

TONIC

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ROBERT SIMPSON SOCIETY

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<i>Editorial</i>	1
Robert Matthew-Walker, <i>Robert Simpson 1921-1997 - a memoir</i>	2

EDITORIAL

The delay of the present issue of *Tonic* was caused by the preparation of one of the two substantial books on Robert Simpson that have been published this year. At the Annual General Meeting I was able to present the very first copies of *Robert Simpson: Composer – Essays, Interviews, Recollections*,¹ and only three months later, Donald Macauley's authorized biography, *The Power of Robert Simpson*,² was out. We very much hope that these two important publications will give the appreciation of Robert Simpson and his music a new boost. In this connection a word of thanks must of course go to our Patron Angela Simpson, who supported both books wholeheartedly and whose positive feelings towards the Robert Simpson Society make so many things possible.

But before the year is over I considered it important to come back to *Tonic*. While I waited for some material from our archive at the Bodleian Library Oxford, kindly supplied by Martin Holmes, which I now intend to use in next year's issue, I got into contact with Robert Matthew-Walker who, as you may know, wrote one of the first-ever books on Robert Simpson's symphonies, a book that has taken me several years to obtain.³

In one e-mail Robert attached 'my unpublished memoir of Bob if you are interested which I wrote about a dozen years ago'.⁴ While reading it, I became instantly aware that we have here the kind we would like to receive for our archive, or even for publication, from readers who knew Robert Simpson personally. Personal recollections are, apart from original letters and writings, an important testimony of the life and times of a personality, and if the connections are as close as will be seen on the following pages, I think their publication is worthwhile indeed.

We cannot close this year's *Tonic* without a few words of thanks: first and most sincerely, to John McCabe CBE, who had to relinquish his position as President of the Robert Simpson Society due to ill health, and to David Matthews, who has accepted to be his successor on 8 August 2013.

Jürgen Schaarwächter

¹ *Robert Simpson: Composer – Essays, Interviews, Recollections*, ed. by Jürgen Schaarwächter, Hildesheim/Zurich/New York: Georg Olms, 2013, 560 pp.

² Donald Macauley, *The Power of Robert Simpson: A Biography*, Bloomington (Indiana): Xlibris, 2013, 424 pp.

³ *The Symphonies of Robert Simpson*, ed. by Robert Matthew-Walker, London: Alfred Lengnick, 1991, 73 pp.

⁴ E-mail dated 14 September 2013.

Robert Matthew-Walker

ROBERT SIMPSON

(1921-1997)

- a memoir

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In writing this memoir, although it is in no way 'official' or 'authorised', I have, from time to time, had to call upon the help of two of Robert Simpson's publishers, Messrs Alfred Lengnick & Co Ltd and Faber Music Ltd, for various courtesies, and I should also like to thank Mark Doran for his practical help and encouragement - and for making the initial suggestion which led to this book.

Additionally, thanks are due to my friends Robert Giddings, who took the photograph of Peter Jacobs with Robert Simpson, which is reproduced here for the first time, the late Ted Perry of Hyperion Records Ltd and his son Simon, John Waite of Pavilion Records Ltd, Beresford King-Smith, Martin J. Anderson - who read the manuscript and made many valuable suggestions - and to the late Denby Richards, editor of *Musical Opinion*, for permission to quote from material I had written which originally appeared in that journal.

R.M.-W.

FOREWORD

The death of Robert Simpson in a hospital near his Irish home on November 21st, 1997 from kidney failure, marked not only the end of more than six years of progressive, degenerative suffering for him, following a stroke in 1991, but also the conclusion of a creative life of notable integrity and single-mindedness which affected many of those who came into contact with him.

I was one such person, having known Robert Simpson for forty years. Our association was intermittent and never what might be termed particularly close, yet familiar enough for him to describe me once in print as „my old friend“, a comment I much appreciated, for I had always admired him immensely both as a composer and as a writer on great music.

In the following pages, I have put down all I can remember of my privileged friendship with Robert Simpson. The reader should not expect to find a detailed discussion of Simpson's works: such writings lie outside the scope of this essay, and the interested reader will find outstanding analyses principally in the writings of John Pickard (whose doctoral thesis was on the Robert Simpson Symphonies) and in published pieces by Simon Phillipppo, Lionel Pike, Matthew Taylor and others.

Broadly speaking, I have set out my memories of Simpson in chronological order, and they are published in the hope that – in the knowledge that he became one of the finest British composers of the twentieth-century as well as one of its finest writers on music – they may, in some small way, contribute to the understanding of aspects of a rare musician.

Robert Matthew-Walker

CHAPTER I

OPENINGS

Robert Wilfred Levick Simpson was born in what is officially called Royal Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, on March 2nd, 1921. One says 'officially', for to him – a fervent republican – he disliked the 'Royal', and always referred to the town as 'Leamington'. Simpson's family moved to London when he was still a child, in which city he lived for over 40 years. Simpson's father was a doctor, as were others of his forebears on his father's side, including Sir James Simpson, obstetrician to Queen Victoria and the discoverer of the use of chloroform. A statue to James Simpson can be seen in Princes Street, Edinburgh. Simpson's mother's family was Dutch, and his mother's father was intensely musical. Simpson naturally believed that he inherited his musical gifts from his mother's branch of the family.

Although Simpson's musicality manifested itself in childhood, his parents assumed that he would follow the family's medical tradition. However, as a pupil at Westminster City School, he joined a local brass band, in which he played the cornet. One day a trombonist in the band brought a new kind of trombone with a built-in 'saliva emptier' instead of the normal key. It transpired that when the band marched through the streets, this fellow would place the instrument on the road, click on the device, and the saliva would run out. This practice did not endear him much to the other musicians and justice prevailed when, on one particular march, he placed his instrument on the road to find that he had jammed it well and truly in a convenient tram-line. The band went marching on – minus a much-troubled trombonist!

The young Simpson also joined an amateur orchestra, as second trumpet; one day, rehearsing a performance of Haydn's 'Farewell' Symphony, the conductor decided to emulate the circumstances of the first performance. He told the players to leave the platform, during the finale, as they finished playing. The symphony was to conclude the first half of the concert, the second half of which was to begin with Beethoven's *Leonore* No 3 Overture. At first, all went well, but during the symphony the orchestra's first trumpeter left by the wrong door, behind which were piled the cases for the cellos and double-basses at the top of the stairs. The lights were off, and in the dark the trumpeter, trying to get away for an early break before the interval, collided with the cases, sending them crashing down the stairs, the noise and his cries completely drowning the two solo violins *pianissimo* in the concert-hall, who were desperately trying to stifle their giggles – made worse by the silent fury of the conductor.

Worse was to come. The conductor had insisted that the trumpeter play the fanfare towards the end of *Leonore* No 3 off-stage – behind the same door. On preparing for his entry, with the cases now replaced at the top of the stairs during the interval, the trum-

peter once more lost his footing, and just as the conductor signalled dramatically to the invisible player, instead of hearing the fanfare the audience was treated to an encore of the previous accident, the hapless musician now tumbling down the stairs on top of the cases once more! As may be imagined, Simpson never forgot this introduction to public orchestral performance.

Robert Simpson continued to explore music during the 1930s. In a memorable opening passage to his Foreword to Erwin Doernberg's book *The Life and Symphonies of Anton Bruckner* (Barrie and Rockliff, London, 1960), Simpson recalled his own first encounter with Bruckner's music: 'as a schoolboy twiddling the knobs of a radio, I heard some extraordinarily spacious and noble music coming from an unidentified source in Germany'. The music was Bruckner's Second Symphony. 'The effect of its breadth and grandeur has remained with me ever since', Simpson continued, and his lifelong enthusiasm for Bruckner's work was fired from that moment.

Simpson's parents' determination that their son should study to become a doctor obliged him to pursue medicine for two years. It seems that he might have made a success of it had not the pull of music been so strong. His family did not take kindly to his change of discipline, but Simpson was adamant, and it was soon apparent to his parents that it would be useless to try to stop him.

He took private lessons from Herbert Howells for some years, beginning in 1942, and he was encouraged also by Granville Bantock. As a pacifist during World War II, Simpson willingly played his part in fire-watching and in medical work, where his now abandoned studies proved invaluable, still finding the odd moment to continue his musical pursuits, principally with Howells, and at the end of the War Simpson took his Mus Bac at Durham. His earliest surviving compositions date from this time, including his splendidly mature Piano Sonata, which was premiered by Harold Truscott - and among early pianists who also tackled the Sonata was Robert Layton.

At this time, also, Simpson began lecturing in music at evening classes in London - such classes being a notable feature of post-war adult education in Britain - using gramophone records to illustrate his talks. It was very probably through these lectures that he developed his admirable manner of speaking about music in unaffected, day-to-day language.

In 1946, at the age of 25, Simpson began his First Symphony, which was, initially, planned as a large solo piano piece, the opening of which he showed to Harold Truscott. It was Truscott who was instrumental in introducing Simpson to the music of Carl Nielsen, and it was the impact of hearing Nielsen's *Sinfonia Espansiva* in a 1947 BBC broadcast that bowled Simpson over. As Simpson told me in 1959, without a trace of vanity, 'I thought it inconceivable that such music could exist without my knowledge'. Coming into contact with Nielsen's symphonies, allied to Truscott's deep understanding of the music, knowledge he readily shared with Simpson (which did much to help broaden Simpson's scholarship) led to the younger man's life-long admiration for, and practical championship of, the music of Nielsen, which was then virtually unknown outside Scandinavia.

Nielsen's neglect was compounded by the then-current fashion which venerated the music of Sibelius: some felt that there could not possibly exist *two* great Scandinavian symphonic masters who were contemporaries, one of whom everyone knew about, and the other of whom we were ignorant.

It took several years for the impact of the *Sinfonia Espansiva* to sink in. The composition of Simpson's own First Symphony (he had withdrawn four earlier efforts) was halted half-way through, until Simpson felt he had fully absorbed Nielsen's influence. With work on the Symphony now temporarily placed on one side, Simpson continued his independent study of the music of the great composers, and pursued his complementary gifts as a public speaker (and, later, broadcaster), as well as a penetrating writer, on music, in the latter field specialising in broadcast music for the challenging new quarterly *Music-Survey*.

This important publication had been founded in 1947 by its editors Hans Keller and Donald Mitchell. It brought Simpson into contact with, and he soon became one of, a brilliant group of immediate post-war commentators on music in Britain – including Harold Truscott, Hans Redlich and Paul Hamburger, amongst others, who each, in their inimitable way, made a notably valuable contribution to the musical life of this country.

It was through this journal that I first encountered Simpson's name. When I was about ten years old, I acquired some copies of *Music-Survey*, given to my mother by a musical neighbour, the contents of which – although I read them as avidly as I could – I could barely comprehend. Nevertheless, I kept at it, and during the coming months and years I would return again and again to these little journals (I still have them) and find my knowledge and understanding of music growing – but it was hard work! Yet, almost from the first, of all the *Music-Survey* contributors, it was Robert Simpson's writing I found the easiest to grasp – no doubt because his ideas were the most straightforwardly expressed. I soon found myself so absorbed by his writing that I could recall whole passages virtually word-for-word. Almost without my being fully aware of it, therefore, Robert Simpson became an important influence on my musical education from a very early age.

I especially remember him writing in one issue on the first broadcast, as a complete series on the BBC Third Programme, of the Bruckner Symphonies. Simpson condemned almost all of the broadcasts, but prophetically – in view of his own later career at the BBC – concluded with the comment: 'The series has not been a success; if such another takes place in the remote future, someone in the BBC must take Bruckner a little more seriously.'

In 1948, Simpson completed a second major piano work, which was to be his last important solo-piano piece for more than forty years. This was the *Variations and Finale on a Theme of Haydn*, in which Haydn's minuet theme is a palindrome (that is, one which can be played either forwards or backwards, and which half-way through, *al rovescio*, retraces its steps). The theme in question is one which Haydn himself is known to have used twice, in a Piano Sonata in A major, and in his Symphony No 47 in G major.

It is a compositional device to which Simpson returned in his First String Quartet (1951), Second Symphony (1956) and Ninth String Quartet (1983). Interestingly, this last

work also uses this same Haydn theme, and scores many of the variations for string quartet. In the piano *Variations and Finale* – as in the Ninth Quartet – every one of the variations is also palindromic.

When I produced a recording of this piano work at the Henry Wood Hall in the early 1980s with Peter Jacobs (with Simpson present – a recording that in the event, as we shall see, was never issued) I did not know of this aspect of the work, although I had toyed with it myself at the keyboard from time to time, and was astonished when Peter pointed it out to me. The music itself was so compelling that I had remained oblivious to its compositional subtlety, and I have occasionally wondered since if Simpson's own encouraging presence at the recording sessions for the *Variations and Finale on a Theme of Haydn* – and the concentration on this masterly early work of his that the recording naturally demanded – was the impetus which led him towards the composition of the Ninth Quartet, which Simpson began a short time afterwards.

It would appear that the *Variations and Finale on a Theme of Haydn* was not first heard publicly until December 1955, when Lamar Crowson played it, but I know that Harold Truscott had played the work privately and greatly admired the piece, which had been published by Alfred Lengnick & Co Ltd. Harold told me, very many years later, that it was the *Variations and Finale*, together with the earlier Piano Sonata, which 'truly convinced me that Robert Simpson is a major composer'. Here was an example, one amongst many, of Truscott's uncommon prescience in musical matters.

CHAPTER II

EARLY ENCOUNTERS

Robert Simpson was always determined to be a composer first and polemicist second. However, early in his post-war musical life, he founded the Exploratory Concert Society, which, as its name implies, was devoted to bringing worthwhile but neglected music to the public. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, much music which is now in the repertoire was quite unknown in England, even to specialists, and Simpson's championing of music which was either unjustly neglected by the Establishment or dismissed by the fashionable avant-garde remains one of his lasting achievements. Indeed, in some ways, it may well be that Simpson's support for, and practical championship of, composers such as Busoni, Medtner, Nielsen and Bruckner, amongst others, played a not insignificant part in their general acceptance today.

In 1950, Simpson succeeded Hubert Foss as chief record critic of *The Monthly Letter*, now defunct. This inimitable journal, issued by the legendary EMG Hand-Made Gramophone Shop, then based at 6 Newman Street in London's West End – one of the specialist dealers in classical records in the capital (all of which are now, sadly, long since gone) – became the most astute and feared record review magazine in the UK's classical record business. Simpson's reviews – like all in this journal – were published anonymously, apart from a remarkable review of Nielsen's Fourth Symphony in the early 1950s and a typically insightful piece for the Beethoven bicentenary in 1970, to both of which we shall refer later, but his individual prose-style was often identifiable, and his judgements on a vast range of music, far wider in sympathy than even his later admirers may imagine, have certainly stood the test of time, founded, as they were, upon the three most important attributes any music critic should possess – a knowledge of the work under discussion, an ability to tell the difference between good, bad and ordinary performances, and the ability to express their opinions in distinctive and communicative English – qualities which Simpson possessed in abundance. He demonstrated these in *The Monthly Letter* for October 1950, in reviews of Nielsen's Second, Third and Fifth Symphonies, and in January 1952, in which his review of the Launy Grøndahl HMV records of Nielsen's Fourth Symphony took the form of an extended analysis of the work, with five music examples (in a record review!). One mentions these early reviews particularly, as they presaged the chapters on those symphonies in Simpson's book on the composer, then in preparation.

1951 proved to be an important year for Simpson: now aged 30, he joined the music staff of the BBC under Sir Steuart Wilson, who was aware of the younger man's wide musical knowledge. Simpson also completed his First Symphony that year, which was dedicated to Sir Adrian Boult, and submitted it to Durham University for his doctorate (which was awarded in 1952). During the 1951 Festival of Britain year, Simpson also fin-

ished his ground-breaking book on Carl Nielsen's music. While working on the book, Simpson had travelled to Denmark and was introduced to members of Nielsen's family, particularly his daughter Anne Marie, which meetings marked the beginning of some lasting friendships. Much later, Simpson was deeply touched to receive Nielsen's pro-pelling pencil by Anne Marie, after which he wrote all his own music with it.

The publication of the book by Dent in 1952 was timely: at the Edinburgh Festival in 1950 Nielsen's Fifth Symphony had created a sensation, as did the Fourth at the Royal Festival Hall a year later (both were played by the Danish State Radio Symphony Orchestra). Records of Nielsen's major works were then starting to appear in Britain for the first time. Simpson's Nielsen book was dedicated to 'my friends in the Danish State Radio Symphony Orchestra' and his connexion with the Danish orchestra was further strengthened when they gave the first performance of his First Symphony in June 1953 under Launy Grøndahl.

Also in 1951, Simpson began his First String Quartet, which was completed the following year, and which – like the Symphony – juxtaposes two tonalities (A and E flat, the same tonalities in both the symphony and quartet) that are poles apart. The Quartet, in two movements, is dedicated to George Enescu, who Simpson had met in London during the Romanian's visit to conduct some BBC concerts in 1951, including Bach's B minor Mass, with Kathleen Ferrier and Peter Pears among the soloists (a recording of this has survived). Simpson produced this recording for broadcast and was keen to show his work to the great musician, and taking him several now withdrawn songs.

Simpson recalled to me some years later that, despite the unfamiliar idiom, Enescu at once sat down and played and sang them – settings of Schiller, Goethe and other poets, and almost all very tragic. Without discouraging Simpson, who in choosing these texts had taken on Schubert and Hugo Wolf – amongst others – Enescu said: 'Look, if you change those chords to this sequence, that will make them really sad.' It was Enescu's penetrating yet kindly remark, Simpson recalled, 'that made me realise I was not destined to be a song composer!'

