

TONIC

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EDITORIAL

It is tragic news that only six weeks after having been appointed Vice-President, Malcolm MacDonald has died after a long illness on 27 May 2014, aged only 66. Malcolm was born in Nairn, Scotland on 26 February 1948 and educated at the Royal High School, Edinburgh and Downing College, Cambridge; he lived in England from 1971 until his death, first in London and from 1992 in Gloucestershire. He wrote several books, notably volumes on Brahms, Schoenberg, John Foulds, Edgard Varèse, Ronald Stevenson and a three-volume study of the 32 symphonies of Havergal Brian. He was editor of the modern-music journal *Tempo*, which he had joined in 1972 as assistant to the then editor David Drew, until December 2013. He wrote music reviews under the nom-de-plume Calum MacDonald because at the outset of his writing career, which began with record reviewing for the journal *Records & Recording*, confusion arose between him and the composer Malcolm MacDonald, who was a long-established record reviewer for *The Gramophone*. As Calum MacDonald he also reviewed regularly for *BBC Music Magazine* and *International Record Review*. He was of course an early champion of the music of Robert Simpson, and several of his texts are to be found in *Robert Simpson – Composer*.¹ We shall miss Malcolm's knowledgeable and communicative inspiration.

In happier news we are delighted to welcome back John McCabe, now in the newly-created position of President Emeritus.

This year's *Tonic* features two items largely concerned with the beginnings of Robert Simpson's career. In the Robert Simpson Archive, most of it kindly donated by Angela Simpson, we have a huge amount of correspondence between Robert Simpson and other musicians and composers. The letters from Kaikhosru Sorabji form a substantial but not too voluminous body, easily published within *Tonic*. As Alistair Hinton, Director of the Sorabji Archive at Warlow Farm House, Eaton Bishop, Hereford, HR2 9QF, informs me, Simpson's letters directed to Sorabji have not survived. And although it is in the nature of such letters to give a clearer impression of the writer than of the addressee, we receive at least hints of what Robert Simpson was involved in before he started his professional life as a composer.

This professional life as a composer is to some extent the starting point of Lionel Pike's highly interesting article on the First Symphony, which will in due course, in a slightly reworked version, be the last chapter of his book on *The Gothic in Twentieth Century English Music*. We cannot thank Lionel highly enough for his continued support in all matters Simpsonian.

Jürgen Schaarwächter

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

KAIKHOSRU SORABJI, LETTERS TO ROBERT SIMPSON
EDITED BY JÜRGEN SCHAARWÄCHTER

ELLERN COTE
EAST ST.
CORFE CASTLE
WAREHAM.
DORSET.¹

21/2/48.

Dear Mr. Simpson

Yours of 17th has just reached me at Co Ca where I am staying for a fortnight with an old friend for rest and change.

I hope I am not so curmudgeonly or uncivilised as to reply to so charming kindly and courteous a letter as yours with any sort of invective or harsh words ever although my reply IS to be an unqualified refusal!

Reasons?

(a.) Like Busoni I have reached the stage of considering playing the piano either in public or private a waste of time!

(b.) I fully expect and hope to be out of this country in my nation (maternally *nota*) Sicily from next October onwards:

(c.) Some time ago I made up my mind to forbid public performance of my works in this country for good, and not ever to take part in any such performance myself or to do so myself.

(d.) More reasons pertinent and germane thereunto you will find set out in my first published MI CONTRA FA (Porcupine Press) in the chapter called IL GRAN RIFIUTO which might amuse you and Mr. Truscott.² I well remember how faithfully he dealt with the naughty (in the Jacobean sense of worth nothing) McNaught:³ it was I think apropos Reger wasn[']t it?

Yours cordially,
Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji

Robert Simpson Esq.
276 Verdant Lane
London. S.E.6.

¹ Sorabji stayed at this boardinghouse while he was looking for a permanent home in Corfe Castle.

² Pianist and composer Harold Truscott (1914–1992) was not only an important factor in the Exploratory Concerts Society, but he also premiered Simpson's Piano Sonata (1946) in 1947 and was its dedicatee.

³ Music critic and editor William McNaught (1883–1953) worked for Novello's and was a friend of Elgar and advocate of new British music.

175 Clarence Gate Gardens.
N.W.I.

March five /48.

Dear Mr. Simpson;

Believe me when I say I am very much touched by yours of Feb. 25th and also when I declare that I am sure you all ARE the oasis you describe yourselves to be.⁴ But you see during the past few years my attitude to ANY public performances (or near public) of my work ANYWHERE has greatly extended and hardened as you might say, so that now it is a general prohibition, for the conviction is borne in upon me that my work is just not adapted for that at all; just as, you see[,] some plays are not intended for performance but only to be read privately in the study ... but are none the less any the worse, (or better! – for that![]) But you'll find my position in this matter fully set out in IL GRAN RIFIUTO in my book as I think I mentioned before.⁵

So even if you are disappointed I think you will both understand and sympathise with the point of view therein expressed and will also realise that for me to retreat from the position I have there taken up would be to stultify myself ... not in the eyes of them that see not ... but FAR FAR worse ... myself!

