George Lloyd.

Good intentions sometimes unfortunately collapse. An annoucement was made by RCA some four years ago that they were planning to record Robert Simpson's Symphony No 2. In fact, it was agreed that the composer should write a Seventh Symphony to go on the reverse side. 'It was not difficult to write "to one-side-length". Once the scale had established itself in my mind the rest fell into place'. The Seventh Symphony was duly completed, but where is the record? May we take it that it will grace some monthly release list in the near future? Sceptical optimism is again called for. Perhaps in the meantime some other adventurous company will put RCA to shame.

Before the Eighth Symphony crystallises (to be studiously ignored, no doubt, by a record industry busily recording Eroicas and Rites of Spring for a saturated market), Robert Simpson has finished a Sonata for two pianos for Bracha Eden and Alexander Tamir. Then, who knows? Commissions might come along, like the one for the String Quartet No 8 for Brunel University, which was played there by the Delme Quartet during a series of eight concerts last May that included all his string quartets, Beethoven's three Razumovsky's together with the last five, and the entire Art of Fugue, arranged by Simpson for string quartet. But regardless of commissions Robert Simpson will feel the need to compose just as acutely as others feel the need to breathe. This inner compulsion to communicate with his fellow man through music is one that he shares with his god Beethoven, but that is not the only similarity between the two composers.

'If I were condemned to compose only one kind of music', said Robert Simpson, 'it would be string quartets'.

ROBERT DEARLING

This is a slightly revised version of an article that appeared in Records and Recording in October 1979. Reprinted by kind permission of the author and the editor, Charles Ross.

LIST OF ROBERT SIMPSON'S WORKS

Publisher: Alfred Lengnick & Co., unless otherwise stated

COMPOSITION	FIRST PERFORMED BY	DATE * APPROX. DURATION
SYMPHONY No.1 (1951) 3(1).2.2.2+1. 4. 2 B flat trpts. + 2 D trpts. 3.1. Timps. Stgs. (Recorded by HMV)	Danish Radio Symphony Orch. Grondahl	11.6.53 * 25.00
SYMPHONY No. 2 (1956) 2.2.2.2. 2.2.0.0. Timps. Stgs.	Halle Orch./Barbirolli	16.7.57 * 30.00
SYMPHONY No.3. (1962) 3(3).2.2.2+1. 4.2.3.1. Timps. Perc.(1). Stgs. (Recorded by Unicorn)	City of Birmingham S.O./ Rignold	14.3.63 * 33.00
SYMPHONY No.4 (1972) 3(3).2.2.2+1. 4.4.3.1. Timps. Perc.(2). Stgs.	Halle Orch./Loughran	26.4.73 * 47.00
SYMPHONY No.5 (1972) 3(3).3.2+1. 4.2 B flat trpts. 2 D trpts. 2 Trombones. 2 bass trombones. 2 tubas. Timps (2 players, one each side of orch.). Perc. (2). Stgs.	L.S.O./Andrew Davis	3.5.73 * 38.00
SYMPHONY No.6 (1977) Picc. 2.2.2+1. 2+1. 4.3.3.1. Timp. Perc. (3) Stgs.	L.P.O./Sir Charles Groves	8.4.80 * 30.00
SYMPHONY No.7 (1977) 2.2.2.2. 2.2.0.0. Timp. Stgs. (Publisher: Scotus Music Publications Ltd.)		* 25.00
PIANO CONCERTO (1967) 3(3).2.2.2+1. 4.3.3.1 Timps. Perc.(2). Stgs.	John Ogdon, C.B.S.O./Rignold (Cheltenham Festival)	14.7.67 * 22.00
VIOLIN CONCERTO (1959) 3(1).2.2.2. 4.2.3.1. Timps. Perc.(1). Stgs.	Ernest Element, C.B.S.O./ Boult	25.2.60 * 39.00
STRING QUARTET No.1 (1952) (Recorded by Unicorn)	Element Quartet	30.3.53 * 26.00
STRING QUARTET No.2 (1953)	Element Quartet	11.6.54 * 15.00