The encounter with the great man made a deep impression upon Simpson, not least for Enescu's basic humility, despite his being, as Pablo Casals claimed, 'the greatest musical phenomenon since Mozart.' As mentioned earlier, Enescu accepted the dedication of Simpson's First String Quartet, offered in genuine admiration; I have no doubt that the older master would have been impressed by Simpson's masterly compositional stroke in the reprise, which occurs near the end of the second movement, of a poignant falling phrase initially heard at the outset of the first movement.

In 1956, commemorating his championship of Carl Nielsen's music, Simpson was awarded the Carl Nielsen Gold Medal in Copenhagen. Also in 1956, Simpson completed his Second Symphony, much of which was written during the previous year. He dedicated it to the conductor Anthony Bernard and his wife, Mary. Simpson's Second Symphony is a very different composition from the First, but no less distinguished. The Second Symphony is scored for a Haydn-Mozart sized orchestra – two each of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets (in D) and strings – and is in three movements,

each of which exhibits a number of unusual features. The ending of the first movement is described by the composer in a footnote as being 'in fact an 'active pause'' - achieved through an instruction to the conductor, who 'may, at his discretion, lengthen or shorten this passage....during which the music dwindles away. The tempo should be maintained strictly to the end, which should be scarcely audible'.

Perhaps the only other British music which ends thus is *Neptune*, which closes Holst's *The Planets*, although the music here is quite dissimilar. The second movement of the Symphony is a large-scale palindrome - the same device Simpson had used in the *Haydn Variations and Finale* of 1948 - although I was likewise unaware of this when in the late 1950s I first heard the Symphony performed, under Lawrence Leonard.

Quite clearly, *any* music can be palindromic, and it may be that some composers have used this technique in meeting commissioning or performing deadlines, by rewriting backwards the music they had thus far composed. In the slow movement of this Symphony, so clever is Simpson's artistry that the music makes perfect sense as it is. I was taken aback a little while later when the composer explained to me the structure of this movement. Intrigued by his example, I was to use the expedient myself shortly afterwards in a symphonic prelude for orchestra, *Orpheus Descending*, suggested by the Tennessee Williams play, but I found it an exceptionally difficult method with which to come to terms and I have used it only once since. The finale of Simpson's Second Symphony is headed with a note by the composer: 'N.B. If this movement lasts less than 8 minutes, it is too fast. R.S.' (!)

The Second Symphony was first performed on July 16th, 1957, at the Cheltenham Festival, by the Hallé Orchestra conducted by Sir John Barbirolli, and not by the dedicatee, Anthony Bernard - surely one of the few occasions when a new symphony, dedicated to one conductor, was first performed by another. One might have thought that the work's modest orchestral requirements (the same instrumentation as Beethoven calls for in his First Symphony) would have attracted several orchestras, but this fine work fell into neglect after a few years. It was, surely, indicative of the strength of Simpson's work that Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt selected this Second Symphony in his programme for a European exchange concert broadcast by the BBC in 1959 from Germany.

It was in 1957 that I first met Robert Simpson, when he agreed to become president of the Eltham Music Club, of which I was a member. Simpson was a staunch supporter of the gramophone society movement, which owed much to its founder in the 1930s, W.W. Johnson. Simpson gave many talks to societies, illustrated by the best recordings. His work as a record critic (although I am not sure he would have entirely approved of this description) with EMG naturally kept him up with the latest record releases.

I believe that Simpson had been present at the National Federation of Gramophone Societies' Conference at Hoddesdon in 1957 where he had met two officers of the Club, Derek Payne and Peter Laming, and these gentlemen had extended the invitation to him. I was surprised that he bothered to accept, frankly, for we were only a small music society that met in a room above a pub, *The Chequers*, in Eltham Hill, south-east London, whereas Simpson then lived in North London, in Muswell Hill, and - as at that time he

did not possess a car – his journey home had to be made by public transport. Since the Club meetings did not end until 10.30pm, the pub's 'closing time' under existing legislation, and last goodbyes were not said until some time after that, his journey home by public transport meant that he would not arrive home until quite late. He did not, of course, come to every meeting – perhaps two or three times a year – but he took his position in the Club seriously enough to make these kind and friendly gestures which were much appreciated by the members and which had long-term implications for me.

An embarrassing encounter at Simpson's first visit occurred during the interval of his talk. He had arrived at the meeting with a lady, clearly some years older than himself – and it should be remembered that then, with Simpson in his thirties, he looked several years younger than he was. During the interval, one of the female members of the Club went up to the lady and introduced herself. The lady replied that she was Mrs Simpson. 'How do you do,' said the member, 'I am sure you must be very proud of your son.' 'Oh, I'm not his mother – I'm his wife.' The young lady hardly knew where to look, but, sensing her dilemma at once, Mrs Simpson gently took her arm and said, 'Don't worry, many people have made that assumption and we're quite used to it.'

The HMV 10" long-playing record of Simpson's First Symphony [BLP 1092] by the London Philharmonic conducted by Sir Adrian Boult, and recorded under the auspices of the British Council, had then recently been issued. By way of 'introducing' Simpson to the Club, it was played at a meeting prior to his first visit. I was deeply impressed by the Symphony, and my admiration for the work has grown over the years. Edmund Rubbra, whom I was later also to get to know quite well, wrote in flattering terms of the Symphony in a review for the *EMG Monthly Letter* (I was to reprint Rubbra's piece in a book on Simpson's Symphonies I edited in 1990). Hugh Ottaway had also just written an article on the Symphony in *The Musical Times*, comparing the (then) two symphonies of Simpson, Iain Hamilton and Malcolm Arnold – but not of Peter Racine Fricker, another contemporary (the four composers were born within two years of one another) who had also written two symphonies by that time.

Having read what Rubbra had written, I obtained the disc, the miniature score of the Symphony published by Alfred Lengnick & Co Ltd, and Ottaway's piece and soon was able to get to know the work intimately. When Simpson visited the Club, I was keen to tell him of my enthusiasm for his Symphony; although he responded to my eagerness, much of what he had to say on this first visit, to me and to the Club's members in general, was about the composer Havergal Brian.

Simpson was keen to bring to our attention – encouraged to do so I believe by the Chairman, Derek Payne – the forthcoming broadcast by the BBC of Brian's Ninth Symphony, and spoke at some length of Brian and his neglect. It was an extraordinary story, of course, and it seemed to all of us then that if anyone was in a position to help Brian, it was surely Robert Simpson through his post at the BBC.

When Simpson fell ill a few months later I wrote to him on behalf of the Club and he invited me to visit him. Thereafter, I would visit the Simpsons' Muswell Hill home three or four times a year, visits to which I always looked forward – not least for hearing

music on his magnificent EMG high-fidelity equipment. I recall especially a splendid broadcast of Berlioz's *Benvenuto Cellini* under Antal Dorati one Sunday afternoon, and Bob (as I was at once asked to call him) saying 'You know, Berlioz saw himself as Cellini. The music is in many respects a self-portrait.' I now know the truth of this observation, which I do not recall having seen made then, anyway, by anyone else in print on the subject. It was during this visit that I also saw at first-hand Simpson's love and care for animals. He and his wife had a cat, and shortly after the Berlioz broadcast had finished, Mrs Simpson, known affectionately as 'Squib', came bustling in to say the cat had caught a bird in the garden. Simpson jumped from his seat and managed to free the bird, which he held 'like a tender baby in his hand' (to misquote slightly Jimmy Webb) before realising the shock was too much for it. He was visibly moved when the bird died as it lay in his palm, adding, 'I can't chastise the cat; it is in his nature.'

On one visit Simpson asked me if I was a composer: I had hardly dare mention my own music to him, yet I did show him two works on which I was engaged. The first was a *Concertante for Piano, Strings and Percussion*, which was suggested by Humphrey Searle's brilliant (and similarly titled) op 24, which he had written for the Jeunesses Musicales – a piece I played once in Croydon, although the score, a facsimile of Searle's manuscript, was almost illegible in several bars. The second work I showed Simpson was a Cello Concerto. I refrained, however, from showing him my Second Symphony, the concluding pages of which may have been fired by the ending of Brian's Ninth Symphony – my Cello Concerto had included a quotation from Brian's Eleventh Symphony, which Simpson found rather perplexing. However, he was particularly encouraging, and asked if I was able to play the solo part in the *Concertante* myself. When I said I could, he replied that he would like to try to arrange a performance, even though much of the slow movement and the concluding pages of the finale had not been completed. When the *Concertante* was almost finished, I had second thoughts about the work and decided it should really be a Concerto with full orchestra. Naturally, I was very encouraged by Simpson's interest in my music, and his statement, when he wrote to me: 'You have a gift for composition, and you must pursue it.'

When my visits were over, he would frequently drive me from Muswell Hill to the centre of town to catch my train home to south London. During one of those journeys – with Simpson driving his new Triumph Herald, shortly after passing his driving test (as with most musicians, in my experience, he was an excellent driver) – he asked me to guess which was the only one of his works that he regarded personally as his most successful. I thought about it for a moment, and said 'Your First Quartet'. I shall never forget his response. 'You're right!' he cried, 'It is, but do you know why?' I thought for a little longer, pondering the reprise of the opening theme at the end of the work, and replied, 'To put my finger on it, it seems to have the most homogeneous and coherent material of all the works of yours I've heard.' 'That's it, exactly!', he replied, 'I always strive to achieve that, not always successfully, I think.' I demurred, thinking of the two symphonies especially, but I felt flattered when Simpson added, 'You certainly have a genuine feel for my music.'

It was around this time, 1958 or 1959, that I attended a talk by Simpson – I forget precisely where it was – at the end of which he asked for questions from the audience. One of the questions he was asked was: who of the youngest generation of British composers he felt to be the most gifted? The generation in question included Richard Rodney Bennett, Harrison Birtwistle, Peter Maxwell Davies and Alexander Goehr – a pretty impressive list by some people’s standards. Simpson thought for several moments before replying, ‘I don’t think much of any of them.’ Then, once the rather muted and somewhat embarrassed laughter had died down, he added: ‘Wait a minute, wait a minute: the only one I think is any good is Carlo Martelli.’ I regret that I did not follow up his comment either then or afterwards, but Carlo Martelli’s name stuck with me. Many years later, I was able to strike up a friendship with Martelli and help him in various ways, although we have not seen each other for some time.

Simpson’s years at the BBC naturally brought him into frequent contact with great performers, and his daily encounters with his many gifted colleagues in the BBC’s Music Department led Robert Ponsonby, the Corporation’s Controller of Music from 1982 to 1985, to say to me, when I interviewed him once: ‘When you had a department containing musicians of the calibre of Robert Simpson, Hans Keller, Deryck Cooke, Robert Layton, Lionel Salter, Leo Black and others, you were not short of great ideas, or of the abilities to put them into practice.’ Ponsonby’s remark reminded me of the famous comment of Sir Matt Busby, manager of the Manchester United football team, when he was asked what he said to his players in training to motivate his hugely successful side tactically: ‘When you have a team that included George Best, Bobby Charlton, Denis Law and Alex Stepney, you just let them go out and play football!’

Today, if one considers the standards at which Radio 3, the successor to the BBC’s Third Programme, now operates, one can only thank Providence that one was around to have heard, almost daily, the results of the serious work of those gifted and eminent musicians such as Robert Simpson and his colleagues. It was indeed a pleasure and privilege to have lived through that ‘golden age’ of enlightened broadcasting, an age when the BBC, and its staff, precisely knew what the phrase ‘public service broadcasting’ meant; one can but regret that young music-students and music scholars of all ages and backgrounds in Britain nowadays have no comparable lines of communication open for them. It was not only the brilliant programming skills of all kinds of art music but also the complementary scripted talks on aspects of music which the Third Programme staff would schedule and, more often than not, undertake themselves, talks of a quality which have long since disappeared from Radio 3.

Another aspect of the then Third Programme staff which is forgotten today was their sense of fun. In 1956, the late Gerard Hoffnung mounted his first Interplanetary Music Festival at the Royal Festival Hall – a bizarre and riotous concert which included the premiere of Malcolm Arnold’s *Grand, Grand Overture* with vacuum cleaners and rifles, conducted by the composer, Franz Reizenstein’s *Concerto Popolare* for piano and orchestra (with the humorous actress Yvonne Arnaud an accomplished soloist), a Chopin Mazurka arranged for four tubas, and many other items including the slow movement of

Haydn's 'Surprise' Symphony, with rather more surprises than Haydn originally envisaged, added by another fine humorist and musician, Donald Swann. The concert also included Dennis Brain as soloist on hosepipe (and also, uniquely, as organist), but the Haydn slow movement had several members of the BBC's music department, including the Third Programme's music head, Leonard Isaacs (a pupil of Alfred Cortot and Egon Petri), engaged to make the additional surprises. Robert Simpson was also one of these, playing a hot water bottle – his only appearance as a performer on record! The concert was televised by the BBC and recorded live by EMI, who issued it on a Columbia long-playing disc, 33CX 1406. It remains a pity that the performers in this movement, Simpson amongst them, were not all identified on the record cover.

In 1959, plans were afoot for the first performance – by largely amateur forces under Bryan Fairfax – of Havergal Brian's mighty *Gothic* Symphony, which took place in June 1961. Simpson played a large part in ensuring that this performance occurred, and he had also been instrumental in planning, at quite short notice, a BBC performance, the first in the UK for many years, of Mahler's equally vast choral Symphony, No 8 (and, like the *Gothic*, in two parts). At first, I did not imagine Mahler to have been a particular enthusiasm of Simpson's, knowing him to be such a devoted Brucknerian, and I was puzzled as to why he proposed this work in particular. He pointed out to me that he considered the first movement of Mahler's Eighth to be the composer's 'greatest architectural achievement, an immensely strong and broad structure.' Although Simpson expressed reservations about the Symphony's enormous second movement, he considered the opening orchestral prelude to it as particularly evocative. Mahler's Eighth Symphony certainly deserved a public hearing, as it was so very rarely given. This was not only owing to the huge cost involved but also because of the relative rarity, in those days, of finding conductors familiar with Mahler's idiom. In addition, as we shall see, the money was sitting there, so to speak, waiting to be used.

The concert took place at the Royal Albert Hall, conducted by Jascha Horenstein, on March 20th, 1959 – with over 750 performers. It was an amazing occasion, even an historic one, for it may be considered as one of the initial sparks, along with the first edition of Donald Mitchell's primary volume in what became his exhaustive Mahler studies, in igniting the sudden Mahler boom in Britain in the 1960s. The revelation of Mahler, so far as many British musicians and music-lovers were concerned, was to be helped, of course, by the centenary celebrations of his birth in 1960, which included the astonishingly moving broadcast of what was then thought to be virtually the entire extant sketches of Mahler's Tenth Symphony, introduced by Deryck Cooke, who later went on to accomplish a final performing version, based on Mahler's complete draft – to which he was ultimately given access and was able brilliantly to reconstruct. That year also saw the first public performance in Britain of Mahler's colossal Third Symphony, under Bryan Fairfax, 64 years after the work had been written.

Simpson's association with Fairfax, a highly gifted Australian conductor, had earlier borne fruit with a Bruckner Festival, held in St Pancras Town Hall, in which Simpson introduced the music from the platform, such introductions taking the form of talks illus-

trated by the orchestra, followed by complete performances of the work in question. Fairfax's noble performance of the slow movement of Bruckner's Eighth Symphony will forever stay in my memory. During his talk on that work Simpson made an intriguing point for those who found it difficult to come to terms with the large structure of the first movement. He told us of a friend of his, who had bought a recording of the work – which he had never heard before – but had mistakenly played the side at 45rpm, not 33. It was only when the movement was over that he realised his error, but having first heard the music 'speeded up', as it were, he was then more readily able to appreciate Bruckner's architecture at the correct tempo (and pitch!). Simpson recommended such an approach to others who may have found the complex structure of the movement initially difficult to grasp.

The BBC-sponsored performance of Mahler's Eighth, as Simpson explained to me with some glee, was made possible by the likelihood that the Corporation's Music Department would underspend its budget for that year; it appeared there was going to be a surplus – in which case, the following year's fiscal resources would, more than likely, have been reduced – so Simpson ensured the 1958/59 money was fully spent by using what was left to mount this expensive, but artistically immensely worthwhile, undertaking. All seats were sold, so the concert made money, and, as stereo broadcasting had only recently been introduced, the many spatial effects which Mahler employs in this score afforded the BBC engineers with a real challenge – to which, as the surviving tapes demonstrate, they rose magnificently.

Another aspect of Simpson's work at the BBC which could surely merit investigation was his provision of programme notes, principally for concerts given by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, under its then chief conductor Sir Malcolm Sargent. On January 22nd, 1958, they gave the British premiere (if it was not the western premiere) of Shostakovich's Symphony No 11, in rather fraught circumstances: the score arrived less than 36 hours before the concert. Simpson undertook to write the programme notes, but could only see the score for an hour – the Symphony's duration. Those expecting a similar work to Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony were confounded. After more than 50 years, we can recognise that the Eleventh, in complete contrast to the Tenth, shows Shostakovich tackling the large-scale programmatic Russian symphony, in the line of Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* or Reinhold Glière's *Ilya Mourometz* – or even Miaskovsky's Sixth. But in 1958, Shostakovich's Eleventh Symphony, as was to happen with the Twelfth in 1962, received a lukewarm, if not hostile, press in the UK, although the qualities of both symphonies, certainly those of the Eleventh, are now more readily appreciated – and Sargent's performance was, in the circumstances, not at all bad.

Simpson's comments on the work, and his sympathetic grasp of what his fellow-composer was about, merit reading today:

'It is not, as some might aver, a narrow political tract, but is clearly intended as an expression of those universal human aspirations which are always forced into the open by tyrannies. Its 'programme', though it refers to specific events, could easily be adapted to fit similar events in any country in the world, and its revolutionary

fire is that which will always arise in certain situations. It would be wise to avoid ephemeral controversies and see that Shostakovich, inspired by the human drama and its vast consequences, is aiming at exactly the same target as Goethe did in *Egmont*, or Beethoven in his Fifth Symphony.'