So, with all good wishes and yet again thanks;

Yours sincerely,

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji

175 Clarence Gate Gardens.
N.W.I.

March 9th. mcmxlviii.

Dear Mr. Simpson;

Why no of COURSE not! “No bones broke” you know, and I bear you no ill-will for your kindly efforts on my behalf, even though I have brought them to nowt.

“One would have to be recognised in a pigsty” you well say ... SICURO! Unless one were a swine in which case the judgment of one's peers would doubtless be gratifying ... Being for the first time in almost years at a public music-making on the occasion of

⁴ Simpson had enquired whether Sorabji would be prepared to get some of his music performed in concerts organised by the Exploratory Concerts Society.

⁵ Sorabji is referring to his book *Mi contra Fa. The Immoralisings of a Machiavellian Musician*, published in 1947 by the Porcupine Press. “Il Gran Rifiuto” forms its chapter XVIII, pp. 141–148, its three sections headed “Reasons for not going to Concerts”, “Reasons for having nothing to do with Musicians” and “Reasons for living in a Granite Tower”.

MAHLER VIII,⁶ and glancing occasionally around on the revolting sight of all the (f)arty-intellectual ones in their various and multifarious manifestations of physical and spiritual depravity around one one was struck by the devastating appositeness of Nietzsche's "swarming vermin of the cultured"⁷ I noticed too ... it was a mild night ... that a sheer bodily physical stench emanates from them as well as the spiritual reek ... long withdrawal from their contact has made one's nose more than usually sensitive!

But....

Non ragioniam' di lor,
Ma guarda e passa ...⁸

I do not regard O.C.⁹ as my most mature piano work. This is either the Tantrik Symphony for piano solo, the Opus Archimagicum or the 100 Transcendental Studies.¹⁰ As you sound the sort of person who might be allowed to have a peep at these sometime AND if you'd care to do so AND if you happen to be my way during the next few weeks towards eight or so of an evening AND will let me know well in advance I can be in and show you one or two things, if this prospect amuses and/or interests you.

Yours sincerely and quite benevolently

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji.

175 Clarence Gate Gdns.
N.W.I.

Dear Son of Simp:

That Fakir evidently was not English! Now, where constipation is an article of faith[,] is no need of a corona of spikes to prevent the raping of Chamberpots by "bright back-sides" ... although that's not the sort that Crashaw¹¹ meant - but he should have!

Here is a list more or less complete assorted.

Organ Symphony No. 1. (1924.)

Concerto for Piano & Chamber Orchestra. (1924.) as you know these, no comment

Concerto for " " Small " (1922) from me is called for.

Piano. Toccata. 1928. An extended work with several sections for fugue.

⁶ Performances of Mahler's Eighth Symphony in London had taken place in 15 April 1930 and 10 February 1948, conducted by Sir Henry Wood and Sir Adrian Boult respectively.

⁷ A quotation from Nietzsche's *Thus spake Zarathustra*, part 3.

⁸ A quotation from Dante's *Divina Commedia*, to be translated roughly "Don't care about them, but give a glance and go on ..."

⁹ *Opus Clavicembalisticum*, Sorabji's most famous piano work to date, completed on 25 June 1930, premiered on 1 December 1930 under the auspices of "The Active Society for the Propagation of Contemporary Music", which had been founded by Erik Chisholm (1904-1965).

¹⁰ For more detailed information of Sorabji's compositions please consult <http://www.sorabji-archive.co.uk/compositions/compositions.php>.

¹¹ Sorabji is probably referring to a sermon of English cleric, academic, and poet William Crashaw (1572-1626).

2nd Toccata. 1934. Similar but much extended – more mature. Performed in Glasgow by self.

“Jami.”¹² (1928) Nocturne for piano. Much liked by self but not as good as Gulistan.¹³ played by self in Glasgow.

4th Sonata. (1929.) The first of the real one-programme works. Very extended ample treatment, with a huge final fugue.

5th Sonata. (1935) (Opus Archimagicum) in three great sections named, after the Tarot. Arcana minora: (4 movements) Arcana majora (2 movements.) Archimagus one gigantic composite movement consisting of a Preludio corale – Punta d’Organo – Fuga Triplice. (one of my major works in all respects.)