STRING QUARTET No.3 (1954)	Element Quartet	11.2.55 * 23.00
STRING QUARTET No. 4 (1973)	Gabrieli Quartet	First b'cast 27.1.80** * 44.02
STRING QUARTET No.5 (1974)	Gabrieli Quartet	First b'cast 3.2.8.** * 44.00
STRING QUARTET No.6 (1975)	Gabrieli Quartet	First b'cast 10.2.80** * 36.00
STRING QUARTET No.7 (1977)	Gabrieli Quartet	11.9.77 * 22.00
STRING QUARTET No.8 (1979) (Publisher: Scotus)	Delme Quartet	21.6.80 * 30.00
VARIATIONS AND FINALE ON A THEME OF HAYDN, for piano (1948)	Lamar Crowson	14.12.55 * 20.00
PIANO SONATA (1946)	Harold Truscott	London 1947 * 20.00
SONATA FOR TWO PIANOS (1980)	(Written for Bracha Eden and Alexander Tamir)	9.2.81 (Projected 1st recording) * 25.00
ALLEGRO DECISO, for string orchestra, (from String Quartet No.3)		* 11.00
CANZONA for Brass (1958) (Recorded by Decca and RCA) 4 trpts. 3 trombones. 1 tuba	Philip Jones Brass Ensemble	27.3.58 (Overseas Service) * 5.00
VARIATIONS AND FUGUE for recorder and string quartet (1959) (MS)	Carl Dolmetsch/Martin Quartet	9.2.59
TRIO for clarinet, cello and piano (1967)	Gervase de Peyer/William Pleeth/ Peter Wallfisch	First b'cast 2.1.69 * 23.00
QUINTET for clarinet and strings (1968) (Recorded by Unicorn)	Melos Ensemble	First b'cast 30.1.69 * 30.00

QUARTET for horn, violin, cello and piano (1975)	Music Group of London	1st UK perf. 9.5.77 (First played in Hong Kong) * 32.00
INCIDENTAL MUSIC TO IBSEN'S 'THE PRETENDERS' (1965) (MS) 3(1).2.2.2.+1. 4.3.3.1. Timps. S. Drum.	1st perf. with play on CBC, 1966	First b'cast in this country 18.4.71 (Entr'acte only)
'ENERGY', Symphonic Study for brass band (Test piece for 1971 world Championship) (Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes; recorded by EMI)		9.10.71 * 9.30
'VOLCANO', Symphonic Study for brass band (Test piece for 1979 National Championship) (Publisher: Rosehill Music Publisher Co. Ltd.; recorded by Chandos)		6.10.79 * 11.00
MEDIA MORTE IN VITA SUMUS (Motet for choir, brass, and timpani) (1975) (MS)	Aylesbury Choral Society Charles Pope	3.4.76 * 12.00
INCIDENTAL MUSIC TO MILTON'S 'SAMSON AGONISTES' (1974) (MS)	Kneller Hall Brass Players	Chalfont St Giles 1974

** 1st performances
pre-recorded

GUIDE TO INSTRUMENTATION:

Woodwind always first: i.e., 2.2.2.2. means 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons. 2(1).2.2.(1).1. means 2 flutes, one doubling piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, one doubling bass clarinet, and 1 bassoon.
2+1. 2+1. 2.2. means: 2 flutes plus 1 piccolo, 2 oboes plus one cor anglais, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons.

Then comes the brass: 4.2.3.1. means 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, and 1 tuba. Extra instruments are indicated in full.

The number of percussion players is indicated in brackets: e.g. Perc. (2).

ANGELA MUSGRAVE

TWO EARLY PIANO WORKS BY ROBERT SIMPSON

The early works of a composer are often valuable in showing the roots of his musical language. Here is the Sonata of 1946 with the Variations and Finale on a Theme of Haydn of 1948. Each has its own integrity and is enjoyable in its own right; and it is clear that the composer has already developed a distinctive musical voice. There is a natural line of development from these to his later pieces. The music 'means' nothing, for it does not have to: it simply 'is'.