CHAPTER III
TWO CONCERTOS AND A SYMPHONY

All who knew Robert Simpson will recall his sense of humour and his love of jokes. I have to say that several of these jokes were rather on the bawdy side, and I know that some sensibilities were shocked by them. Hans Keller typically asked me if I thought Robert Simpson's penchant for what some may have considered questionable humour revealed a psychological characteristic. I replied that it probably did, in much the same way as his question betokened one in him – to which Hans smiled, and no more was said.

Simpson did have a fund of wonderful stories of his time as a producer for the BBC Symphony Orchestra. One day, the Orchestra was to give the British premiere of Karl Amadeus Hartmann's Sixth Symphony – an extraordinary piece, in two movements for vast orchestra (including two pianists), that in playing-time lasts for less than half-an-hour. On the day of the recording, some refurbishment was being carried out at the Maida Vale Studios, and Bob asked the contractors to stop work until the Symphony had been recorded. He said they could stay and listen if they wished. Some of the workmen sat down and, perhaps looking forward to half an hour's pleasant orchestral music, sat with their arms folded, waiting for the orchestra to begin. Hartmann's Symphony is full of what Bob aptly termed 'post-Nazi hysteria', and as the tumult in the second movement unfolded, he cast an eye at the workmen – who sat almost open-mouthed at the din being made, astonished that people could actually be paid for unleashing such a noise. At the end of the Symphony, one of the men turned to Bob and said, 'Gor blimey, mate, you need to wear a bleedin' tin 'at to listen to that, don't'cher!'

Another humorous tale concerned the first concert with the BBC Symphony conducted by Otto Klemperer for many years – it may even have been Klemperer's debut with the Orchestra. The Maida Vale Studios employed a long-serving caretaker, whose first name I believe was Stan, and who treated everyone the same, no matter how eminent. The morning began with a Beethoven symphony, and after an hour or so, the orchestra trooped out for their mid-morning break, leaving Klemperer alone on his conductor's stool, deep in private thought and looking immensely serious. Stan took pity on the great conductor, and went over to him with a cup of tea and a biscuit. He put his arm around Klemperer's shoulder, saying 'Here y'are, Otto old mate, have a cup of tea. This'll cheer you up.' Klemperer's startled reaction at having his profound reverie interrupted by Stan was, according to Bob, more memorable than the performance itself – good though it undoubtedly was.

One of the most important musical experiences of my life was coming into contact with the composer Havergal Brian, about which I have written elsewhere. This could not have happened had I not met Robert Simpson, who was always most supportive of me

and my musical interests, even – as when I visited and studied for a time with the composer Darius Milhaud in Paris in 1962-63 – when Simpson did not share my other enthusiasms, although he admitted that Milhaud was ‘the most consistently inventive of contemporary composers’ and regarded Milhaud’s ballet *Moses* as one of the few works of its kind worthy to stand alongside the great early Stravinsky ballets.

By this time, I had attended several Simpson premieres, but unfortunately missed one or two others. Into the latter category came the short *Canzona* for brass instruments of 1958, composed for the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble and of which I was later to produce the second recording. Another of these shorter pieces which I missed, and much regret having done so, was the *Variations and Fugue* for recorder and string quartet, a combination which struck me then as being unusual for Simpson – I had been attracted by the strength in his music, and could not readily conceive of him writing for this much gentler instrumental combination. The composition was written for Carl Dolmetsch, who premiered it with the Martin String Quartet in February, 1959. I do not think that the score has ever been published, nor do I know the work’s duration, but it surely would seem to merit revival today.

The first major Simpson premiere I attended was of the Violin Concerto, which was completed in 1959 (it was begun two years earlier), in response I believe to a commission from the Feeney Trust. The Violin Concerto was written also to pay tribute – as Simpson wrote in the programme book – ‘to the profound art and character of Ernest Element’. It was the Element Quartet, which Ernest led, that had given the first performances of Simpson’s first three string quartets – in 1953, 1954 and 1955 respectively – all before the Second Symphony was written. In his private collection, Simpson had tapes and acetates of performances of these first three quartets, given in or about 1953-54, by the Element Quartet. After Simpson’s death, John Waite of Pavilion Records was able to issue these rare recordings on the Pearl label, a compact disc of no little interest.

Simpson’s Violin Concerto of 1959, dedicated – of course – to Ernest Element, is a magnificent work, similarly proportioned to the Beethoven Concerto, with which it shared the joining of slow movement and finale, *attacca*. The tempo indication of the opening movement – *Con ira, ma maestoso* – seemed to describe Simpson’s own character to a T: whenever he was moved to protest, I never knew Simpson to ‘lose his cool’, and the music I can recall now, even though Simpson was to withdraw the Concerto after more than a dozen years. The first theme of the finale, in 7/8 (basically, two crotchets followed by three quavers – virtually a musical anagram of the seven quaver beats of the first statement of the main theme of the finale of Beethoven’s Concerto), is one of Simpson’s most felicitous and memorable inspirations, marked *Cantando con allegrezza*. I have always regretted his decision to withdraw the work, but never got a wholly convincing reply as to what his reasons were, although I shall later touch upon one which may have been in his mind. Even if we should respect Simpson’s wishes, I hope the score was not destroyed. Thankfully, tapes survive of the work, so it is not irredeemably lost. I have recently learned (2013) that Matthew Taylor is preparing a new edition of the Concerto.

The concert at which the Violin Concerto was first heard took place at Birmingham Town Hall on February 25th, 1960. Sir Adrian Boult conducted the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. I sat with Simpson and his wife in the front row of the circle. The concert opened with Rossini's *Semiramide Overture*; and Simpson's new Concerto, a lengthy three-movement work of almost 41 minutes' duration, was next. It received a very warm reception. Element played from music, of course, and although his tone did not always penetrate, in the slow movement and in the magical way he projected the unfolding of the theme of the finale, before it flowered into life, he was superb.

Simpson, soloist and conductor took several bows, and I went with his wife to meet up with him during the interval. It was then that I met Sir Adrian for the first time, sitting quietly in his room with the score of the Brahms Fourth Symphony before him. A viola-player in the orchestra collared Simpson on the stairs - 'Well done, Bob, a great work,' he said, 'now let's have one for viola!' 'Thanks! - O.K. then' Simpson enthusiastically replied, before dashing up the stairs, two at a time - it was all I could do to keep up with him - but the viola concerto was, as we know, destined to remain unwritten.

The last train to London from the old Birmingham New Street Station left at about 9.40pm, which meant I would miss the Brahms Symphony if I were to catch it, but I knew there was a later milk train and decided to stay and hear the Brahms. I am so glad I did; it was the greatest performance of the Symphony I have ever heard and well worth the four-and-a-half-hour wait on the platform itself (the milk train was very late) that followed. I found a copy of the *Christian Science Monitor* in a trash-can on platform 4 and read it from cover to cover more than once, an issue which carried in some depth two stories of the British royal family, the first being the birth of Prince Andrew six days earlier, and the second a report on the impending marriage of Princess Margaret to Antony Armstrong-Jones. In spite of these diversions, which would have no doubt ruffled Simpson's republican feathers, I returned again and again to the fine music I had heard at the concert - Simpson's Violin Concerto and Brahms's Fourth Symphony. As mentioned earlier, I still cannot wholly understand why Simpson later withdrew the Concerto, a decision which tended to confirm something I have long believed, which is that composers are not always the best judges of their work. The critic Alan Fitton, writing in the *Birmingham Evening Mail* the next day, said that 'The interplay between soloist and orchestra is brilliantly achieved; the development is logical and the climaxes never over stressed. But it is no mere exercise in clever writing. It is a deeply significant work, with moments of great beauty, especially in the superb slow movement, surely the best thing Simpson has written.....It is a concerto that will endure'.

Simpson's Violin Concerto had one further performance - a Third Programme broadcast one Sunday afternoon several months later, by the artists who had given the premiere - and that, I believe, was the last time the music was ever heard in concert.

Another important project with Ernest Element also eventually came to naught; one day, Simpson told me he intended to co-write, with Ernest, a book on the Beethoven String Quartets, but this was never completed. I do not know how far the project got but we can only regret that it remained unfinished. Around this time, also, an essay by Simp-

son in the January 1960 issue of William Glock's journal *The Score* opened my eyes further as to the depth of my friend's knowledge of Beethoven. The essay was on the first version of Beethoven's C minor Symphony – that which contained a second repeat in the *Scherzo*, with two extra bars, now almost always omitted and the existence of which in those days was virtually unknown. Once more, it was Simpson's knowledge of the subject, the clarity of his thought and his notable expository skill, which convinced me that his conclusions were right, although it was some time before I heard a performance of the Fifth Symphony with the second repeat in the *Scherzo* observed. As an example of original writing on great music, Simpson's essay was, for me, both revelatory and inspirational.

I mentioned this to him, and was additionally intrigued when he asked me how well I knew the Beethoven string trios. I hardly knew them at all, and during one visit, I was treated to a virtual master-class on the C minor, Op. 9, No. 3, illustrated by a recently issued Artia recording of the piece by Leonid Kogan, Rudolf Barshai and Mstislav Rostropovich, in which Simpson decisively demonstrated to me that these works were Beethoven's preparation for his first string quartets, Op. 18. Simpson believed that, having obtained mastery in the more demanding idiom of string trio writing, this equipped Beethoven better than anything could have done for the task of tackling string quartet writing. I asked Simpson if he ever contemplated writing a string trio – 'not at the moment, the Third Symphony takes up all of my time.' His next chamber work was a trio, but not a string trio, for which we had to wait, almost 30 years, until 1987.

I had a further insight into Simpson's opinions of various other composers, when I loaned him a book on Prokofiev which had been recently published in Moscow (in English). On returning it, Simpson described Prokofiev as 'a pretty good composer', which prompted me to ask if he knew of Prokofiev's *Symphony-Concerto* for cello and orchestra Op 125. I had been present at the first British performance of this work – it was also Rostropovich's debut, conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent – at the Royal Festival Hall (which was less than half-full for the occasion!), and had been enormously impressed by it. I was staggered that the critical response to what I felt to be a self-evident masterpiece was almost wholly negative and condemnatory, but most heartened, if not little surprised, when Simpson replied that he regarded the *Symphony-Concerto* as 'the finest work for cello and orchestra written thus far this century, and in fifty years' time it will be recognised as such.'

The next large-scale composition by Simpson to receive its first performance was the Third Symphony, another Feeney Trust commission, which he completed in November, 1962. I was at its first performance, also at Birmingham Town Hall, on March 14th 1963, when it was given by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra under Hugo Rignold. On December 31st, 1959, a Thursday, I had visited the Simpsons at their home. Bob was keen to tell me of his new Symphony, the Third, which he had begun a few days earlier. He showed me the first five or six pages of fully-sketched pencil score, opening with a quietly mysterious atmosphere, a 'bloody awful noise buzzing in my brain' (in Bob's own phrase), leading to a powerful first entry for the brass – at figure 2 in the published score – with his (left-handed) writing clearly displaying what I might call his typical sweep and

certainty in expressing himself. This first entry reminded me of a similar passage in William Alwyn's Third Symphony, which Beecham had premiered (from memory!) the year before at the Festival Hall, and which I had also attended. I mentioned this to Simpson. 'Well,' he replied, 'I'll make sure it doesn't *sound* like Alwyn's music.' I noticed the date he wrote at the top of the first page of pencil score: 28.xii.'59. Simpson said that the Symphony was to be dedicated to Havergal Brian, who had, earlier that same month, sent Bob the score of his Thirteenth Symphony, which he had inscribed to Simpson in gratitude. I know that Simpson was genuinely touched by Brian's dedication.

Simpson's Second and Third Symphonies are very different from the First, and from each other, but are equally fine. The Third was indeed dedicated to Havergal Brian, whose music Simpson had championed at the BBC from about 1957 onwards, culminating in the first performance in 1961 of the *Gothic Symphony*, and two memorable broadcasts of the work, under Sir Adrian Boult and Ole Schmidt, in 1966 and 1980 respectively. It was almost entirely due to Simpson's efforts that Brian's music was discovered, after the indomitable composer was in his eighties.

Despite the connexion between Havergal Brian and Simpson, in the latter's Third Symphony there may be parallels between it and the Second Symphony of Carlo Martelli, the young British composer I mentioned earlier. Carlo, despite his name, barely speaks Italian; his father came to England from Italy, and married an English girl, but he died when Carlo and his younger brother were little more than children. Carlo's inherent musicianship was much encouraged by Malcolm Arnold, who lived nearby, and who helped secure a scholarship for Carlo to the Royal College of Music. From an early age, Carlo had written music, and became a distinguished viola-player.

In the late 1950s, Carlo's music was broadcast fairly regularly by the BBC: Berthold Goldschmidt conducted the first broadcast of Martelli's Second Symphony, with the Philharmonia Orchestra – and with Carlo himself playing in the viola section as a regular member of the Orchestra. The work had received its world premiere at the Royal Festival Hall by the London Symphony Orchestra under Norman Del Mar, when Carlo was only 20.

Carlo took the score of the Symphony (his First Symphony was destroyed, along with other of his works, in a disastrous fire many years later) to Simpson, together with a tape, and they went through it together. Martin Anderson has suggested that there are strong parallels between Carlo's Symphony and Simpson's Third.

The Birmingham programme in which Simpson's Third Symphony received its premiere was an unusual one. It began with Mozart's rarely-heard Symphony no 27 K.199, which was followed by Delius's *Brigg Fair*. Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto, with Endré Wolf an admirable soloist, concluded the first half. Simpson's new Symphony was the only work in the second half; it lasted almost 34 minutes.

After the premiere of his Third Symphony, Simpson introduced me in the street to his mother, a gracious lady indeed, but a curious – and in the circumstances rather amusing – thing happened the following month at the concert in which the Symphony was first performed in London, when the City of Birmingham Orchestra under Hugo Rignold

came to London's Royal Festival Hall on April 10th. The Symphony was originally scheduled to conclude the second half of the programme, but the order was changed, and for some reason it was played as the last item in the first half. As it transpired, it seemed to some of us in the audience that the entire programme was being played in reverse order! The programme began with Strauss's *Don Juan*, and this was followed by Simpson's Symphony. The second half opened with Brahms's Violin Concerto, played by Henryk Szeryng, and the programme ended with Berlioz's *Carnaval Romain* Overture. Surprisingly for some commentators, the concert was very well attended, and the large audience heard Simpson's new Symphony with keen attention. But with London critics being what they were, many amongst the press corps arrived in time merely for the second half, to hear Simpson's new Symphony as originally programmed, only to learn that they had missed it! In fairness, one must say that the Hall had posted up change of order announcements on the day, but, as the printed programmes had the items printed in the order in which they were actually played, and this running order had obviously been decided some time in advance, there was evidently a communications problem between the Orchestra and the Hall's management. If this contretemps was not entirely the critics' fault, Simpson (whose caustic views on critics – with some honourable exceptions – were well-known to his friends) was nonetheless tickled pink at their discomfiture, even more so when several critics complained in print at the change of order in the programme to explain their non-coverage of the work.

One commentator who clearly had it in for Simpson around this time was Edmund Tracey, the second-string music critic of *The Observer*, who once described Simpson in print as 'a typical product of the English musical scene – a man untouched by progress or vision'. Whilst I would always defend the right of a critic to express their opinion – after all, they are being asked to give it – Tracey's attack indicated something of the strong feelings that Simpson's views on music aroused in those who did not share them.

I know that Simpson was upset, if not angered, by Tracey's comment, but was only a little mollified when I said to him, 'What did you expect from such a writer?' Nor was this the last time the critical team on *The Observer*, headed by Peter Heyworth, attacked Simpson in print. The most public of these offensives occurred on November 19th, 1961, when a comment by Simpson on Anton Webern – in Simpson's ostensibly anonymous guise as record reviewer for *The Monthly Letter* – brought forth a strong attack by Peter Heyworth, which was rebutted with characteristic logic by Simpson, again writing anonymously in the *Letter's* January, 1962 issue.

Between the premiere of the Third Symphony in Birmingham and the London performance, the Orchestra had undertaken a tour of Europe which was not without problems, including, at one point, the refusal to release the players' instruments over some matter or another. Thankfully, this action, virtually tantamount to blackmail, was eventually resolved, and the instruments arrived in good time for the London concert. The Orchestra and Rignold were to give a third performance of the Symphony at Oxford on May 16th and, before the London premiere, Simpson had visited the Music Club at Eltham to talk about the work. He brought a tape of the Symphony, which I believe had

not, by that time, been broadcast, and a couple of scores. Members were so impressed with it that, late as it was, we insisted – led by Derek Payne – on playing the tape of the Symphony through again.

I shall never forget Simpson's description on that occasion of the quiet, rather mysterious, ending of the work. He said he hoped it reflected those feelings one had on looking at the sky on a clear summer night, full of stars. All is quiet, and, at first, one thinks 'How wonderful it all is!' but then other thoughts intrude: 'What does it all mean? What's it all *for*?'

We knew full well that he was not trying to create a sense of mystery – in the sense of mystery-mongering – in these closing bars, for he had made no secret of his anti-religious views, but rather that he was attempting to recapture that awesome sense of wonder when contemplating some vast natural phenomenon. Manifestly *not* programme music, this was the first time, but not the last, when I wondered if Simpson's deep interest in astronomy might have inspired a passage in one of his works.