Tantric Symphony (1939) for Piano solo. a pianistic-orchestral treatment of the piano, with a backward glance at Alkan. Seven movements named after the Chakra of Tantrik Yoga (the 7 psychic centres of the Subtle body)[.] The 7th movement an enormous 5tuple fugue with a huge Stretto Mæstrale. This, with the 100 Transcendental Studies and the Sequentia Cyclica I regard as my most mature and developed work for the piano. Of diabolical and fiendish difficulty.

The 100 Transcendental Studies (1940-44) continue the Alkan-Liszt tradition to the ultimate. Every conceivable technical problem is worked out concluding, in the 100th Study[,] with another enormous Fugue. (It works [out at] over 400pp.) written largely at night during the Blitz in the Second Free Demockery to make the World safe for Spivs.

The Sequentia Cyclica (1949) is a great series of 27 Excursions on Dies Irae. Variations in the ordinary sense they are not, being far too elaborate, detailed and extended. Again a huge 5tuple fugue of great freedom of treatment, with subjects of extreme crankiness – one, a dance of gargoyles & skeletons. My latest great piano work an one of the most typical and important.

My Opus Maximum is the Jami Symphony (1942-9) for eight part chorus [&] large Orchestra: with organ & piano and, in the final Cantico: a barytone Solo. The work is in 4 great sections and runs to over 800pp. of full score. The point de départ is the transcendental mystical poem of Jami. “At once a great poet, a great scholar, and a great mystic ... One of the most remarkable geniuses whom Persia ever produced” (E. G. Browne)¹⁴ in the latter’s wonderful and incomparable translation:

“In Solitude, where Being signless dwelt __”¹⁵

The chorus are wordless all through though having a very large part in the fun. The soloist alone sings (if he can!) the poem in the last short section of the work. My most important work in all ways.

Here my odds and ends. “Gulistan” is very good – a sull[y]ing[,] champak reeking[.]

¹² Nur ad-Dîn Abd ar-Rahmân Jâmî (1414–1492).

¹³ Gulistan (translated “Rose Garden”) is a city in what is now Uzbekistan.

¹⁴ Edward Granville Browne, *A History of Persian Literature under Tartar Dominion (AD 1265–1502)*, Cambridge 1920, p. 507. Edward Granville Browne (1862–1926) was a famous scholar on Persian literature.

¹⁵ Edward Granville Browne, *A Year amongst the Persians. Impressions as to the Life, Character, & Thought of the People of Persia. Received during Twelve Months’ Residence in that Country in the Year 1887-1888*, Cambridge 1927, p. 137.

stifling tropical nightpiece ... so unlike the healthy open air life of one Butlin barstanding et al

“*Quaere reliqua hujus materiai ...*” a Black Magical allusion from M. R. James¹⁶

A version of the Chromatic Fantasia of J. S. Bach

Concerto per suonare da me solo, written to amuse myself, in the intervals of the Jami Symphony. A concerto without orchestra. Schumann did it – badly, as he did most things. I’ve done it supremely well.

3 excellent settings of Baudelaire & Verlaine.

There: that’s all I can tell you. I’m bored and tired with all this. So if you can’t read what I’ve written that’s just as bad as bad!

Don’t ever, ever go into any sort of partnership association with anyone: your worst enemy or your best friend – (even worse!) without having ‘em tied up to a black and white legally drawn up document ... and remember how much more dangerous fake and treacherous best friends are than worst enemies!!!

Experto Crede!!¹⁷

Yours gargoylically

K. S. S.

P. S. 2nd Organ Symphony a huge and quite important affair. Am now on the third Org. Symp.

175 Clarence Gate Gardens. N.W.I.
(one minute of Baker St. Underground station; immediately behind the ABBEY NATIONAL “BUILDING” SOCIETY ...
(You know of course why it[’]s called a “building” society[.] No? Well on the same principle that this long narrow gloomy canon-like street is called “gardens”, or some overblown pantomime harlot a “principal boy”

Dear Mr. Simpson;

It will be nice to see you on Monday evening April 5th. round about 8. You MAY perhaps look forward to SEEING some of my work but you certainly won[’]t look forward to HEARING any. I never touch the piano nowadays, having reached that state that Busoni reached when he said he felt piano playing a waste of time. I feel it not only a waste of time but a damnable waste of energy as well!

¹⁶ *Quaere reliqua hujus materiae inter secretiora* is a Latin line taken from English writer Montague Rhodes James (1862–1936)’s *Count Magnus*.

¹⁷ Latin, to mean „Believe an expert“.

¹⁸ A mixture of “maltreatment” and “malpractice”?