This music is tonal; that is, key centres exist or are established. The harmony is largely triadic, but a simple chord may be a point of rest or part of the path of a flight, sometimes very alien to its surroundings. Complex chords frequently are simple chords sounded together. There is a strong linear or horizontal element, lines which sing and propel the music forward. The roots of this counterpoint lie in Bach, Haydn and Beethoven, but there never is counterpoint just for its own sake, or lines that prop each other up like the frame of a wooden hut: pull one out, and the rest collapses. No: each voice is meant to be heard. Every age presumes the insights (perhaps a better word would be 'inhearings') of its ancestors; knowing them intimately, there is always the tendency to compress them, or combine them in new ways. This is musical evolution without need for musical revolution; it may even be conservation. Still, it demands full attention - as contemporaries found with Beethoven.

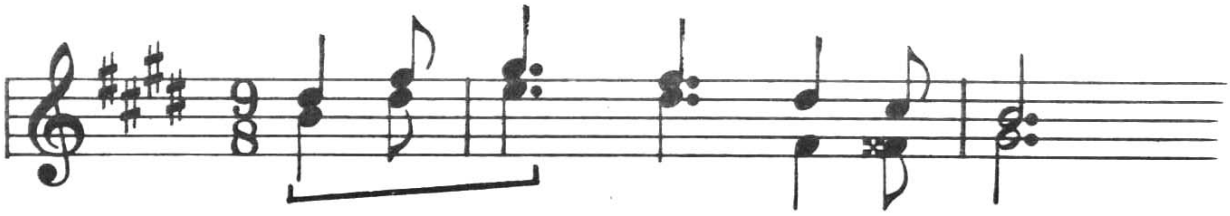
Something interesting is certainly to be found going on; however, above all each piece is a poem. In listening to Simpson's music, the inner ear quickly detects a strong current, propelling the musical argument. The openings may be very simple, as simple as the cliche which opens the Fifth Symphony of Sibelius, but memorable and perhaps hiding a musical paradox; the endings come about with a sense of total inevitability, never too long or too short.

Robert Simpson found these essentials early, and has never needed to leave them. Those who know the later music will find many personal fingerprints - it is best to leave the discovery to the listener - while an unclouded ear will sense that this music is, above all, an experience.

These two pieces stand either side of a significant watershed in the musical experience of the composer. This is not immediately apparent from the music itself; the new experience effected no mere superficial insight, rather it stirred the roots and gave courage. We are reminded of Plato's doctrine that knowledge is recollection; the new released what was already there. The experience came from a broadcast of Carl Nielsen's Sinfonia Espansiva in 1947, leading to a broader acquaintance with Nielsen's music.

The outward shape of the piano Sonata of 1946 is normal, an Allegro molto moderato in E major, a middle Molto adagio e tranquillo leading directly to an Allegro vivace finale which finally ends in E Major. Despite the use of expected key-signatures in the outer movements, there is nothing inevitable about this key at the outset. The opening figure, unremarkable on paper, is tonally ambiguous when

heard: it pulls towards the dominant, B. Place beside it this opening of the hymn-tune Morningside, quoted at Simpson's own pitch-class, and it hardly seems to be in E at all:



Simpson

From this tension, the key of E needs to be fully established; the opening figure returns often, ending the first movement, silent in the second, but returning in an expanded form at the start of the finale. The end of the slow movement and the end of the finale are likewise closely parallel: movement from dominant to tonic is interrupted by a flourish in a key a major third away. These movements are completely balanced; C major is interrupted by A flat major, E major by C major. This kind of recall does not depend on any sense of absolute pitch, merely on the recall of a basic interval which played a structural part very conspicuously in the slow movement; as Nielsen once remarked, the intervals are the musical features which the ear first notices.

The music flows naturally in the quicker movements; and the middle movement shows Simpson to great advantage as a writer of an adagio in the tradition of Beethoven and Bruckner. Though not long, it engenders vastness. This is partly due to the spare use of notes. The sense of C major as an undeflectable key is gradually built, until nothing can stop it; when that happens, the movement sinks to its end.

The Variations and Finale of 1948 takes the curious palindromic theme of a minuet that Haydn used twice, in the Symphony No. 47 in G, and in the Piano Sonata in A (H. 26, Landon 41). In part, the peculiar tensions of this theme arise because the ten-bar sentence subdivides rather differently when played backwards. The plosive opening of every note played on a piano also make the return journey rather different. Here then are two kinds of double-entendre which may be exploited. Haydn repeats each refrain of the minuet, and Simpson takes the repeats, but not always. The result runs in segments, without bridges of any kind, except when two or three variations run into each other.