Simpson's Third Symphony truly is a magnificent composition, but I have always puzzled over various aspects of the score. The first is that, during the progress of the work, one tonality, in this case C major, emerges from an adjacent tonality, B flat major. In gratitude for his efforts in championing Havergal Brian's work, Brian presented Simpson with the original manuscript score of one of the parts of the *Gothic*, but whether this was before the premiere took place or not I cannot say. The point is that Brian's *Gothic* is also concerned at one level with the emergence of one tonality, E major, from its adjacent tonality, D (minor, in this instance). I have always felt that the study of Brian's *Gothic*, which the preparations for its premiere would have entailed, may well have planted in Simpson's creative subconscious a desire to write a Symphony which also considers this 'emerging' adjacent tonality. I never tackled Simpson on this – and I suspect that although Simpson had shown me the opening pages of his original draft, without knowing where the Symphony might ultimately lead, he quite possibly already had considered a work in which adjacent tonalities vied for resolution, for the end of the Symphony is implied in those opening pages. The second point is that perhaps the two-movement structure of Simpson's Third Symphony had its origin in the two-part structure of the *Gothic*. Finally, the quiet ending of the Third Symphony, the first of Simpson's symphonies to end thus, also echoes the quiet ending of the *Gothic*. A feature of the Symphony with which Simpson appeared particularly pleased was the use of three instrumental lines at various points, the three lines – say, solo oboe, horn and violas – being held *fortissimo* through a long *diminuendo* tutti, and making up a major triad. The result was that the simplest chords thereby took on truly frightening aspects, in sheer force greater than any discord. This profoundly musical, and highly original, effect is used several times in the Symphony with tremendous impact.

There is another point. The tonality of the Violin Concerto – which work had not been performed by the time Simpson had begun the Third Symphony – is also concerned with adjacent keys, in fact the very same keys Brian tackled in the *Gothic*, D and E, and it may well be that Simpson later considered these two large-scale successive works of his

constituted one discussion too many of a similar tonal scheme, and therefore withdrew the Violin Concerto. If so, and I shall not refer to it again, I still think his decision over the earlier work was mistaken.

It was shortly after this, during the second half of 1962, that Simpson paid another visit to the Music Club, to talk about the early Dvořák symphonies – several of which works had then recently been issued on record for the first time – and which were, in those days, not numbered as they were subsequently. Only five Dvořák symphonies were in the repertoire, and it took some getting used to when the *New World*, universally known as No 5, became No 9 (the preceding works were also re-numbered).

Simpson was enthusiastic about these scores, not only for their own qualities, but also for what they revealed about the early development of a great and original symphonist. I recall him discussing particularly (what is now called No 1) *The Bells of Zlonice* Symphony. Simpson told us that this was, he believed, Dvořák's first orchestral work, written when the composer was 24, and 'evidence,' as he said, 'of an enormous talent for spontaneous composition, destined to grow into real genius.' What much intrigued Simpson – and us all – during this visit was that an elderly member of the Music Club, Jim Fuller, revealed that he had travelled in Bohemia in the 1930s, and had actually visited the little town of Zlonice, staying there for several days. Earlier in his talk, Simpson had said he did not know why the work was called 'The Bells of Zlonice', but Jim explained that the church bells in the town square were well known locally for their unusually ringing peal, slightly out of tune, which he had heard, and he was convinced that Dvořák had attempted, with some success, to recreate their singular sound in the work's initial pages, through the opening horn calls which cut across the full orchestral texture. Simpson was enthralled and not a little surprised – as indeed we all were – by Jim's first-hand evidence, a piece of observation and memory which appears to have eluded later writers on the work.

Some time before, Simpson had been the instigator of a series of programmes on the Third Programme which became necessary listening for enquiring music-lovers. The series in question was entitled *The Innocent Ear*, and the concept behind it was that the composers and titles of the music played were not announced until after the pieces had been broadcast. Simpson's basic premise was that listeners ought not to approach music with preconceptions, and should merely let it 'happen' – as it were – to them, experiencing it fairly and impartially, although the description of a typical programme: 'A concert overture', 'A Piano Concerto in three movements', 'An orchestral suite in four movements' or 'A Symphony in one movement', as they were published in *Radio Times*, would give listeners a general idea of the type of work to be broadcast. Simpson was adamant that the programmes should not be regarded as some kind of quiz, with listeners trying to guess the composer's name: he was anxious that the particular scores should simply be experienced as music. This was a brilliantly simple notion which enabled a fair amount of unfamiliar and worthwhile music to get an unbiased hearing, and I regret that this type of programming has ended in Great Britain, together with various other outstanding and valuable types of classical music broadcasting to which I have already referred.

Relatively little music came from Simpson during the remainder of the 1960s, but by far the most important score was his shattering Piano Concerto, in one movement. I was also present at the first performance of this work, in Cheltenham Town Hall, on July 14th 1967, when it was played by John Ogdon, the Concerto's dedicatee, with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra once more (the third Simpson orchestral work in succession to be first performed by this orchestra) under Hugo Rignold. For reasons of which I remain unaware, Simpson banned all music critics from the final rehearsal that afternoon, and it seemed to me that the following day some of them took their revenge.

The concert itself began with a scintillating account of Richard Strauss's *Don Juan*, with the opening played correctly, for once! – the very work with which this orchestra and conductor had preceded the London premiere of Simpson's Third Symphony four years earlier – and then the great John Ogdon, that lovable bear of a man, came on to play the socks off Simpson's powerful and dramatic composition. The thrilling first entry of the soloist was absolutely spine-tingling, and I can see and hear that passage in my mind's eye and ear as I write these words, a memory reinforced by a tape of that first performance Simpson sent me some twenty or so years later, taken from the live BBC broadcast.

This premiere took place, of course, before the dreadful personality change which visited Ogdon some years later, and the sight of Bob embracing a man twice his size (if Ogdon was not even bigger than that!) after the premiere was a joy to see. I did not remain for the second half of the programme: at 9 pm it was still very light and on this balmy summer Cheltenham Festival evening I drove the 110 miles home, putting my new Mark IV Zephyr through its paces – this was before the construction of the M40 motorway – in an elated state of mind. I had seen that Simpson was thrilled by the performance, his eyes gleaming with excitement afterwards, and he was full of praise for Ogdon and Rignold. It was very welcome for BBC Records to issue this Concerto on the Carlton Classics label in 1996 from a later John Ogdon broadcast conducted by Constantin Silvestri, imaginatively coupled with Rawsthorne's Second Piano Concerto and Concerto for Two Pianos, played by Ogdon and his wife Brenda Lucas.

Simpson's Piano Concerto was first heard at the BBC Henry Wood Promenade Concerts on August 6th 1998, in memory of the composer, who had died the previous November. The soloist on that occasion was Piers Lane, who gave a thrillingly accomplished and most musical account of this original composition with the BBC Concert Orchestra, on really top form, under Barry Wordsworth. It was on hearing this performance that, for the first time, I became aware of several of the subtle quotations with which Simpson had peppered his score, thanks to the insight of Martin Anderson, who pointed some of them out to me – and which Simpson may possibly have included for Ogdon's benefit and intrigued delight. Nonetheless, it need hardly be said, such had been Simpson's artistry in the thorough composition of this virtuoso piece that many listeners, including myself, would surely have remained blissfully unaware of these fleeting references to other music – as well as to Simpson's own, as Anderson claims, in particular the early *Variations and Finale on a Theme of Haydn* for solo piano. But this was surely not such

an unusual procedure as might at first be imagined: Simpson did not claim to be much of a pianist but his two early solo piano works are effectively laid out for the keyboard. Exceptional amongst non-pianist composers, in those works Simpson demonstrated that he certainly knew how to write for the keyboard, for which he had a genuine understanding. The Piano Concerto, it seems, was written relatively quickly: at the time, what would have been more natural for the composer than to look at his earlier piano writing, to see what had worked effectively in those pieces, and to have used similar figuration – if not a touch of self-quotation – in the Concerto?

Although Piers Lane's 1998 Prom performance could not wholly efface memories of Ogdon's – nor should it have – it was, as I stated earlier, an exceptionally convincing reading, allowing one to hope that this impressive score might eventually take its rightful place among the finest British piano concertos to have appeared since the War. The genuine enthusiasm of the large Prom audience at the end, following the absorbed attention which they had given to the work, was highly encouraging.

Ogdon's personality and musical character had surely influenced Simpson's writing, an aspect of the score which the composer had virtually admitted in his programme note for the Cheltenham premiere:

'If it [my Piano Concerto] conveys some inkling of the artistry of its remarkable soloist, the music will have served its purpose.'

The nature of the work rises far above any musical portrait of Ogdon – as subsequent performances, by Raymond Clarke in addition to that by Piers Lane, have amply demonstrated.

The entry on John Ogdon which I was asked to contribute to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, some years after his premature death in 1989, was indeed a melancholy task to undertake for anyone who knew him, but I felt honoured to be invited by Oxford University Press to write it.

CHAPTER IV
WRITING ABOUT MUSIC

If, as we have noted, the 1960s produced relatively little in the way of original composition from Simpson, he published a number of important books in that decade. 1965 saw the centenary of the births of Sibelius and Nielsen, two composers on whose music Simpson was a world-renowned authority. Some years earlier, the BBC had produced the first of a series of short paperbacks on aspects of music in the international repertoire, entitled 'BBC Music Guides'. Simpson was to write three of these: the first was *Bruckner and the Symphony*, which was published in 1963; the second, a guide to Sibelius and Nielsen, appeared in 1965. The third, in 1970, is on the Beethoven Symphonies – and in my view it remains the best short guide ever published on these works.

Although these books are comparatively short, their musical value is out of all proportion to their length. Simpson was never prolix in his writing, any more than he was in his speech, and his knowledge of, and love for, these four great masters was matched by few of his contemporaries. It is a pity that Simpson was never able to write a book on Beethoven's music, in particular, although as we shall see, he effectively came very close to it.

His book *The Essence of Bruckner*, which appeared in 1967 and which is devoted to Bruckner's symphonies, is without doubt the definitive study of these works. Based at times, naturally enough, on earlier writings of his, Simpson's large essay has to be also considered as the most significant volume on Bruckner to have appeared in any language. So musically insightful is it, and so well written, that we must wonder why nothing approaching the scope and understanding of this book had ever appeared before, or why the Austrians were not able to produce something along these lines themselves.

Although subsequently revised, Simpson's study is not entirely free from error*, but all in all there has never been anything to touch it, before or since, and it opened my eyes and ears to Bruckner's symphonies in a wholly new way – as I am sure it did for many other readers.

In the previous year, 1966, Pelican Books published the important two volume symposium *The Symphony*, which Simpson edited. In 1950, Pelican had issued a similarly titled single volume symposium edited by A.L. Bacharach. This had come in for some criticism, as Bacharach stipulated that no composer under the age of 50 should be included, which meant – misguidedly, according to some English critics – that Walton, who was born in 1902, should be excluded. Walton's First Symphony in B flat minor of 1934 (his

* For example, in discussing the slow movement of the Sixth Symphony, Simpson writes of the music being "on the dominant of D flat". The passage in question is actually in F-sharp minor, not A flat major. As Mark Doran has pointed out, this may have led to Simpson erroneously writing "dominant" when enharmonically he meant "subdominant".

Second dates from 1960) had become something of a repertoire piece by 1950, and was regularly heard in concerts and broadcasts.

However the criticism against Bacharach was levelled, it was relatively mild compared with that aimed at Simpson, who, in a typically forthright introduction to the two volumes, laid down his criteria for what constitutes a symphony. He was not prepared merely to take the composer at his word, should he call a piece a symphony, and leave it at that. Simpson was keen to show that the often-heard phrase 'genuinely symphonic' actually meant something, and he set out to define it. In so doing, he concluded that works entitled 'symphonies' by, say, Stravinsky, Hindemith, Henze (and others) did not satisfy those criteria. Simpson's argument was clearly and logically expounded (as one might have expected), but it did not go down well with some critics. In addition, Simpson's choice of contributors was also challenged, being largely made up of, as one critic caustically commented, „his friends at the BBC“.

It was true that some contributors to the symposium worked in the BBC's Music Department, but – as I pointed out in an earlier chapter, and as Robert Ponsonby was proud to claim – at that time the Department employed a number of distinguished musicians who were also notable writers on music, renowned experts in their own field. For Simpson *not* to have asked them to contribute would have seemed deliberately perverse. As a Simpson admirer, I was with him (almost) all the way, and was particularly pleased that he had written the chapter on Rachmaninoff himself – largely on the basis of the First Symphony in D minor, which had recently been recorded for the first time. Although Simpson was not wholly in sympathy with Rachmaninoff's output (as his comments on the Second and Third Symphonies – not to mention his omission of *The Bells* and the *Symphonic Dances* – revealed), he was by no means unappreciative of his artistry. We agreed that the tonal similarity between Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto and Rachmaninoff's Second – the works share the same key structure – showed the influence of the earlier Concerto upon the latter, and I was pleased that a man I held in high esteem had changed his mind about Rachmaninoff's symphonic command to the extent of becoming an admirer of one of Rachmaninoff's undoubted – and genuinely symphonic! – early masterpieces.

Towards the end of the previous year, 1965, EMI had begun an important reissue sequence of albums of authoritative recordings of music written during the twentieth-century on a new mid-price label – the 'HQM 20 Series' as it was called. This had been the brain-child of a notable EMI record man, Bill Newman, one of the unsung heroes of the classical record business, to whom collectors of many generations have had good cause to be grateful. I was later to work with Bill at CBS. Early in 1966, Bill issued a recoupling of Boult's recording of Simpson's First Symphony with Peter Racine Fricker's Second Symphony (the latter performed by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic conducted by John Pritchard). I was never happy with the 14-bar cut made in this recording in the slow movement of the Fricker Symphony: many years later, I told both the composer and Sir John (as he became) of my disenchantment at this cut – and I was most surprised when they both, independently, agreed with me! Fricker was somewhat delighted to learn then

that I had been responsible for issuing the only recording ever made of his First Symphony in the UK. But both symphonies on the reissued LP (Simpson's First and Fricker's Second) were written in 1951. As Simpson's Symphony is continuous, the original 10" LP meant a break in the music, so Bill's reissue enabled record-buyers to hear the work for the first time as Simpson intended. The original recordings were very good, but the new transfer produced finer sound quality.

It was in 1967 that the Beatles issued their famous album, *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, which reached a new level in the artistic value of popular music. I never discussed popular music with Simpson, though I knew of Hans Keller's admiration for John Lennon's work, but like many who visited Simpson at his office in the BBC's Music Department in Great Portland Street I was surprised to see, hung behind his office door, a photograph taken many decades previously of what must have been the *original* Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band – some kind of al fresco jazz band of the 1920s, to judge from the picture. Those who thought the album title was a 1960s psychedelic fantasy would have been nonplussed to have seen the picture in Simpson's office; he never did explain it satisfactorily to me, apart from chuckling at my comment. I have no idea what happened to this picture, but it was certainly peculiar to see it following the success of the Beatles LP.

Although the 1960s proved a relatively fallow decade for new compositions from Simpson's pen, those of us who wished for more big works by him were not entirely frustrated. His Clarinet Quintet of 1968 was recorded in August 1970 by Bernard Walton and the Aeolian String Quartet for John Goldsmith's Unicorn label, a recording in which the opening bars are bedevilled by traffic noise. I remain astonished that the Quintet is not regularly performed. The record also contained Simpson's First String Quartet. Structurally, the Quintet is exceptional in Simpson's output for being in five movements, and containing that rare thing in modern music – a genuine Scherzo. It is magnificently written for the clarinet and there are few contemporary clarinet quintets which come within a thousand miles of it. One can only hope that enquiring clarinetists who put music before commerce will take up this masterpiece, for it deserves to be better known, both for its own merits and also to enable later music-lovers to come into contact with a work which could enrich their lives. The new Hyperion recording of the Quintet, with Thea King and the Delmé Quartet is an improvement with regard to the recorded sound, but interpretatively there is little to choose between them.

I had chivvied Simpson, on more than on occasion, that his Fourth Symphony should be in four movements. When I first put this to him, at the London premiere of the Third Symphony, he asked why, and I replied that as No 1 was in one movement, No 2 in three, and No 3 in two, at some point he would no doubt tackle a traditional four-movement structure. His reply was typical: 'I can't see myself writing a Scherzo at this point in the twentieth-century; life's too grim to make a joke of it!' I pointed out that jokes could be grim, as well as light-hearted, and said that if Beethoven did it, with Napoleon walking all over Europe, were today's circumstances so very different? 'What about your optimism, Bob?' I countered. 'You of all people could show the way forward in such a

movement, and writing Scherzos doesn't seem to have troubled Rubbra.' I have no idea if my comment – or anyone else's, for that matter – was responsible for planting the seed of a genuine Scherzo in his mind, which surfaced first in the Clarinet Quintet, but when the Fourth finally appeared, in 1972, it was indeed in four movements – with a Scherzo.

Working at the BBC was always a problem for Simpson with regard to getting broadcasts of his own music. Clearly, he could not use his position to further his own career, nor would he have done so should the opportunity have arisen, but it may well have been that the very fact of him working in the BBC's Music Department tended to make colleagues a trifle circumspect in suggesting his music be broadcast, without his knowledge, and may have militated against his music becoming better-known.

William Glock's appointment as Controller, Music at the BBC in 1959 led to the deliberate promotion of much music that was previously rarely transmitted (much of it by, or emanating from, composers of the Second Viennese School), and the gradual sidelining of other works which, up to then, had been regularly broadcast. Simpson's music could never be said to fall into the former category, and as he was not a prolific composer – his total output by that time of about ten works were all relatively big pieces – consequently he was neither part of the latter category. Such a combination of factors meant that his work continued to be rarely broadcast. However, I recall a three-week series in which Jascha Horenstein conducted Simpson's then-extant three symphonies on successive Sundays. *Radio Times* did Simpson proud, as had the BBC in engaging Horenstein to conduct them. It was a wonderful series of broadcasts, and maybe BBC Records will consider making one or other of these performances available on CD – especially the First and Second Symphonies, for Horenstein was to record the Third commercially for Unicorn Records. This record was produced by Anthony Hodgson and Simpson himself – one of the few times, if not the only one up to then, when a serious composer was engaged in a professional capacity as record producer of his own music. The recording took place in June 1970, and that year also saw the publication of a little book by Simpson, in the BBC Music Guide series, on Beethoven's Symphonies.