I can assure you that poor old Wood's maltractice¹⁸ upon Mahler VIII – both of which I heard¹⁹ – were many many times worse than Uncle Adrian's though you MAY find that hard to believe. By the way WHAT sort of a cheap-jack is Alma Maria to DARE to write that blithering balderdash about her great husband having to telegraph to Vienna for the text of VENI CREATOR SPIRITUS that any parish priest, any Missal or Breviary anywhere in the remotest village of a Catholic country could have given him in a moment ... About as sensible as anyone telegraphing to the Archbishop of Canterbury for the word[s] of the Lord's Prayer!!!!!!²⁰

Perhaps knowing that such a large pro portion of London concert audiences at the present time are merely the scum of almost any European Ghettoes, she thought that twaddle would go down. Certainly none of the Fleet Ditch sewer-rats remarked on it!

Remind me to tell you a pleasing and instructive anecdote of my Lady Mother, a woman of much observation, AND like her only child not an impassioned lover of the human race, and THE THUMBS OF UNCLE ADRIAN.

Best of good wishes;

Cordially yours;

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji.

175; Clarence Gate Gardens. N.W.I.

April 7th./48.

Dear Brother Simpson;

I was pleased to see you the other evening and find you a person so "simpatico" ... which means so much more than merely the rather wishy washy "sympathetic" ... one can WELL do without THAT type but NOT the persons who are "simpatici" [-] a MUCH deeper wider and more subtle thing. I am greatly your debtor for introducing me to a very original and powerful musical mind, viz. that of Carl Nielsen.²¹ I'm greatly obleeged to you. And that's what I want to ask you. Whither shall I send the music? I've forgotten your chez vous address, and am one of those odd persons whom the holding of borrowed books music etc. is a physical distress until I know it[']s safely in its owners hands again! The Suite is especially remarkable, AND so utterly free from all the fashionable maquillage of that period or indeed any other. No wonder you and the E.C.S. admire him so much. More honour to you. I find a certain subtle cognateness of mind with Reger, but

¹⁹ Mahler's Eighth Symphony was performed in London on 15 April 1930 conducted by Sir Henry Wood and on 10 February 1948 conducted by Sir Adrian Boult.

²⁰ Mahler dedicated the Eighth Symphony to his wife Alma (1879-1964), who only in 1958 published her memoirs (*And the Bridge is Love*, in collaboration with E. B. Ashton, New York 1958); some of her recollections had been published in periodicals previously.

²¹ It is probable that Sorabji refers to Nielsen's Suite [*Den Luciferiske*], Op. 45, for piano, composed in 1919-20 and dedicated to Artur Schnabel (1882-1951).

no question of Reger INFLUENCE; it[']s merely a certain relationship of mind-type or psychological type, as Jung might say. I hope to see you again before very long.

Yours very cordially and well-wishingly

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji

175 Clarence Gate Gardens.
Regents Park.N.W.I.

May 23rd.1948.

My dear Mr. Simpson;

Very many thanks for yours of 19th. which I found awaiting me on my return from Dorset, where I go periodically to stay with a very dear great and old friend, and to work in complete quiet and freedom from the interruptions inseparable from home.

How VERY kind of you to invite me to come out and see you; but you must not be offended or hurt, if for the moment I ask you to excuse me. The recent death of my Aunt has involved a vast amount of work and business for me, which even now four months after the poor soul passed away is not nearly finished and over; and until it is, I'm not greatly in a mood for visiting, as you'll understand. Ask me again later on, if you WANT to!

Was I not right when I lammed into the boundless conceit, effrontery and sheer brazenness of the "amateurs"? Do they not deserve all and more than I gave them? I think they do! AND your letter with its diverting account of their malpractices upon the Bruckner Seventh underlines me!²²

The full-blown (or possibly overblown!) professionals are almost as bad; one of them – a man I used to see somewhat of twenty or more years ago, recently blew across my path ... he's a pianist, quite a fair one, but NOT, naturally, a Titan, merely a fair sized Lilliputian ... and he was VERY insistent on my hearing him play THE WALDSTEIN SONATA Jesu Maria! The WALDSTEIN. At THIS time of day! My reaction was forcible and instantaneous "If I hear that work ONCE only ONCE again, I shall not only SCREAM I shall tear my own hair and yours as well: ARE there no other things in the ken of you "professionals"?" He was VERY hurt and surprised as he said he wanted to ask me if I thought Beethoven MEANT a certain passage to be taken how HE took it I replied, very rudely, I fear, "My DEAR man, I care not a fly's fart HOW Beethoven meant it to be taken I'VE no intention of taking it anyway whatsoever!" AND en attendant, the powerful hard-thought work of a mind like Carl Nielsen's remains a terra incognita to them ... probably as well, all things considered! Quel Canaille! And THIS is the scum to whom we composers are supposed to go hat in hand begging for their unkind

²² It is unclear onto which kind of "malpractices" of Bruckner's Seventh Sorabji refers.

attention! UGH!