The key of A major is never in much doubt, though the ambiguities of A minor are reached in the comic march. The next variation is two for the price of one: simple arpeggios in the major are played at the same time as a running tune in the minor; the tune is below the accompaniment. At this point simple decoration and play are left far behind; noticeably, an F natural is prominent. A further double-entendre has entered the scene, and the fifth variation is a mighty sequence of strange chords, to be played 'as slow as possible'; the repeats are abandoned, for 'less is more'. Only the pianist's nerve and ear determine how long it might last; yet the chords are largely triads-plus-one, with doublings. Three slow, very quiet variations follow, gradually adding couterpoint, but remaining very subdued con sordino. The theme has a brilliance which has thus been suppressed; it bursts out glorioso (not so marked in the score - it

hardly needs to be) in two variations, the second of which is a decoration and expansion of the first; the repeats return, and a presto heralds the final rugged variation, which is full of harmonic ambiguities. The F natural has in no way been absorbed; so the piece cannot end at this point; indeed, there is the expectation of a very long coda indeed.

The theme, as such, is left behind; in its place, a widely spaced arpeggio and much stepwise movement. Haydn has given place to Beethoven. A tiny reference to the theme, the coda is fully reached, and the piece is over.

BRIAN DUKE

SIMPSON ANTAGONISTES

Your correspondent suggests that the Tate's pile of bricks might serve a good purpose in angering people into articulating their real feelings about proper art. By the same token we would be more conscious of the real value of public lavatories if more people used public transport for basic purposes.

(Letter to The Listener, dated 28.x.77 - not printed.)

Those responsible for degenerative processes are inevitably the last to recognise them.

(Letter to the Chairman of the BBC, 23.viii.80)

Nielsen may well prove to be not on the sidelines (as some would have it) but on a clear by-pass that will get him past the confused tangle of industry that is at present causing the worst artistic traffic jam in history.

(Postscript on Nielsen, Radio 3, 1969)

You can easily baffle other people by first baffling yourself.

The professional opinionist will describe a specially alienated new work as being 'in an advanced idiom'. Surely you've heard that ringing phrase? But what the hell is an advanced idiom? Only an advanced idiot could tell you that.

(Any Advance?, Radio 3, 1975)

Though there are Hanslicks still with us, they can no longer trouble him.

(The Essence of Bruckner, Gollancz)

Schoenberg did not ruin the art of music. There is no such thing in the abstract - there are only composers. His influence may have ruined some of these, but so did that of every strikingly powerful artistic personality. Those who were so ruined would in any case have been unable to do anything of great consequence. Every artist's 'language' is private until it is understood by somebody else.

Schoenberg's music happens to express (with great precision) a certain state of consciousness. Many hate it (as I do) but we must not assume that he has thereby ruined the possibility for someone else to express something else. Some states of mind are more comprehensive that others, and this is the criterion by which I would evaluate the relative achievements of artists of comparable talent. Most of the 'great' twentieth-century artists (not only musicians) suffer, in one form or another, from the limitations imposed by the over-cultivation of personal distinguishing marks. This means, basically, that they are intimidated into producing defence mechanisms. By what? By certain very strong trends of thought and feeling that seem to them characteristic of their time; Schoenberg was himself too much a victim to have 'ruined' anything. We must try to evaluate talent by what statements it makes about life as well as by its own skills, and not get lost in wasteful discussions about raw materials - chromaticism, diatonicism, atonality, and the rest. These should be the private elements in the composer's thinking. He can use what means he likes, and should not like most of his contemporary colleagues, merely 'reflect' life; he should change it for the better if he can. There is no life in a mirror.

(Letter to The Listener, 23.xi.67,
answer to an attack on Schoenberg)

We must be very cautious about worshipping the gods that such an age as ours throws up.

The abrogation of the artist's authority is the snuffing out of his life. He becomes a symptom of a sickness, the smell of the corpse. I don't want to be either of these things, even if I end up as useful compost.

No-one born deaf could ever be a composer, though if it could happen, now is the time.

Scepticism's very important - it should be taught in schools.

('The ferociously anti-pessimist composer', Radio 3, 12.v.71;
published in The Listener under the title 'Against Lipsius')

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