In 1967, the Italian publishing firm, Fabbri and Partners, had issued the first in what were known as 'part series'. The issues, entitled *The Great Composers*, were published fortnightly, and were sold through newsagents or on subscription. The series was excellently illustrated and very well written and researched. Each issue was packaged with a 10" long-playing record. Many of the recordings were relatively old, being largely taken from the American Vox record catalogue, but not all of them were sourced in this way, for the first issue – of Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony – was a new recording by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Charles Groves. The series had some odd choices – Delibes, Chabrier and Pergolesi, for example – and equally odd omissions, such as Schumann, Liszt and Rachmaninoff. Amongst the staff responsible for coordinating these issues, under the general editorship of Neville Gambier was the young Michael Nyman. Gambier's choice of experts such as Simpson, Robin Golding (on Grieg) and Joan Chissell (on Brahms), who wrote with their customary expertise and fluency, was criticised in some quarters for taking their subjects too seriously(!), as if ordinary

members of the public could not be expected to take a reasonably serious interest in a serious subject. The series was valuable for not treating great art as if it were a branch of entertainment, nor for writing about such subjects in Sunday supplement journalese.

Simpson was described as the editor of the Beethoven issues in *The Great Composers*, of which there were twelve. The word 'editor' in this context should be taken as a broad euphemism for 'sole author', for Simpson wrote every word of the text of all twelve issues, making a total of no fewer than 144 pages on most aspects of Beethoven's work. The series was aimed, as I have said, with the intelligent music-lover, rather than the specialist, in mind, and Simpson succeeded admirably in not writing-down to readers, in so doing making his contributions an important and immensely valuable addition to a wider and better appreciation of Beethoven.

Some years ago, I mentioned them to Mark Doran, a colleague and friend, who had been in touch with Simpson, and sent Mark copies of the text. I had always felt that it could form the basis for an important book by Simpson on aspects of Beethoven's music, and Mark urged Simpson to allow his writing in these issues to be reprinted in book form. Simpson demurred, saying that there should be something in such a book on the string quartets, none of which appeared in the Fabbri series. Regrettably, Simpson's long incapacity, following his stroke in 1991, prevented him from adding whatever fresh material he felt was necessary, taken perhaps from the abandoned book on the quartets which he planned with Ernest Element in the late 1950s.

After Simpson's death, Lionel Pike issued a collection of Simpson's Beethoven writings, but it is encouraging that at some point in the future a more complete collection of his writings on Beethoven will appear, as his observations deserve to be made available permanently for later generations, who would otherwise remain unaware of the insights of a great musical mind on the work of one of the greatest composers of all. In addition to Simpson's published writings on Beethoven, the scripts of his broadcasts are being considered, particularly part of that he prepared for his participation in the (now long since discontinued) Radio 3 series *Man of Action*, in which prominent people chose and talked about music. Simpson's programme was memorable for including the last three Beethoven Piano Sonatas, and his convincing claim that the six variations which conclude Op. 111 constitute six further variations on the theme by Diabelli, which spawned Beethoven's massive Op. 120. The (signed) rare editorial on Beethoven, which Simpson contributed to the *EMG Monthly Letter* in December 1970 (Beethoven's Bicentenary month), could well stand as a Preface to such a volume.

CHAPTER V
FOUR MORE SYMPHONIES AND THREE MORE QUARTETS

In December 1969 I married, and a few months later, in March 1970, introduced my wife to Simpson and his wife at the Royal Festival Hall, when I saw Simpson conduct for the first time. This was a concert by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, in which Simpson conducted his First Symphony, which opened the programme. I was thrilled at the performance. The concert was broadcast, and a good tape of it survives.

Simpson should have conducted more, and one of the big regrets of my life is not being present at a performance of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony which Simpson conducted in Birmingham some years later. There is also a tape in the British Library of Simpson conducting his Second Symphony with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. It would be splendid if these recordings of Simpson conducting his First and Second Symphonies could be made commercially available – they would make an excellent coupling – even if the Horenstein BBC tapes of these same works are also released.

It was around this time, I believe, that Simpson's new Trio for clarinet, cello and piano was given publicly for the first time at the Wigmore Hall. I went alone, only learning of the programme at the last minute, and saw Simpson and his wife in the foyer. I explained to them that I had only just arrived on time, and was hurrying to buy a ticket. Imagine our surprise when we discovered that the ticket sold me was for the seat next to Simpson himself! As with the Clarinet Quintet, here is another work for a classic combination which should be heard far more frequently, as the similar Trios by Beethoven and Brahms cry out for additional repertoire of quality.

1971 was an important year for Simpson, for during it he celebrated his fiftieth birthday. That indefatigable champion of British music, Lewis Foreman, had founded a small publishing house, Triad Press, which was to issue a number of valuable short books on aspects of British music. He published one in honour of Simpson's birthday, an excellent collection of essays edited by Edward Johnson, with contributions from Hans Keller, Robert Layton, Hugh Ottaway, Peter Dobson and Ainslee Cox, and with a foreword by Jascha Horenstein. If one hoped that someone would act as a champion for Simpson's music, in the same way that he had championed Nielsen, Brian and others, Lewis Foreman's book was an excellent start, and within several years a more practical institution was to be formed on Simpson's behalf.

Also in 1971, we soon received a practical demonstration that as a composer Simpson had a very great deal more to say. In fact, he was working on two more – if vastly different – Symphonies, as well as a commemorative *jeu d'esprit*. To take the last piece first, in March 1972 Sir William Walton's seventieth birthday was celebrated with a concert at the Royal Festival Hall conducted by André Previn. The proceedings began with a series

of short orchestral variations on *Happy Birthday* by various British composers (Malcolm Arnold, Richard Rodney Bennett, Nicholas Maw, Peter Maxwell Davies, Thea Musgrave and Robert Simpson), each conducted by its composer (the commemoration was not repeated ten years later, for Walton's 80th birthday concert, also conducted by Previn). Simpson's contribution was particularly felicitous, being based upon the opening of Walton's First Symphony – the oboe theme lending itself ideally to such humorous variation treatment – and the short variation petered out with Simpson nodding in time to the second violins' rhythmic figure as it disappeared into silence.

The two new symphonies, Nos 4 and 5, were premiered within seven days of each other. The Fourth was given in Manchester, by the Hallé Orchestra under James Loughran, for the first time on April 26th, 1972, and the Fifth at the Royal Festival Hall in London by the London Symphony Orchestra under Andrew Davis on May 3rd. Was there ever another occasion (apart from Beethoven's – of course!) when two symphonies by the same composer were premiered within a week of each other? Their impact was considerable – in a lengthy notice in *The Sunday Times*, headed 'Power of Robert Simpson', Desmond Shawe-Taylor left his readers in no doubt with regard to his admiration of Simpson's work.

I heard the broadcast from the Free Trade Hall of the Fourth Symphony – Simpson's longest symphony to date – and found the piece a tough nut at first, although one aspect of the scoring, three flutes all doubling piccolos, proved extraordinarily effective. Simpson had also utilised this aspect in the Third Symphony, but not to anything like the same degree. In the Fifth Symphony, somewhat shorter in playing-time than the Fourth, Simpson employed the largest orchestra he had called for up to that time, including two sets of timpani placed either side of the orchestra in the manner of Nielsen's Fourth and Walton's First.

I attended the premiere of No 5, and no-one who was present that night will ever forget it. The performance was electrifying, and the young Andrew Davis was at his considerable best. The effect of the opening three or four minutes of the Symphony will remain indelibly etched in my memory. It seemed as though everyone in the audience had been literally jerked forward – as in a reflex spasm – by the sudden and sustained impact of the first tutti *fortissimo* outburst. Edward Greenfield, writing in *The Guardian*, was as enthusiastic about the work as many in the audience clearly also were. For myself, I knew that I was present at the first performance of a masterpiece.

It was this symphony that ended the 23-year absence of Simpson's works from the BBC's Promenade Concerts when it was given, also under Andrew Davis, during the 1990 Season. But this meant that the BBC would not programme anything by Simpson during his seventieth birthday year in the 1991 season! One work in thirty years by a composer as significant as Robert Simpson – in fact, the 1998 performance of the Piano Concerto was only the fifth time in 41 years that a score by Simpson was given at the Proms – is an unworthy record by most standards, but his music had never been part of those areas of the repertoire which in recent decades have increasingly dominated concert programming.

During the composition of his Fifth Symphony, Simpson suffered a burst blood vessel in his brain. In a piece I wrote for *Musical Opinion* to mark his seventieth birthday, I mentioned this event, saying that 'at dinner one night he just fell forward into his food.' Simpson was not too pleased at that description – he said, 'You made it seem like something out of the Marx Brothers!', but that is what happened. He also said to me that when he was recovering his mind was quite clear as he lay in hospital. Although he was temporarily unable to communicate, he could hear what was going on around him – an extraordinary experience. In this state, he made up his mind that he would overcome the setback – he knew he had much more music to write. Thankfully, he went on to make a full recovery.

A letter of good wishes sent by Jascha Horenstein while Simpson was in hospital was a source of much encouragement; the great conductor urged Simpson to get better as 'I want to hear your Ninth Symphony.' Alas, Horenstein did not live to fulfil his own wish, but one can readily imagine how thrilled he would have been to have heard that work – one of Simpson's greatest achievements, an original masterpiece of a very high order – in particular.

The two symphonies, appearing in close proximity clearly showed that Simpson was in his prime as a composer. His other favoured medium – the string quartet – was soon added to in an equally impressive manner; no fewer than three string quartets, Nos 4, 5 and 6, were written in successive years from 1973. It was coincidental that in 1975, when Simpson completed these three quartets, Hans Werner Henze began a quartet trilogy, his Third, Fourth and Fifth Quartets, written between autumn 1975 and early 1977. No two contemporaneous quartet trilogies could, in essence, probably be more different.

The (possibly unique) impetus for Simpson's Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Quartets – each longer in playing-time than any of his earlier quartets – arose from a study of the three 'Razumovsky' quartets of Beethoven, Op. 59. As with the premieres of the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, or rather more allied to Horenstein's broadcast performances of Simpson's first three Symphonies, the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Quartets were first broadcast on successive Sundays, in January and February 1980, in performances by the Gabrieli Quartet.

In some ways, I consider these three quartets to be akin to Simpson's creative re-creation of Hans Keller's Functional Analysis system of wordless analysis. They constitute a profound composer's response – solely through music – to existing great works which have in turn inspired him. This may seem to carry things a little far, but the analogy is not entirely inappropriate. Shortly after I first met Simpson in 1957, I learned that he was then not an out-and-out admirer of Keller – 'too clever by half', I think his phrase was – but by 1970, with Hans having joined the BBC's Music Department in 1959 and thereafter having become one of Simpson's working colleagues, Simpson's opinion had changed to one of admiration for the slightly older man's intellectual rigour, honesty and sheer musicality – to say nothing of his endearing personality. I should not have been surprised to learn that it was a conversation between Simpson and Keller about Beethoven's 'Razumovsky' quartets, or a comment dropped by Hans into such a conversation, which was the initial inspiration for Simpson's quartet trilogy.

There are in existence a number of comprehensive interviews with Simpson about these three quartets with Malcolm MacDonald. It may be that Simpson's Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Quartets will come to be regarded as a main fulcrum of his career as a truly significant composer; possibly even as the central part of his output.

The year 1977 proved to be one of Simpson's most creatively important, with two more symphonies and yet another string quartet from him. The Sixth Symphony is dedicated to Ian Craft, a gynaecologist friend, who happened to mention to Simpson that the notion of 'fertilisation-to-birth-to-life' might supply the background structure for a symphony. Such an idea would most likely have appealed strongly to him, an artist for whom the excitement, challenge and essential creativity of a positive approach to life itself were strong tenets of his humanism.

The first performance of Simpson's Sixth Symphony was given at the Royal Festival Hall by the London Philharmonic under Sir Charles Groves in April, 1980. The concert was broadcast on Radio 3, but the impact of the new Symphony, so far as I was concerned, was less than I had hoped. Initially there appeared to be relentlessness about the concluding section of the work which frankly baffled me. It seemed almost as though Simpson did not know when to stop. Today, I realise the inadequacy of judging such an important new score on just one hearing, and as a composer myself I equally know how misleading impressions can be given through an initial performance that does not wholly reflect the music. It was only after studying the Hyperion recording of this work in some depth, conducted by Vernon Handley, and after reading Lionel Pike's excellent analysis – published in the Spring 1990 issue of *Tonic*, the journal of the Robert Simpson Society which had been constituted by the summer of 1980, following initial meetings in 1978 – that the qualities of the Sixth Symphony were revealed to me.

Simpson began writing his next symphony soon after he had completed the Sixth. The composition of the Seventh Symphony was initially undertaken at my suggestion. In 1970, I had left my job in the City of London and joined the record business, and in January 1975 I was appointed head of the classical department of RCA Records in London. The following year, I put together a deal with Harvey's of Bristol and the Bournemouth Sinfonietta to make a series of records of English music. The first disc included the premiere recording of Elgar's *Soliloquy* for oboe and orchestra, with Léon Goossens, for whom the work was originally composed in 1933. I was also determined to record some music by Edmund Rubbra, and arranged for Richard Hickox, then at the outset of his dazzling recording career, to record two of Rubbra's masses with his St Margaret's Westminster Singers. I had lunch with Edmund at the *Snooty Fox* restaurant in Hertford Street, and was intrigued to learn of his recent Tenth Symphony, which I agreed to record then and there, along with his *Improvisations on Virginal Pieces by Giles Farnaby* and *A Tribute*, both scored for small orchestra. I arranged for the excellent Leipzig-born, but naturalised British conductor Hans-Hubert Schönzeler to conduct this record, which I produced in Southampton. Edmund came for all of the sessions, spread over two days, and was clearly thrilled at the result. Hans-Hubert was to make a number of records at RCA for me, and had already conducted Edmund's Fifth Symphony, as well as both Simpson's Second and *Allegro deciso* for string orchestra (a stand-

alone piece arranged from the last movement in the Third String Quartet) in Australia. An ABC recording of his performance of the Rubbra Fifth was to be issued later.

At about this same time, I had a conversation with Edmund Rubbra in which we discussed a comment by Hugh Ottaway on the 'humanism' in Simpson's music: I think Edmund had raised it in an article he wrote for *The Listener*, claiming that music, as such, cannot express 'humanism' or any other 'ism'. The composer may be a humanist, or a fascist, or a socialist, or align himself with any other grouping, but his music – solely as music – cannot possibly express such beliefs in the abstract.

The sales of the record of Rubbra's Tenth Symphony and the other pieces were immensely encouraging, and I planned two more records in the series. One was to contain Richard Arnell's First Symphony – a very fine work, premiered by Sir Thomas Beecham – and I thought of coupling it with Simpson's Second, with perhaps both composers conducting. The symphonies are scored for orchestras of similar size. But I also wanted to record Wilfred Josephs' *Winter* Symphony (no 7) and I was stuck for a coupling. When I mentioned it to Simpson over lunch, again in the *Snooty Fox*, I said it would be great to have a new symphony from him. Although he had recently completed the Sixth – which had to wait three years for its first performance, as we have seen – it was scored for a larger orchestra than the Bournemouth Sinfonietta, and the recording budget, could run to. A week or so later, I had a letter from Simpson in which he told me that he had indeed begun such a work, and we at once agreed that it would be the ideal coupling for the Second Symphony, if he could score the Seventh for an identical-sized orchestra, thus making Arnell's and Josephs' works go together on the other record.

Simpson was also minded to conduct the record himself, as he expressed some reservations about Schönzeler's grasp of his work; I had put Hans-Hubert's name forward as he had conducted the Australian premiere of Simpson's Second Symphony, and was keen to record it. I held no strong opinions one way or the other as to who should conduct, but realised that the composer himself conducting would add to the appeal of the disc. The publicity which would naturally attend the making of such a record should have helped sales all round, for the talking-point of having a new symphony premiered on disc before being played in public had only happened once before in recording history – 50 years earlier, in fact, in 1928, with Kurt Atterberg's Sixth Symphony; to have it conducted by the composer was an extra bonus. Atterberg's Sixth Symphony had won an international competition to commemorate the centenary of the death of Schubert; one of the judges for this competition had been Carl Nielsen. Havergal Brian's *Gothic* Symphony had been entered for the British section of this same competition; it is reputed to have only just failed to gain first prize.

Although the recording plans for Simpson's Second and Seventh Symphonies were settled, and the deal I had put together meant that the total cost to RCA for the tape was just £400, by the end of 1977 the administration of RCA's classical repertoire in the UK had passed to someone else, and my successor let it be known that he did not intend honouring the company's commitment to make these two records, and so none of the four symphonies, by Arnell, Josephs and Simpson, was recorded.

I was very disappointed by this – the more so as Simpson had gone to the trouble of writing the Seventh initially at my instigation – and had Simpson’s publishers been more forceful in this matter I have no doubt that they could have compelled RCA to make the record. In my experience deals only work best when all parties want them to, and RCA’s cancellation of the recordings also frustrated the orchestra, as it would have been natural for them to have the honour of giving the first public performance of the Simpson Symphony, so the Bournemouth Sinfonietta also lost out. In the event, Simpson’s Symphony No 7 was not first heard until after his Eighth had been given in public, and one has to say that the premiere of the latter work – as we shall see – was less than ideal. Eventually, Simpson had to wait until the year of his seventieth birthday before hearing the Eighth as he imagined it.