How admirable was Newman's devastating exposure of Stravinsky's cheap shoddy "thinking" the last two Sundays.²³ No, one doesn't, at least I don't say that the lucubrations of a Stravinsky are insincere ... any more than the maunderings of mental deficiency are

I have recently come across two delicious mots;-

"You can buy yourself a copy of the NEW STATESMAN, a pair of suède shoes, a Picaso print and a Freud text-book and imagine yourself the dernier-cri of culture when you're only its last gasp!"

and ...

"I never forget a face but in your case, I'm willing to make an exception!"

Greetings and friendlinesses;

Cordially;

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji

175 Clarence Gate Gardens.
Regents Park.N.W.I.

June 22nd./48.

Dear Robert Simpson;

Many thanks for your manuscript that I'm afraid I'll have to return incontinent.²⁴ At present I have absolutely no time at all to study anything being enmeshed in business and family affairs - and every spare minute I can get is given to my own work and very few minutes they are. At a later time I shall ask you to send the work to me again; but at the present I just will NOT take the to me nerve-racking responsibility of having some one else's manuscript under my roof. Add to that that my departure for a stay out of London of at least two months is imminent and I do not intend to take anything like that with me, again too much of a responsibility. You see, I am totally UNLIKE a musician, I have a conscience where the property of other people are concerned, and it is a matter of nerve-rack to me until such property is safely in its owners hands again. Anyway, I very much doubt whether I am capable of giving a fair criticism of the work as the writing is violently antipatico to me temperamentally and it probably would not be fair or just to say anything at all about it ... that would be of any profit to you ... of course the supposition that what ANYONE ever says about anyone else's work is of the LEAST HELP OR GUID-

²³ It remains unclear as to on which works of Stravinsky critic Ernest Newman (1868-1959) expressed himself so negatively in the *Manchester Guardian*.

²⁴ Probably Simpson had sent the manuscript of his most recent *Variations and Finale on a theme of Haydn* for piano, which was premiered only in 1955 by Lamar Crowson. Since Sorabji did not essentially like the music of Haydn his refusal to discuss the music is easily understandable.

ANCE TO THEM IS UTTER NONSENSE.

I have seen ONE INTELLIGENT review of my book and THAT was in MUSICAL TIMES. All the rest are beneath contempt, conventional dull and silly, and I don[']t except from that stricture the egregious specimen you have sent me!

But I DID read your own notes upon the alleged performances of the Mahler Symphonies with very great interest; but you were FAR too restrained about the VIIIth and Vth!

Yes, I did see Schnabel's letter about his symphony in THE TIMES, and the footnote rejoinder was effective enough had one not seen your own letter which has a devastating effect upon it. But I cannot imagine that that dull plebeian-minded German-Jew pedant Schnabel,²⁵ the tedious and most consummately boring performer it has ever been my misfortune to hear COULD have anything whatsoever of interest to say in ANY medium words OR music.

By the way, would it interest you - or have you ever seen a copy of my First Organ Symphony? If you will solemnly pledge me your word of honour that UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES WHATSOEVER WILL YOU ALLOW IT OUT OF YOUR POSSESSION INTO THE HANDS OF ANY THIRD PARTY NOR UNDER ANY PRETEXT, AND if you WANT to. I might send you my own bound copy to browse in at your leisure. Some years ago that very fine organist E. Emlyn Davies²⁶ played the second movement magnificently - at one of his recitals at the Westminster Congregational Church.²⁷ He did it on two occasions, bless him! The absolute prohibition against public performance goes for this work too now as for all the rest of my work.

With all good wishes and greetings;

Yours very sincerely,

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji.

175 The Gentile Ghetto ... for here
we are surrounded by the most
pestilent vulgar and obnoxious
sort of the most vulgar obnoxious
kind of human Yiddish
"Refugees" - alleged! -
N.W.I.

June 24th. 1948.

²⁵ There is, as Alistair Hinton points out, no obvious certainty about the origins of Sorabji's anti-Semitic expressions. Schnabel had lived in England from 1933 to 1939, and it well may be possible that he and Sorabji had become personally acquainted.

²⁶ Edward Emlyn Davies (1885-1951) became the dedicatee of the Second Organ Symphony.

²⁷ The church, now called Westminster Chapel, was founded in 1840, the current building being opened in 1865.

Dear Robert Simpson;

Here is the First Organ Symphony. It[']s many years old now as you'll see but it has its points. Harvey Grace²⁸ spoke about REGER WITH KNOBS ON when he reviewed it²⁹ ... that sort of thing reminds one of the way, as I said in AROUND MUSIC[,] people used to hiss in a triumphantly Agatha Christie-detection-whisper "DEBUSSY!!!!!" when they heard a pair of consecutive triads or secondary sevenths.

I glanced – purely from a scatological curiosity [-] at a Sonata of one Michael Tipstaff or Tipster³⁰ ... or some such idiotic name yesterday. Such dreary dry-as-dust drivel as never yet was! Your Neo-Academic is if possible even worse than the other sort, for the other sort, at least[,] doesn't pose as NEO anything ... except possibly neolithic.

You may keep the Organ Symphony until I come back to town, i.e. two months or so.

Do you remember the old gentleman who said he'd said all he had to say before he was thirty? The trouble with people like Tipster is that they go on saying what is not worth saying at ANY age or ANY time and just will not stop.

So far as I personally am concerned, in addition to my reasons for abstaining from concerts, already set out in IL GRAN RIFIUTO and how many readers will spot the source of the allusion I wonder... DOES Bloomsbunkhemia know that such a thing as the DIVINA COMMEDIA exists? .. but perhaps it[']s too REACTIONARY and counter-revolutionary eh? .. I find the "cultured" ones smell so nasty ... high thinking and scanty washing OBVIOUSLY go together in these days! I was nearly poison-gassed by the reek of them at the Mahler VIIIth; and that was comparatively cold weather!!!!

Yours;

K. S. S.

as from/

THE GREYHOUND HOTEL:

CORFE CASTLE ... Wareham.

Dorset.

June 29th. 1948.

My dear Robert Simpson;

Your pertinacious enthusiasm or should it be enthusiastic pertinacity is very cheering and heart-warming in these days when they are neither hot nor cold ... and therefore as

²⁸ Harvey Grace (1874–1944) was Organist and Master of the Choristers of Chichester Cathedral, 1931–1937, lecturer at the Trinity College of Music, editor of *The Musical Times* and a noted writer on music.

²⁹ Harvey Grace, *Organ Music*, in *The Musical Times*, 1 July 1926, p. 616.

³⁰ Michael Tippett's (1905–1998) [First] Piano Sonata was composed as early as 1938, and published in 1942. The original name was Fantasy Sonata since it departed from the usual four movement classical sonata form with a set of variations as the first movement, followed by a slow movement, a sonata-allegro, and lastly a rondo-finale. In 1954 Tippett re-designated the work as a sonata for the second edition because it adhered more closely to this form than to that of a fantasy.

ONE once said "THEREFORE WILL I SPUE THEE OUT OF MY MOUTH"³¹ As far as playing to a few gathered together in the name of the Robert Simpson, well the ordeal of playing to a FEW is JUST as unpleasant as playing to not so few ... besides, I've neither the time nor the energy to waste upon working up any of my "pieces"[,] my "morceaux" (????!!!!) to a performance-stage. As I think I told you, I have arrived at the stage of Busoni when he said he felt piano-playing a waste of time. As for addressing a company upon this that or the other that's not my style either I'M QUITE sure! Besides I've said all I had to say for the time being at any rate in M.c.F..³² Why ask me to repeat viva voce what I've already said in print????? "But there's no need why should you know!" "But it[']s ten to one I SHOULD!" ... Besides, a gathering of more than one or two people whom I already know well I find insupportable .. "To begin with, I find my own failings etc" see IL GRAN RIFIUTO. You see, my dear man[,] I don[']t LIKE people in anything above homoeopathic doses in very high dilutions ... Very refractory of me of course ... and I PERFECTLY sure ... at least I devoutly hope THEY like ME as little as I like THEM I'M a monomaniac, a glutton for privacy ... I find my own society so absorbingly interesting that I like to take all the possible opportunities to enjoy it! It all links up psycho-idiotically with my consuming passion for boxes of all sorts that I collect as other and "better" people collect picture postcards[,] stamps, butterflies or what you will. My boxes are delicious I promise you! They reside one inside another inside cabinets shut away from profane and foolish gaze to be brought out in the rare presence of another claustrophiliac! Yes, I'm really tickled to death with my boxes ... I should be désorienté without my boxes And when my boxes[,] as some of them do, possess secret places of the box my transports are BOUNDLESS! I have one covered in human skin .. that appropriately enough looks remarkably like that of a pig ... it probably was.³³

Now enough of all this.

Your patron Saints preserve and prosper you.

Yours continuously;

K. S. S.

175 Clarence Gate Gardens.
Regents Park N.W.I.

Sept. 10th. /48.

My dear Robert Simpson;

How nice of you to say all those nice things about my Organ Symphony EVEN though I am fully aware that they are the truth!!!!!! You see, I am modest ... i.e. modestus IN THE

³¹ A quotation from Revelation 3:16.