One day at RCA, I was visited by Giles Easterbrook, an executive of the music publishers Novello and Co Ltd, and Carolyn Schurmann, wife of the composer Gerard Schurmann. Their suggestion was to record Schurmann’s Piano Concerto – a fine virtuoso piece – with John Ogdon, a project which much interested me. I suggested that it be coupled with Simpson’s Piano Concerto. However, it transpired that this was a particularly stressful time for the pianist, and the proposal was shelved – for the time being. In the event, as so often with good ideas being put ‘to one side for further consideration’ the recording was not proceeded with. Nonetheless, I was able to record one of Simpson’s shorter pieces for RCA. This was his *Canzona* for brass instruments, a relatively brief score that, as noted in Chapter III, had been composed early in 1958 for the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble, who had already recorded it for Decca.

The RCA recording of Simpson’s *Canzona*, which I also produced in the fine acoustic of St Peter’s, Morden, in February 1977, formed part of an album of British brass music, mainly fanfares, entitled *Jubilant Brass*. The disc was made with the excellent Locke Brass Consort conducted by James Stobart, and I had planned the repertoire at my home with the trombonist Leslie Lake – a leading light of the Locke Brass Consort, and a member of the orchestra of English National Opera. The disc, being one of several albums of British music I had made to mark the Silver Jubilee, in June 1977, of the accession to the throne of Queen Elizabeth II, also included Havergal Brian’s *Festival Fanfare* and Edmund Rubbra’s *Fanfare for Europe* (on the notes EEC!) among many other short pieces; I wrote the unsigned liner notes.

The resultant long-playing record, dazzlingly played and outstandingly recorded by Chandos Productions, became a surprisingly successful issue. I was pleased when Hugh Ottoway, with whom I did not always see eye to eye on all musical matters – though we shared many musical enthusiasms, our conclusions were often arrived at by different routes – selected the disc as one of his best Records of the Year at the end of 1977.

In a letter published in *The Listener* in November 1967 Simpson had written: ‘We must try to evaluate talent by what statements it makes about life as well as by its own skills’ – a statement that everyone who knew Simpson well will have heard him express in similar terms over many years. In terms of making a more direct statement about life in his work, as Matthew Taylor has written, ‘Like Beethoven, but unlike many twentieth-century British composers, Robert Simpson’s music is generally conceived instrumental-

ly rather than vocally.' A more direct statement is encountered in a work wholly exceptional amongst Simpson's output, the choral motet *Media morte in vita sumus* ('In the midst of death we are in life'), which Simpson composed in 1975 for chorus, brass and timpani for the Aylesbury Choral Society – a Society situated near where the Simpsons were then living – and its conductor Charles Pope.

Exceptional also in this work is the fact that Simpson wrote his own text, an article of his own humanistic beliefs and which, to give it a universality, he had had translated into Latin before setting it. I remember several conversations with Simpson about this work during its composition, perhaps most distinctly his barely-suppressed elation at writing it. It is a striking score in many respects, the first performance of which was given in April 1976. The text repays study itself, as does the composition overall, and I strongly believe that this is one of the very few contemporary pieces of its type worthy to stand alongside not dissimilar works by Bach – his Motets especially – and the later choral pieces of Brahms.

The structure of the work is that of a prelude and fugue, and the English text of *Media morte in vita sumus* is as follows:

The race continues in the seed.
All perceived human acts endure
through the generations.
Among his fellows no man can vanish
utterly, not even in death.

All human lives change others,
and so through the generations.
Malignant change will kill the race.
The dead remember nothing;
and multitudes must be forgotten.
Even so, every man must strive
to deserve remembrance.
Thus will he vivify the unremembering
generations after him.
So in life can death be overcome.

In September 1977, I was present at the London premiere of Simpson's newest string quartet – his Seventh, at the Purcell Room. In one movement, this was the shortest string quartet he had written since his Second of 24 years before, and the performance – by the Gabrieli Quartet (one of several fine young British string quartets which had at that time recently come to the fore) – was particularly gripping. It should be remembered therefore that, at the time this performance took place, none of Simpson's preceding three quartets (Four, Five and Six) had been heard – over twenty years had accordingly elapsed since a new Simpson string quartet had been premiered in public.

In the Seventh Quartet, I was at once forcibly struck by the imaginative opening to the work – a series of repeated Ds on first violin, oscillating between G and D strings – a string instrumental timbre so finely conceived that it simply could not have been scored for any other instrument or group to produce the same effect. What remains so surprising about this opening is that Simpson himself was not a string player, yet his string writing is so wholly in tune with the nature of stringed instruments as to place this aspect of his quartet series on a par with those by Bartók and Shostakovich – master twentieth-century quartet composers who also were not string players. The effect was not wholly unlike the beginning of his Third Symphony, in which flute and clarinet oscillate between D sharp and E simultaneously, the alternate instrumental colour providing the only change in our perception.

Just as Simpson's contemporaneous Seventh Symphony – his shortest symphony since the First of 1951 – could be seen partly as a compositional reaction to its larger-scaled predecessors, which was soon to be succeeded by the bigger Eighth Symphony, so a somewhat similar observation could be made with regard to the Seventh Quartet, *vis-à-vis* the work's immediate predecessors and successors.

CHAPTER VI
DIVERGENCES-CONVERGENCES

I was to leave RCA Records in March, 1978. A party to the Bournemouth Sinfonietta deal had been the independent recording company Chandos Productions, the sound engineers for *Jubilant Brass*. I continued to act as producer for Chandos for several albums with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra conducted by Sir Alexander Gibson, as I had done when I was at RCA, although the remaining Bournemouth Sinfonietta albums in the deal were excellently produced by Brian Culverhouse. The Bournemouth Sinfonietta deal was soon snapped up by EMI, and I was asked by Chandos's managing director, Brian Couzens, if I would help in setting up an independent classical record label. I agreed, and I was able to bring the Australian conductor Geoffrey Simon, via my friend the music critic Denby Richards, to the label, whose first recording – of Ernest Bloch's *Sacred Service* – had been offered to me. I was the producer of this first release on the Chandos classical label – it was recorded by the Zemel Choir and the London Symphony Orchestra at St George's, Tooting – and I planned and produced virtually all of the first dozen or so Chandos Records releases.

Whilst working at Chandos, I resurrected the idea of the two albums of British symphonies – Simpson's Second and Seventh, and the symphonies by Arnell and Josephs. Simpson came to see me at my office at 42 Charing Cross Road, but once more the plan was not proceeded with, principally because the Bournemouth Sinfonietta were about to sign a new deal with EMI, a company that was at that time not particularly interested in this repertoire, and who in any event would naturally engage its own engineers and producers.

One of the niches in recorded repertoire in which Chandos excelled superbly was the brass band movement. Simpson had up to then written two major works for this medium – both symphonic studies and test pieces – characteristically entitled *Energy* (written for the 1971 world brass band championship) and *Volcano* (composed for the 1979 national championship).

I was delighted to learn that Chandos had recorded Simpson's *Volcano* some months before, with the famous Black Dyke Mills Band conducted by Major Peter Parkes, and I quickly arranged for the album containing this work to be issued. The liner notes had to be written within a day or so, and so I contacted Simpson to ask if there were any special features of the score with which he was particularly pleased, and which he felt should be mentioned in the accompanying liner notes. I was able to complete the task within my self-imposed deadline, and felt that this release was some small recompense to the composer for the debacle surrounding RCA's Second and Seventh Symphonies recording.

The release of the *Volcano* album took place in the early part of 1980, and a short time afterwards I left Chandos with no little artistic regret, for I had built a friendly working

relationship with the artists and had done my best in help launch what has, over the years, become a highly successful and much-admired label worldwide.

It was at this time, also, that gradual policy changes within the BBC, which were to lead – in the modern phrase – to a ‘dumbing-down’ of Radio 3, caused Simpson to have serious thoughts about his own position there. Simpson was not alone either in his reservations, or in his eventual disenchantment, and he was to resign from the BBC after 29 years continuous service in 1980. I wrote him a letter of support, during which I said that he ought not to be surprised if he now found himself rather more publicly at loggerheads with the organisation. I was also concerned that he should retain his pension rights – and was relieved to learn that they were safe.

Simpson’s retirement meant that he could now devote far more time to composition and to other projects. This relative freedom soon produced a combative short book, *The Proms and Natural Justice*. This was courageously published by the energetic Martin Anderson, who was then employed at the Institute of Economic Affairs in Lord North Street, Westminster. Simpson’s book, which launched Martin’s Toccata Press imprint, put forward a closely argued – and in my opinion unanswerable – case for changing the planning and costing of this annual series of concerts. Thanks to Martin’s contacts at the Institute, Simpson’s thesis became the subject of a *Daily Telegraph* leading article on July 31st 1981 (indeed, its essential validity after more than 30 years could still do so), which I understand caused no little consternation at Broadcasting House and at Yalding House, where the BBC’s Music Department was based.

Martin Anderson’s and Robert Simpson’s respective views on economics could not have been more different (the former a libertarian free-marketeer – although by no means politically Conservative – with Simpson a somewhat romantic socialist) even if their views on music were very much in sympathy. Much later, Martin told me of a time when he received a telephone call from Simpson, who at first could not remember why he had called. ‘I can’t remember what it was I was going to say,’ Simpson said. Jokingly, Martin said ‘Bugger off, maybe?’ ‘I don’t think I’ve ever said that to you,’ Simpson replied, ‘but it’s always ready!’

Martin asked me to review *The Proms and Natural Justice* in *Tonic* – which was the Journal (which I mentioned earlier, and which he edited), of the recently-formed Robert Simpson Society, and whilst my review was supportive and enthusiastic, I made the point that Simpson was, in publishing it so soon after leaving the BBC, treading ‘an ethical tight-rope’. I also know Simpson himself took exception to this phrase, although Hans Keller knew exactly what I meant by it, which was that Simpson had been employed by the BBC for almost thirty years, yet it appeared – from his book – that for twenty of those years he had been in disagreement with a large part of the Corporation’s policy towards classical music. The ethics involved here were that for two-thirds of his career, Simpson was presumably prepared to take the money and keep quiet in public on matters to which, he now revealed, he was opposed. Others have found themselves in similar position, not at all connected to the BBC or to music, in which it is difficult for them to avoid the charge of hypocrisy. I was not making such a charge against Simpson – for, as I had

privately communicated to him, I understood his position well enough – but was merely pointing out that others might.

In the 1980s, in retirement, a steady flow of major works came from his pen. In 1986, he moved to the west coast of Ireland with his second wife Angela, whom he married following the tragic death of 'Squibs'. The first of these works was the Eighth Symphony, completed in 1981, and written to a description by Simpson's friend, the painter Anthony Dorrell, who had been asked by the composer to outline 'what sort of symphony he'd like to hear, and then trying to oblige him.' The result was a magnificent large-scale (almost 50 minutes) work in two parts (each comprising two movements), but the first performance, by the Royal Danish Orchestra under Jerzy Semkow at the Royal Festival Hall in London on November 10th, 1982, was little short of disastrous.

I attended the premiere, and found myself mightily puzzled, not to say disappointed, by the Symphony. Bayan Northcott – another long-standing Simpson admirer – shared my misgivings, which were that we felt the structure of the symphony was not as fully coherent as other of Simpson's works had been at a first hearing. Frankly, we were unconvinced, but the position was made much clearer when I spoke to Simpson the following day. He at once said that the performance the previous evening 'was not of my Eighth Symphony.'

Simpson had actually travelled to Copenhagen for the rehearsals. According to what he told Martin Anderson later, Simpson listened to a run-through of the work in Copenhagen and then was told by Semkow that he had no time to discuss the work with him. The result was that many of the conductor's tempos and much of his phrasing ran counter to the composer's instructions.

What particularly irked Simpson at the premiere was, as he explained to me the following day, 'having to go on stage and shake the hand of the conductor who had positively murdered my work – pretending to be friends, when what I really wanted to do was strangle him!' Semkow said to Simpson, 'You can go on for one bow – one', but Simpson replied, 'I'm not taking the blame for this on my own' – and took Semkow by the arm and marched him on. There was one bright spot in the evening: the score calls for two timpanists, and the players came up to him in the wings, bowed politely and rather formally, and said 'It's not often that we get such interesting timpani parts.'

But not for the first time in musical history, and doubtless not for the last, the composer was going to have to take the blame for an unsatisfactory first performance. It was not until Simpson's seventieth birthday year that he was, at last, to hear his Eighth Symphony as he imagined it.

Since its inception in 1980, the Robert Simpson Society has done much good work in keeping interest in his work alive, but the astonishing commitment of Edward (Ted) Perry, founder of Hyperion Records, is surely unique in contemporary music. Hyperion have issued recordings of all of Simpson's eleven Symphonies, all of the fifteen string quartets (he had begun a 16th at the time of his stroke in 1991) and other piano and chamber music, as well as almost all of Simpson's music in other fields, including his important contribution to the serious brass band repertoire.

It was Ted Perry's ambition to record as much of Simpson's music as he could. Ted's son Simon has followed in his father's footsteps, and Hyperion has now recorded all of Simpson's chamber and instrumental music, his few choral works and his major organ piece. The recordings stand as a wonderful tribute to these men. Ted had agreed that Simpson would compose a *Hyperion Overture* for the company as the series of recordings of his music drew to a close; regrettably, Simpson's stroke caused that part of the project to remain unfulfilled.

Shortly after leaving Chandos, I toyed with the idea of starting my own record label. I was then introduced to a famous classical recording artist, who told me he would sub-vent the making of a whole series of records by himself, which I could then release on my own label, which I called Phoenix. Enthusiastically, I began to make these recordings, and, after a few months, presented the bills to him. To my horror, he then informed me that he actually did not have the money. This was a very serious turn of events. I suddenly found myself landed with many thousands of pounds' worth of debts which I had incurred on his behalf, and which he was now either unable or unwilling to meet. I decided to carry on as best I could, for I had made a number of other records which I felt would do well.

Amongst these was an album I had made in secret to honour Edmund Rubbra's eightieth birthday in 1981. This was of his complete solo piano music, played superbly by Edward Moore, with liner notes by Harold Truscott. Edward and I drove to Edmund's home on his birthday, May 23rd 1981, to present him with copies of the record, the existence of which he was entirely unaware. The look on Edmund's face as he unpacked the discs and realised the nature of the present we had brought was well worth our efforts.

Another record of British piano music I had made was of the complete music for solo piano of Vaughan Williams, played by Peter Jacobs. Knowing Peter was an admirer of Simpson's music and had played it publicly, I asked him if he would record Simpson's two big solo piano pieces for me, the Sonata and the *Variations and Finale on a Theme of Haydn*. I was very pleased when he agreed, and I contacted Simpson to arrange the sessions to take place at a time when he could attend. The sessions were held at Henry Wood Hall in London, and Simpson's presence was inspirational. I arranged for my friend Bob Giddings to take some session photographs, one of them being reproduced for the first time in this book. The tapes were duly edited, but the financial pressures caused by the artist renegeing on the original deal setting up the label, together with the depressed economic climate in the early 1980s hastening the demise of several long-established record distributors, meant that there were considerable delays in plans to release this and other albums. Two events now conspired to prevent the album's eventual release. The first was that I was then about to be appointed editor of the magazine *Music and Musicians*, and I felt that I could hardly - on the one hand - exercise my opinions as a critic, whilst - on the other - continue as an entrepreneur (however small) in the classical record business. There was a clear conflict of interests, which was soon resolved when, out of the blue, I received an offer for Phoenix Records. Within a few weeks, therefore, I was able to sell the record company, lock, stock and barrel, and proceed in a relatively new career, for several years, solely as a music critic and journalist. As it transpired, the new owner of

the Phoenix record company was not minded to issue the Simpson disc, and those tapes remain unissued.

Although I had written a fair amount of musical criticism of one kind or another, the change to becoming an editor was a very different challenge. A few days after I became editor, I had a call from Hans Keller, offering to write a monthly article for the magazine on any musical matter he chose, if I would agree. I accepted at once, and although I had known Hans for quite a few years, and we had mentioned Simpson before, during a lunch date soon afterwards we talked at some length about Simpson and his music. I mentioned the Seventh Symphony, which I jokingly said was 'mine' - owing to the circumstances that led to its composition. 'I don't understand,' Hans replied, 'it's *my* symphony.' I did not know then that, when the symphony was finished, Simpson had decided to dedicate it to Hans and his wife Milein Cosman. In turn, Hans had been unaware of the background to the aborted recording project, and at that time he kept from me his proposal that I should be invited to join the Critics' Circle. I was flattered when the secretary of the Music Section invited me to join, the more so when I learned that my second-der was Bayan Northcott.

During my editorship of *Music and Musicians* the ownership of the magazine changed hands. At the end of 1986, it was bought by a fledgling company, Filmtrax plc, several of whose directors I had worked with at my time with RCA. During the next eighteen months, Filmtrax was to grow very quickly, perhaps more quickly than was good for it, and although this was a very exciting period, the strains of too quick economic growth, especially during the boom years of the late 1980s, at last began to tell. Having worked in the City during the 1960s as Company Secretary for a relatively large firm, I could see the economic writing on the wall clearly enough. I edited my last issue of *Music and Musicians* in May, 1988, leaving Filmtrax at the same time.

There then followed a number of circuitous events which led to me becoming the publisher of Simpson's music. Internationally, the latter half of the 1980s saw - after the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev as general-secretary of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union and his espousal of the policy of *glasnost* - a gradual relaxation of tension in what was termed the Cold War. There were then more opportunities for economic collaboration between east and west, and in July, 1988, I made the first of many trips to Bulgaria - a country whose people I came to like very much - to strike a deal with Semeon Ignatov, the general director of Balkanton Records, the Bulgarian state record company, in Sofia, the Bulgarian capital. This was for the company AVM, a division of a German group, Ultraprime, which had recently been set up in the UK.