³² *Mi contra Fa.*

³³ At least some of them have survived in the Sorabji Archive.

CLASSICAL SENSE without any of those modern implications of grovelling humility ... but humble not in the least!

You may live with it a bit longer if so you wish, for you won[']t be allowed to live with number two even for ANY time it[']s in manuscript ONLY only one copy. It[']s three times the size of number I, and the treatment of the instrument is far freer[,] bolder and [more] venturesome than number one!

For the moment I am in no mood to see or talk to anyone having just returned from pure country air to this pest-house of London, from which, however[,] I am scheming to clear out at the earliest possible moment, and have various plans on hand with that end in view. The sight of the many-too-many brings home to one how inordinate they are doesn[']t it? The only way I can preserve any balance and tolerance of judgment regarding them and their ways is to keep as far from the mass of them as possible.

(i.e. MESS!)

Close contact serves with me to destroy utterly any movements of sympathy that I may, in my weaker moments ... (and in STRICT private) feel for them in the misfortunes and afflictions, bodily[,] financial and other that they so industriously bring upon themselves. By the way have you read that VERY wonderful book THE PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY?³⁴

Later I'll ask you to drop in one evening and join me in an EXECRATION DUET over them and things, in a glass of Monte Aguila³⁵ - if there's any left!

Cordialest greetings to your admirable self and all associated with you;

Yours very sincerely,

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji

175 Clarence Gate Gardens.
Regents Park. N.W.I.

7. 4. 49.

Dear Robert Simpson,

However pleasing, displeasing or however much of no interest at all it may be, I am still alive - not at all well thank you very much, and hope you are - as far as concerns the better part of the statement - as well as one can possibly expect to be, starved as we are of all the foods vitaly necessary to incarnate well being and poisoned by the felonious malfractions upon those that we do succeed in getting!

This by way of prelude to saying that I hoped you heard the two 3rd programme performances of that unspeakably lovely and great masterpiece Das Lied von der Erde from

³⁴ Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy*, a comparative study of mysticism, was published in 1945 by Harper & Brothers in the US and in 1946 by Chatto & Windus in London.

³⁵ Monte Aguila is a West Indian liqueur.

Germany last Sunday and yestereven? Never – certainly so far as the contralto [is concerned] have I heard the music sung with such penetrating and poignant beauty. The tenor too was admirable.³⁶

Do you remember the gentleman who operated on this in the Edinburgh Festival a year or two since under Walter???

... Only one comment can be made about such singing of such music as Margarethe Klose gave us – Calaf's in "Turandot" "O divina bellezza o meraviglia o sogno!"

And how precious not to have to go to a Concert Hall, sit next to evil looking and ill-smelling brainstrustful ones³⁸ and hear the air polluted afterwards by what they gabble ... from mouthsful of teeth as false as themselves, with breath to which a midden or cesspool was as oil of attar of roses & champak!

Yours cordially:

K. S. Sorabji

175; Clarence Gate Gardens;
Regents Park. N.W.I.

xi-iv-xlix.

My dear Robert Simpson;

Many thanks for the returned Organ Symphony. Do you know, I REALLY couldn't remember who'd had it! That's how I lost my three beautifully bound pre-last War miniature scores of ALL THREE IMAGES of Debussy, lent to a noxious insect called Henry Boys,³⁹ I believe. This now a good sixteen years ago or more.

³⁶ It is uncertain whether this performance is identical to a performance of the work from Hamburg first broadcast in 1948, featuring Margarete Klose (1899–1968) and Rudolf Schock (1915–1986) and conducted by Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt (1900–1973).

³⁷ The Edinburgh 1947 performance conducted by Walter and attended by Alma Mahler, is famous for Kathleen Ferrier having sung, most movingly, the contralto part; the *Edinburgh Evening News* thought it "simply superb". Critics these days kindly omit the name of the tenor involved.

³⁸ The Brains Trust was a popular Radio programme during the 1940s, on which a panel of experts tried to answer questions sent in by the audience. The programme started on the Forces radio service in January 1941, and after having been renamed it continued for 84 weeks continuously from its initial broadcast and became one of the most popular of informational programmes. Because of its popularity, it was moved to the peak time on Sunday afternoons. It was typically heard by around 29% of the UK population and generated four to five thousand letters each week from the general public. During the early war years it helped raise morale on the Home Front, and the verbal sparring between its three original panel members, especially Julian Huxley (1887–1975) and Cyril Joad (1891–1953), made it one of the most popular programmes with listeners. The radio programme ended in May 1949 and transferred to BBC television in the 1950s.