By late 1989, several constituent parts of the Filmtrax organisation had been sold off, and I felt that some ex-employees could be valuably brought into the burgeoning AVM orbit, which included companies in other European countries and the United States. The result was a combination of music companies of varied interests, from heavy metal and pop music to house and disco trends (in which I played some part, appearing on a maxi-single with the techno artist Adamski) as well as an important classical interest, founded upon the Bulgarian state record company's catalogue, Balkanton.

In Simpson's office at the BBC, he had had displayed a poster which announced a performance of his Fifth Symphony in Czechoslovakia, conducted by Vladimir Nohyl. During my Bulgarian trips, I learned that a certain amount of horse-trading existed in East European states with regard to tapes of broadcasts. I wondered if a tape existed of this Czechoslovak performance which AVM might possibly be able to acquire for release through its Bulgarian contacts, but my enquiries proved fruitless. As for Simpson himself, he was not sure that the performance had ever taken place.

After a few months, I was asked by Tim Hollier, chief executive of Allied West Entertainments Ltd – the company he founded after leaving Filmtrax – to find an established British music publishing house, whose shareholders might be prepared to sell. I mentioned this to a composer friend of mine, who said he thought that Alfred Lengnick might soon come on the market. Following many meetings and other discussions, the confidential details of which I will not disclose, in the summer of 1989 I found myself in charge of the Company at Purley Oaks, Croydon, installed as the firm's Managing Director. Lengnick was soon to become part of the Allied West group.

I was now effectively doing three jobs in three locations at the same time, for I was still Director of Classical Music for the AVM and Allied West Companies, which were based in London with offices in Lambeth and Fulham. I was unaware initially where the pressures were eventually to lead me personally, but for quite a while – for several months, in fact – I thrived on the bustle and excitement and what, especially at Alfred Lengnick (who were of course Robert Simpson's original publishers), I was planning to do for him and for the other Lengnick composers whose music I had known and admired for most of my adult life, among them Edmund Rubbra and Malcolm Arnold.

Having worked for many years in various positions in the record business, I knew full well of the advantages of 'cross-advertising', or 'mutual' advertising. This is when two or more companies have an interest in the same product or event, and where they each advertise at the same time, often in the same publications, the one helping the other and thus combining to make a bigger impact with regard to the product or event itself. As I had also been the editor of a long-established music journal for several years, I knew full well of the advantages in building an on-going relationship between consistently supportive advertisers and editorial coverage.

There was a fairly steady stream of recordings of works for which miniature study scores were published by Alfred Lengnick and I lost no time in advertising those scores in the classical record press, tying the advertising in with issues of recordings of the relevant music. I was able to do this with a number of other composers – in particular, Malcolm Arnold, Alun Hoddinott, Elizabeth Maconchy, and – of course – Robert Simpson, thereby raising their public profile in an important area of the classical music business almost always neglected by various other music publishers. The additional 'free' advertising this gave record companies would, in time (human nature being what it is), make them more favourably disposed to record Lengnick works, should such opportunities present themselves in the future.

CHAPTER VII
THE COMPOSER'S PUBLISHER

During the negotiations for the purchase of Alfred Lengnick, I renewed acquaintance with a Director of the company, the noted pianist and musician David Willison. I had known of the company from my earliest days, of course, and at the time of the take-over David, whom I had first met some years before, asked me if I wished him to continue as a Director of the company. I told him that, so far as I was concerned, I very much looked forward to calling upon his experience – as I was sure the composers did as well – and should like him to continue on the same terms. I was most pleased when he agreed to do so.

The then owners of Alfred Lengnick were the husband-and-wife team Leslie and Betty Avenell. I found them a remarkable and endearing pair, very much of the old school, who had kept the company going through thick and thin, and who between them shared an extraordinary wealth of experience in classical-music publishing. Indeed, I understood that Betty herself was a descendant of the Novello music-publishing family, so it was in her blood. Her husband Leslie was the most knowledgeable classical music publisher I have ever met.

A week or so before the deal was finalised (although all the details had been agreed), Leslie Avenell called me to say that Robert Simpson had been in touch with him. It appeared that the previous year, 1988, Simpson had completed his Tenth Symphony, and, although his Seventh Symphony had been published by Scotus Music, and his Eighth and Ninth Symphonies by Faber Music, Simpson wondered if Lengnick would be interested in taking on the Tenth. As Leslie and Betty were to leave Lengnick shortly, Leslie felt the decision should be mine.

I needed no second bidding. Here at last was a chance to do something practical for a composer I had known for over 30 years and whose music I had constantly admired. As the Tenth Symphony had two performances and a broadcast scheduled, as well as a commercial recording for Hyperion Records – all within a month of the first performance – I could see no earthly reason not to take on the work. In addition, the fact that 1991 would mark Simpson's seventieth birthday year provided me, now his publisher, with an additional golden opportunity to demonstrate what I could do for him and his music.

A short while after the Lengnick take-over, David Willison told me that Simpson had told him that, in addition to the Tenth Symphony, he had a number of other unpublished works he would like to place. I told David that Lengnick would take the lot. I felt very pleased that, after all these years, our association had grown to the previously unimaginable situation where I was now Simpson's publisher, and had brought him 'back into the fold', so to speak, with the company that had first supported him almost

forty years before through its brilliant and now virtually forgotten director, Bernard de Nevers, in whose footsteps I felt humbled to follow.

It was Bernard de Nevers who had personally signed Ernst von Dohnányi, Edmund Rubbra, Malcolm Arnold, Bernard Stevens, Robert Simpson, Elizabeth Maconchy, Maurice Jacobson, Julius Harrison, Carlo Martelli and other important British composers to the company in the immediate post-war years, and had earlier, after the Anschluss, negotiated a remarkable deal with the Simrock company for the rights for the British Empire of many of the works of Brahms and Dvořák – both of whose music was then still in copyright (Brahms until 1948, and Dvořák's until 1958). Apparently, de Nevers had groomed his son, an only child, to take over the company when he came to retirement, but the young man was an enthusiast for motor-racing. In the early 1960s, grievously, he was killed in a motor-racing accident, and de Nevers, now a disillusioned and broken man, never recovered from the tragedy.

As the new managing director of Alfred Lengnick and Company, I was concerned to discover that so few of Simpson's recent works had actually been printed for sale, and when he sent me the score of a new String Quartet, No 14, which was to be premiered at the forthcoming Cardiff Festival, I was determined to produce a study score immediately. One of the admirable long-serving members of the Lengnick staff was a talented musician, Valentine (Val) Williams. Val was also gifted in a related area: he was a music copyist whose hand-copying was so exceptionally neat that it looked as though it had been set up in type. I should add that this was before reliable computer music-setting had been perfected, and that Val's combination of superbly tidy layout, speed and accuracy of work made him a most valuable employee.

The score of Simpson's Quartet No 14 occupied relatively few pages, and as Val did his usual immaculate job in preparing the layout, we were able to publish a study score of the work before the first performance. Some months earlier, the fine musician Leslie Howard (now renowned as a pianist: he is also an exceptional organist, conductor and composer) rang to ask if I needed an assistant at Lengnick. Leslie was nurturing a gifted young student, Iain Quinn, an organist of such quality that when I first heard him I knew he could very likely become the most brilliant British organist of his generation – he had become organist of St. Michael's Theological College in Llandaff at the age of 14. I gave Iain a job, and sent him to Cardiff to attend the Quartet's premiere, taking with him copies of the newly published score.

I soon learned the music-publisher's lesson that it is not always a good idea to print a score before the composer has heard the work live, for after the quartet's premiere Simpson had a few – very few, I should emphasize – slight changes to the texture, which he wrote on an envelope for Iain, and which were printed on an *errata* slip inserted in the score. Nonetheless, I was pleased that I had been able to do something practical for the composer.

The pressure of doing three jobs at once, in three locations – despite having (for those days) up-to-the-minute means of communication – took its toll. One Friday evening, just before Christmas, 1989, I suffered a mild heart attack. The condition was

immediately treated with drugs, and my errant heart brought (by and large) under control. It meant a complete re-evaluation of my life-style, which – I also realised myself – had latterly come to depend rather too much on alcohol. With the help of an excellent doctor and wonderful support from family and friends, I was able to take this setback almost in my stride, and my body responded well to giving up alcohol completely (for five years, until a specialist advised me that I would be better off taking up alcohol again, but not to the same extent(!)) a change of diet, and the taking of regular exercise, including walking for three miles every morning before breakfast. Simpson was particularly solicitous to me at this time, and was highly supportive of my ‘walking’ regime – a healthy recreation which he also enjoyed. Within a few weeks, I felt very much better, had lost weight and had taken up tennis again – at which sport, as a youth, I had been a quite reasonable player.

In April 1990, Lengnick signed a distribution deal with Music Sales Ltd., and entered into a specialist deal with William Elkin Music Services. There was no need, once the freehold of the Purley premises had also been sold, to maintain the base in Purley – which was some little way outside London. In addition, there was also a vast quantity of printed music in the Lengnick warehouse, and the company’s stock control had long been in need of overhaul: Lengnick possessed many overstocks. Once the agreed quantity of music had been delivered to Bury St Edmunds and Norwich (where the distribution companies were situated), the remainder of the music had to be disposed of quickly.

In this, I was helped greatly by the dedicated work of Mark Doran, whom I had employed as my assistant at Lengnick and whom I had first met at AVM. Mark was a student of Hans Keller’s writings, and as I write is completing a Ph.D. on Hans’s Functional Analyses. When I first met Mark at AVM he selflessly offered to typeset a little book I had edited of the essays Hans had written when I was editor of *Music and Musicians*, and which I then published under the Alfred Lengnick imprint (Lengnick had published a number of handbooks on music, so this was not an entirely new departure for the company) the proceeds from the sale of which were to go to the Motor Neurone Disease Association, the dreadful disease which had led to Hans’s death in November 1985. Sarah, Duchess of York (Patron of the Association) and (then) Sir Yehudi Menuhin also contributed to the book, and everyone involved in the production gave their services. Music Sales Ltd undertook to distribute the book, free of charge, forgoing their customary percentage; Thom and Cook Limited, for whom I had worked as Company Secretary 30 years before, supplied the paper free, and the printing and binding costs were also donated by local companies.

When Mark Doran joined Lengnick, he was not initially an out-and-out supporter of Simpson’s music; in readiness for the Prom performance of the Fifth Symphony in 1990 (which broke the 23-year absence of Simpson’s music from the Proms) and to prepare for the composer’s seventieth birthday in 1991, I had arranged for *The Musical Times* and *Musical Opinion* to carry commemorative pieces, and I hoped that others would appear elsewhere in the classical music press. I suggested to Mark that he write the one in *The Musical Times*, the discipline of which would, I felt, oblige him to study the music in

depth, a consequence of which discipline would be to reveal to him the quality of Simpson's art.

This is precisely what happened (I myself wrote the piece for *Musical Opinion*), and Mark immediately became one of Simpson's staunchest and most insightful admirers, producing a fine short essay for *The Musical Times* on the Fifth Symphony, but in the event his piece was so clumsily edited as to make parts of it uncharacteristically incoherent. Simpson himself was none too happy at the Fifth Symphony being done in that year's Prom Season; he would have much preferred the recent Ninth – which had not been heard in London. He did not attend the performance himself, although the conductor was Andrew Davis, who had given the unforgettable world premiere with the London Symphony Orchestra seventeen years before.

Mark's interest in Simpson's music extended to personal contact with the composer. Mark visited Simpson in his home in Ireland, and taped several interviews with him. He also sent a copy of the Lengnick miniature score of the First Symphony to Simpson, asking if he had any changes he would now like to make to the work. Simpson sent the score back with quite a few detailed alterations, which Mark hopes to publish as an appendix to the excellent short essay on the Symphony by Simon Philippo, which appeared in the Summer 1999 issue of *Tempo*, edited by Malcolm MacDonald.

In addition to taking on Simpson's unpublished music, I had also signed the composer Alun Hoddinott to the company, since I particularly admired his music, and additionally I bought from Novellos the University College Cardiff Press (UCCP) imprint, which contained a number of important 18th-century works edited by H. C. Robbins Landon, whom Hoddinott had appointed visiting Professor at University College Cardiff. In addition, I took a number of original scores by Hoddinott himself – who had been professor of the music department there since 1967 and had built it into the largest in the United Kingdom. UCCP were also publishers of the Haydn Yearbook.

After the distribution deal with Music Sales had been put into effect, Lengnick was to move to London. At first, I rented offices in the block where the AVM Companies were located, but later we moved into the very offices in Camden Town that Filmtrax had occupied five or so years earlier. It was indeed a rather strange experience for me to be back there, but just at the time of this move, in the summer of 1990, I was playing tennis with my photographer friend Bob Giddings. I ran for the ball after his volleyed return of my service. Almost at once, I heard a loud crack, as the firing of a gun (momentarily, I was back on the firing range in the Army), and I tumbled over, falling in a heap near the net. Before I came to a halt, I knew what had happened: I had snapped the Achilles' tendon in my right leg at the heel and my foot dangled uselessly. I could not get up.

Running round to my side of the net, Bob initially thought I had suffered another heart attack, and, reassured that this was not the case, thankfully was able to drive his car across the grass almost up to the tennis court itself. He lifted me into the vehicle, taking me straightaway to Lewisham Hospital, where my foot and leg were encased in plaster.

I had mixed feelings when I was told that the tendon would heal itself, but that it would take six months. This meant that I was effectively out of the offices for the whole

of this period, but I could still run things reasonably smoothly from home, as faxes, mobile phones and other early technological developments in communication enabled me to keep in relatively constant touch (this was just before the advent of PCs and emails). At home, I was able to do a number of things I would not normally have done, including making a version for string orchestra of a splendid work by Alun Hoddinott, his *Welsh Airs and Dances*, originally written for brass band, and seeing his magnificent *Noctis Equi* for cello and orchestra, a piece written for, premiered and recorded by Mstislav Rostropovich, into print – expertly hand copied by Val Williams.

The tendon did indeed grow back by itself, and after four or five months I was able to make the journey to Camden Town and back by hired car every day. There was a lift to take me from the ground floor to my offices. I enjoyed being chauffeured around, thanks to the generosity of Tim Hollier, but when I got back to the office I was concerned to learn that the copying of the score and parts of Simpson's Tenth Symphony had not been started, and that the premiere – scheduled for the middle of January, 1991 – was only about six weeks away.

Before these details were put into operation, Simpson asked me to send the score to a score-reader, a gentleman whose name I forget, but who – Simpson said – had 'eyes like a hawk'. This gentleman was amazing at spotting tiny handwriting errors in the manuscript, and his pre-production work undoubtedly saved a lot of time and money.

Val Williams did a fine job in copying the score for Vernon Handley, to whom Simpson had dedicated the work and who was to give the first performance in Liverpool, and the part-copying was handed out to an excellent young company. Some time before this, I had received a letter from Jim Pattison, an enthusiast for Simpson's music, who had conceived the excellent idea of putting together a book of writings about Simpson's symphonies. I was much taken with the notion, and greatly admired Jim's enthusiasm, but I felt the project needed expanding somewhat. It struck me immediately that this would be just the kind of commemoration Lengnick should publish in 1991 as a tribute to Simpson in what would be the year of his seventieth birthday.

I contacted Jim Pattison, and, now that my Achilles tendon was on the mend (although in its third encasement of plaster), I was able to make the journey myself by train to his company, Dunholm Publicity Ltd, in Ashton-under-Lyne, to discuss the project with him and his wife. Jim kindly met me at the station, and we had a good meeting – together with a pleasant lunch at his offices – during which we agreed that I would edit the book (adding a number of contributions, the existence of which Jim had been unaware, and writing two new ones myself), and Jim would arrange for the printing and binding to be done by a company which he recommended. Amongst the contributions were chapters by Simpson himself, Edmund Rubbra, Deryck Cooke, Hugh Ottaway, Paul Pellay, John Pickard, Matthew Taylor, and Lionel Pike. It was to Lionel Pike's outstanding book, *The Profound Logic*, a study of Beethoven and Sibelius, that, some years earlier, Simpson had contributed a notable introduction. He strongly recommended the book to me, and I had been both impressed by it and reassured that in Lionel Pike – of whom previously I had been unaware – this country possessed a musical thinker of deep learning

and perception, who also commanded the ability to convey his discoveries in clear and literate English.

Jim Pattison (who also contributed a chapter to the book) and I agreed that Alfred Lengnick & Company Limited would publish the book and pay the production costs. In addition, Alfred Lengnick would also pay a royalty on sales of the book to the Robert Simpson Society. As there was little time (for I wanted the book out in readiness for the premiere of the Tenth Symphony in Liverpool on January 16th), I undertook to copy the music examples in the book myself (Val Williams then being heavily engaged upon copying the score of the Symphony).

Although my leg was still in plaster, I was determined to attend the Symphony's premiere and subsequent recording, and thanks to Jim Pattison's efforts, the book was indeed ready for the day of the first performance, a concert that was enhanced by a fine reading of Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto by Peter Donohoe. Jim and his wife had also travelled to Liverpool for the concert, and handed me copies of the finished book. Although there were aspects of the book's appearance which I felt might have been improved upon, Jim had done a very good job and I was quite satisfied with the result.

I was not the only one – Simpson was also pleased with the book, as were the critics Hugh Canning and Bayan Northcott, both of whom, with other writers, were covering the premiere for their respective newspapers. After the superb first performance, at which many people felt they were present at the first hearing of a magnificent large-scale work, with Simpson in splendid form and the admirable Vernon Handley having conducted with his customary power and sensitivity, I hobbled across the road from Philharmonic Hall to the big pub opposite, to have a drink with Raymond Few, one of Simpson's staunchest admirers, who had asked me to join him in the bar for a chat.

By the beginning of 1991, Simpson had also completed his Symphony No 11. He had written to me late in 1990, telling me of the existence of the work, and how it had come into being. He explained that, some time before, he had heard what he described as 'an astonishingly penetrating account' of his Seventh Symphony by the Thames Sinfonia, conducted by the young composer Matthew Taylor. Simpson had been so taken with the interpretation that he determined to write a new symphony for, and dedicate it to, Matthew. The Eleventh Symphony was the result. In addition to the new symphony, Simpson had also recently written a large-scale work for solo piano, *Variations and Finale on a Theme of Beethoven*, which in turn had been triggered by the pianism of Raymond Clarke, whose performance of a late Beethoven Sonata had deeply impressed Simpson. As it happened, another of Simpson's long-term friends and admirers was Sir John Manduell, then principal of the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and Director of the Cheltenham Festival. I knew that plans were afoot to mark Simpson's seventieth birthday that year at Cheltenham.

Simpson had had the idea that both the Symphony No 11, to be conducted by Matthew Taylor, and the *Variations*, could be premiered in the same concert, which it was hoped would be broadcast by the BBC. Simpson felt that Beethoven's *Emperor* Concerto could make up the remainder of the programme. This seemed to most of us an excellent

idea, but I was taken aback when I learned that the BBC would not be able to relay the programme, as Raymond Clarke had not then passed the customary BBC audition.

There were other problems with Cheltenham. Such is the nature of orchestral concert-giving today that sponsorship has often to be sought in order for programmes to take place at all. The Festival had obtained sponsorship from, amongst other bodies, British Nuclear Fuels Limited, who were to be listed as one of the sponsors for a Simpson concert which was to include his new Flute Concerto. Simpson's ardent pacifism, and his life-long opposition to nuclear power, meant that he could not allow his music to be premiered at a concert underwritten by such a sponsor.

Simpson had already written to Sir John Manduell, forthrightly outlining his views, a copy of which letter he had also sent to me. As his publisher, I was naturally anxious that as many performances of Simpson's music as possible should be given in 1991, and felt I should do all that I could to ensure that they take place. Sir John replied robustly, pointing out what he had done for Simpson in the past, and was still prepared to do in 1991, and I felt very much in a cleft stick. I was most unwilling to get involved at this stage, other than to say to Simpson that, so far as my understanding of the correspondence I had seen was concerned, no slight was intended by the Festival, and I hoped an accommodation between the two men could be reached. Simpson's anti-nuclear views were reasonably common knowledge, and the decision to link a concert of his music with BNFL could certainly be construed as insensitive. On the other hand, Simpson may have reacted rather too strongly to the news, and I was concerned that two old friends were on the point of falling out.

This was the situation which Ray Few was anxious to discuss with me that Wednesday evening in the pub; he had been apprised of the correspondence and we both held similar views, hoping that Simpson and Manduell would at least come to an understanding. That indeed is what happened, and thankfully the 1991 Cheltenham Festival marked Simpson's birthday in suitable style.

Some time later, at a reception, Sir John took me to one side and explained his own position in further detail, saying that he wished neither to cause offence to his composer friend or his publisher, nor to jeopardise the hard-won sponsorship. I was most grateful to him for doing this, and said how pleased I was that the disagreements had been resolved to the point where Sir John still felt able to mount a number of performances of Simpson's music at that year's Festival.

Simpson was staying near my hotel, the Albion, and, I was able to hobble back to the hotel with him down the hill from Philharmonic Hall. Although I had been booked into the Albion Hotel by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, since the orchestra enjoyed a special rate and the station was close by, at that relatively late hour it was the only place within walking distance where we could get a half-decent supper. Simpson joined me for a meal and we had a long chat, principally about his composing methods.

Thanks to his years at the BBC and the number of broadcast talks he was able to give, together with the dedicated work of the Robert Simpson Society, there is a fairly large amount of first-hand material concerning his attitude to composition and his own

music in particular, as well as much insightful comment from him on other composers and different aspects of music, so a lot of what he had to tell me was not particularly new. As a composer myself, I was fascinated by his explanation of how he went about the task, and that, when he realised at some stage in the compositional process that he was on the wrong lines, he would go back through the work until he could pinpoint the place when things began to go awry and recompose from that spot. This process enabled him to find out precisely what had gone wrong, more often than not realising that the music should have taken a different turning, sometimes over the merest detail.

I realised then something I had always suspected in Simpson's music, which is that, for him, the resultant score should be both logical and continuous. He did not always set out to write a work in a particular 'mood', but would be led by the shape the music was taking during its composition; he probably had a pretty good idea of where he wished the music to end up, but perhaps no detailed plan as to how it was going to get there, and even then the music might go off at a previously unimagined tangent – so long as it remained, essentially, organic, logical and aesthetically convincing. Another impression remained strongly from our conversation that evening: I was once more affected by the manner of his speaking. I never knew Simpson to be loquacious or unclear in his speech; he chose his words carefully, yet spoke at normal speed, and his ability to say precisely what he meant, going to the heart of the matter, were gifts I much admired.

After our meal, I retired to my room just after midnight, and thought of how my friend had changed in some ways over the years. Whereas, when I first met him almost 35 years earlier, he smoked cigarettes and a pipe, drank alcohol and ate meat, he was now a non-smoker, drank only water and was a vegetarian. He appeared then, for a man about to celebrate his 70th birthday, to be in particularly fine shape mentally, physically and creatively.

At around 12.40am, whilst preparing for bed, I turned on the television news. As Simpson and I had feared during our supper, the screen was full of reports that the initial allied attack in what came to be known as the First Gulf War had taken place earlier on the evening of the 16th, coincidentally at the same time as the Symphony was being premiered, and the offensive known as Desert Storm was under way. The 16th had also been my mother's 92nd birthday, and I had earlier telephoned her with good wishes. In turn, my mother had asked after my son, who had joined the British Army as a regular soldier about 18 months before, and although he was not a member of the forces sent to the Gulf, we harboured forebodings as to where these uncertain events might lead.

I had mentioned my anxieties to Simpson during our meal, and although I knew he was a deeply committed pacifist, and he knew I was not, he had shared our hopes that the conflict, if it were to begin, would at best be short-lived. Of course, we were not the only ones thus concerned that day.

One of my son's fellow-soldiers in the 13th/18th Hussars was a keen enthusiast for Vaughan Williams's music. As a family, we had shared a holiday with the composer's widow, Ursula, in France some years before. I had recently told her of the Trooper's interest in her husband's music, and she kindly inscribed a copy of a record of Vaughan

Williams's music for my son's friend, which she had sent to me that same day. When I arrived home from Liverpool, her note of concern at the outbreak of the new war and the fate of young soldiers of all nations was eloquently expressed - as had been Simpson's fears the evening before.

CHAPTER VIII
REMEMBRANCE

The London premiere of Simpson's Tenth Symphony took place at the Royal Festival Hall two weeks after the first performance, on Thursday January 31st, by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic with 'Tod' Handley conducting. This programme, part of the Royal Philharmonic Society's 178th concert season, was an impressive occasion, and opened with two works by Beethoven – the *Fidelio* Overture and Triple Concerto Opus 56 (with the Israel Piano Trio) – for which Simpson himself wrote the programme notes. For the Tenth Symphony, John Pickard provided the notes. Ensuring that my Alfred Lengnick staff were present, with Madeleine Kasket doing her customary excellent job of publicity and press relations, I thought it would be a suitable occasion to give Simpson a birthday present from the company. Many years before, on holiday in Denmark, I had come across an old post-card, which had actually been sent to an address in England, round about 1916; on one side of the card was a facsimile of a Danish folk-song, in Carl Nielsen's handwriting. I bought the card, and when pondering over what to give Simpson for his birthday – nothing grand, of course, but something personal and relevant, of which he was previously unaware and would appreciate – it struck me that this card, suitably mounted so that *both* sides could be examined, without taking it from the frame, would be suitable. I gave it to Simpson in the Green Room of the Festival Hall. He was, as I hoped he would be, touched and intrigued by the gift and thanked me warmly.

We were back in Liverpool the following week, for the Hyperion recording of the Tenth Symphony. Andrew Keener, producer of many other albums in the series, was in charge of the sessions. I had first met Andrew when he worked in the EMG Record Shop in Soho Square. Ted Perry travelled up from London for the recording and Mark Doran, who was staying in the Wirral, also attended, during which Simpson was at one time not entirely certain of the ending of the symphony – should the work conclude with an *allargando* or not? The point being resolved – no *allargando* – another excellent compact disc was added to the growing list of Simpson's works on Hyperion, which were at long last beginning to receive their due international recognition.

The magnificent Hyperion recording of Simpson's overwhelming Ninth Symphony, a work in one gigantic movement (fifty minutes in duration, not unlike that of Franz Schmidt's Fourth Symphony) which is also believed to be the longest piece of music to be written in the same tempo, and which the composer dedicated to his wife Angela, had, quite properly, been accorded the *Gramophone* Contemporary Music album of the year for 1989/90. During the composition of this work, and before Simpson had decided to cast it in one large continuous movement, Martin Anderson had sent a photocopy of the original first movement to Phil Lesh, a member of the American rock group The Grateful

Dead. Lesh, a remarkable man, had formed the Rex Foundation, a charitable organisation funded by some of his royalties from the hugely successful band. The Foundation specialised in subventing recordings of worthwhile music that might not otherwise appear on disc. According to Martin, Phil came up with \$10,000, but shortly afterwards the value of the dollar fell dramatically. Ted Perry nonetheless agreed to go ahead, and made up the resultant shortfall in production costs himself.

When the *Gramophone* Awards ceremony took place I was still virtually housebound with my leg in plaster, but Ted Perry kindly collected me from my home and took me to the Savoy Hotel, where the presentations were made following a lunchtime reception. Simpson himself accepted the award with a humorously modest and laconic speech, describing himself at one point as one of 'the grateful living'. Vernon Handley was of course the conductor of the record, as he has been throughout the Hyperion series thus far – and he had conducted the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in the premiere of the work at the Wessex Hall, in Poole, Dorset in April 1987. The record is additionally valuable for containing a talk by Simpson on his symphony – which captures permanently his admirable gifts as a lucid and compelling lecturer on music. In completing Hyperion's recordings of Simpson's symphonies, the Eleventh is conducted by Matthew Taylor, the work's dedicatee,

Vernon Handley was also to have conducted the second performance of Simpson's Ninth Symphony, but in the event it was Simpson himself who did so. Whilst backstage, preparing to come on to the platform in Bournemouth to conduct the Symphony, Vernon Handley blew his nose. This simple act started a nosebleed of such ferocity that it could not be stemmed. The audience was naturally unaware of what had happened, and, with growing impatience, waited for the conductor's arrival. Eventually, Simpson himself had to step in and conduct his own work at quite literally a few minutes' notice. 'I don't want anything like that to happen again!' he said to me afterwards, with that typical chuckle of his.

When I arrived back in London following the recording of the Tenth Symphony, I found myself in for a considerable shock. It emerged that during my enforced absence from the office as a result of the accident, the finances of the parent company which owned Alfred Lengnick had run into difficulty. None of this was Tim Hollier's doing; one of the major debtors of Allied West had reneged on a deal, leaving Tim horribly

exposed. His genuine trusting nature had been misplaced and cruelly taken advantage of, and – always one to concentrate on the big picture rather than the small print – he was to pay a horrendous price. The result was that Alfred Lengnick would probably have to be sold, which it was. I could not remain party to various of the suggestions which were put forward as to how that might be accomplished.

It was therefore with a very heavy heart that I left Alfred Lengnick & Company Limited early in March 1991, and with my resignation my professional association with Robert Simpson and other of my composer friends, which had lasted a little under two years, came to an end.

In 1956, I had worked for Boosey & Hawkes Ltd at one of their departments, 29 Berners Street, in London's West End. Every day, on my way to work, I would pass the

showrooms of Alfred Lengnick, which were at that time situated at 14, Berners Street. In 1991, on my way home for the last time from my offices in Camden Town, I thought of myself then and how, 35 years later, I had found myself heading the very company whose showrooms as a 17-year-old I would patronise during my lunch-hour, perhaps glimpsing in those days, but never daring to talk to, the great Bernard de Nevers himself. Nowadays, on seeing the level at which this once-great publishing house currently operates, and having learned of some of the things which took place after I had left, I am nonetheless deeply grateful at least to have had the opportunity to try and maintain de Nevers' high standards and those of his predecessors and successors – albeit (so far as I was concerned) for far too brief a period.

I telephoned Simpson and told him of the turn of events which had led to me resigning from Lengnick. He was most sympathetic, and thanked me for what I had been able to do for him. I looked forward to the concentration upon his music which his seventieth birthday celebrations would generate.

Like all who knew him, I was deeply saddened to hear of the stroke Simpson suffered some months later. It occurred while he was in England giving an adult education course. He insisted that they take him home to Ireland, by which time he was much worse. I telephoned Angela, and learned that the stroke was a particularly debilitating one. As time went by, it became clearer that Simpson's career as a composer was virtually at an end, although he was able to complete his Second String Quintet in 1995, and begin another string quartet, the Sixteenth, which remained unfinished. He was in much pain, and found it difficult to concentrate for any length of time. Not wishing to trouble him unnecessarily, I telephoned Simpson rarely after that, more often than not speaking to Angela to enquire after his health, and learning from her that the chances of his recovery were slim.

Some years after leaving Lengnick, I was sent a Danish film of a dramatisation of the early life of Carl Nielsen, based upon the composer's published reminiscences *My Childhood* – a video I was pleased to see, although as my Danish was limited to the first few pages from the Berlitz phrase-book for travellers, much of it passed me by. I telephoned Angela, and, learning that Bob was unaware of the film, I sent it to him. I was pleased when Angela wrote to say how much Bob had enjoyed it, and a little while later, I set down my recollections of Havergal Brian in a book, *Havergal Brian – Reminiscences and Observations*, which was published in 1995. As Robert Simpson had been the catalyst by which initially I had come into contact with Brian, and as I also wanted to include in the book some relatively substantial quotations from Simpson's earlier published writings on Brian, I wrote to him, seeking permission to quote and reprint from them.

Typically, his permission came almost by return, and I trust that in that book I was able to pay tribute to the selfless work of one artist for another. In this present memoir – where I have, with one exception, avoided repeating what I had earlier written about Simpson in the Havergal Brian book – for what it may be worth, I trust I have been able to explain and convey something of the character and humanity of Robert Simpson, a magnificently gifted composer and artist, as his qualities appeared to me.

I have no doubt that, as time goes by, Simpson will eventually come to be widely regarded as a leading symphonist and string quartet writer. He was one of the relatively few outstanding English symphonists, a composer whose artistic integrity makes his eleven symphonies worthy to stand alongside those by Edward Elgar, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Havergal Brian and Edmund Rubbra.

The recognition of Simpson's full importance as a composer will, naturally, take time and we should hope that printed copies of the scores will be made available in due course. However, such recognition is, thankfully, made more practical for many people through the release of Simpson's music in permanent recorded form. Ted Perry of Hyperion himself knew Robert Simpson for longer than most people – longer than I did, in fact – because he had worked for a time in the early 1950s at EMG Handmade Gramophones when they were situated at 6, Newman Street. As mentioned earlier, Simpson was to write for EMG's *Monthly Letter* for thirty years – and shortly after he began his reviewing, Ted recalls, Simpson was known to the EMG staff as „The Professor.“

As also mentioned earlier, it was Ted Perry's intention to record virtually everything Simpson wrote, and around 90% of Simpson's output has now been recorded by Hyperion, which this great record man had founded in 1980, and whose admirable work was commemorated, in the 1999 New Year's Honours list, with the well merited and widely applauded award of the MBE.

A recording of Simpson's solitary organ work, the large-scale (and fearsomely difficult) *Eppur si muove* of 1985, was released by Hyperion at the end of 1998, played by my one-time young Lengnick assistant, Iain Quinn, to whom I had introduced the work. Iain has since gone on to make an admirable international reputation for himself within a few short years, especially in Scandinavia, the United States and South America. Iain was a Churchill Scholar at Juilliard in New York, and master of the music at the Church of the Intercession at 550, West 155 Street in Manhattan, prior to taking up a new post in Connecticut. It was at the Church of the Intercession that Iain gave the American premiere of *Eppur si muove* in 1997. This major (and technically very difficult) organ work, which plays for a little over half-an-hour, is cast in the form of a *Ricercar e Passacaglia*, and takes its title (in English, 'But it *does* move') from the words Galileo is credited with having said on being forced by the Church to withdraw his claim that the earth revolves around the sun, and not vice versa. Matthew Taylor's excellent notes accompanying Iain's recording make the point that 'The concept of 'movement' is crucial to Simpson's art, and one is tempted to draw a further parallel here with Nielsen's single-movement organ work *Commotio*.'

Those of us who knew Robert Simpson will long remember him as a profound musician, a wholly exceptional composer and gifted writer; a friend, colleague and warm-hearted human being whose humour and encouraging humanitarianism – in all senses – were added delights. We who are left must draw our inspiration from his example of intellectual integrity allied to the single-minded pursuit of artistic excellence. In so doing, we demonstrate the truth of Simpson's own belief: 'every man must strive to deserve remembrance. Thus will he vivify the unremembering generations after him. So in life can death be overcome.'

This extract from Simpson's text for *Media morte in vita sumus* declares 'a simple and practical morality' – as he described the text himself. Such a humanistic moral belief as he enunciated here, in what one might properly term his Testament, stands alongside further wholly exceptional qualities in other artists of integrity, which are but rarely encountered in our society at any level.

All who were fortunate to meet Simpson soon came to realise that, through his art, and through his character, he possessed such qualities – and others, equally admirable and also essentially humanitarian – in full measure. For those who knew him at first hand, his practical advice and encouragement were unforgettable. Even those who did not know him personally, and those who will form part of the 'unremembering generations' which are to come, will encounter his inspiring influence both in his compositions and in his writings on music. Through his legacy we experience the richly deserved remembrance of Robert Simpson.

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