³⁹ Henry Boys (1910–1992) had attended the International Society of Contemporary Music concerts while still a student at the Royal College of Music; there he made the acquaintance of Aaron Copland, of whom he became the earliest English advocate. His extensive musico-dramatic analysis of Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* – a work he had stoutly defended elsewhere against its many critics – concluded an anthology of essays devoted to the opera and published in 1948.

But how pleasant to know that you are about [to] démenager⁴⁰ in that graphic and expressive French phrase, to Muswell Hill, a locality I know very well. Indeed more years ago than is ANYBODY'S business, I used, of a Saturday afternoon, in fine warm weather, to take a 27 bus to what was at the time the extreme northern limit of the Subterranean line, at the bottom of Archway Road and Highgate Hill, take a something-or-other train up the Archway Road, yea even under the Archway itself verily verily, to Highgate Station, down into which one gazed as from one of the upper rings of Malebolge;⁴¹ it was quite macabre and exciting then an indolent waddle down Wood Lane into Queen's Wood, where I would sit for an hour or two browsing and drowsing over and into some score or other, to waddle on down through said Queen's Wood, along a footpath that led into Park Road, thence descending upon a friend who used to live in a road called Tivoli [Road] - why[,] Jesu Maria alone know[s]; what connection it had with that place of dream enchantment and fabulous beauty was never within mortal ken - to angle for a cup of tea, when one COULD brazenly and openly angle for a cup of tea without being looked at askance for a scrounging thief, as one would be, and indeed in fact WOULD BE in these bright days, did one do such an outrageous thing! But enough of these near-senile reminiscences ...

..... Nessun maggior dolore
 Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
 Nella miseria, e ciò sa'l tuo dottore.⁴²

Is Dante right? I cannot make up my mind; in very many cases, I find it[']s very much the reverse. I'm very very often not at all sorry to have HAD the times and things I used to have, HAVING had them, I'd be such sorrier never to have HAD them at all! ... At least I can crow over those who HAVEN[']T! Which is sometimes VERY diverting, especially when they are bloody fools, who think Mr. Peter Pears is a singer, and Dr. Malcolm Sargent a conductor (he might have been perfectly MARVELLOUS on a tram or a bus poor darling ... SUCH a tragedy of missed vocation don[']t you think? there's nothing sadder)

Kathleen Ferrier ... yes mmmm reminds me of a story of a friend of mine talking to an old Neapolitan maestro di canto recently "The Engleesh mees nice girl nice voice often very very good macché! IF YOU PUT A FISH IN A TREE DO 'E SING LIKE BIRD?????????????????"⁴³

⁴⁰ I.e. house-move.

⁴¹ In the *Divina Commedia*, "Malebolge" is the eighth circle of Hell.

⁴² "There is no greater sorrow | Than to be mindful of the happy time | In misery." Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia*, "Inferno", Canto V, lines 121-3.

⁴³ Sorabji's complaining about contemporary performers can regularly be found in his writings. He had been an ardent concert- and opera-goer in his early years and now felt there was a decline in quality anywhere. Of course, Sir Malcolm Sargent (1895-1967) was disliked by a number of critics, who considered his interpretations superficial or "flashy" and regarded his success with the lay audience suspiciously. Tenor Peter Pears' (1910-1986) voice was, as David Cairns writes, "not beautiful in itself; its reedy timbre was so idiosyncratic that for some people it came between them and the music. Even his countless admirers might have agreed that, objectively considered, it lacked warmth and variety of colour. But so great was his skill and so subtle and imaginative his musical sensitivity and mastery of inflection that it conveyed, together with his air of patrician authority, an extraordinary richness of atmosphere and feeling." ("A tenor of rare

And now from this backbiting, to other matters. Ma sicuro you may write what you like about my not at all humble self in "M. in G. u G."⁴⁴ I'd be tickled to death. Naturally you'd have to have opportunities, to sniff at and into the corpus of mss. works, and I'd place every opportunity at your disposal for so doing. [']Twould take a number of probably wearing and exhausting sessions; so the best method to pursue would for you to arrange to come to this Ungentile Ghetto on such free afternoons as you can manage twixt this and say the time when the contribution has to be ready, closet yourself in my study with certain of the score[s]; I would then remove myself into some convenient fourth dimension, go into Nirvikalpa Samadhi⁴⁵ or something until it was time for you to be refreshed with tea and such, after which, you would depart in such peace as still remained with you after an afternoon thus spent or misspent. No other plan seems feasible. I shall be out of London from June first until July 31st. I expect, so what is to arrange had either to be before or after that ... sort of ante and post Iron Curtain notion ... The only snag is that I am NOT "British Music" How do you propose to get round, over[,] under (or all three) that? "A kitten, dear readers, born in a kennel, as you are all sagaciously aware, remains quand même a kitten ... and so, Kum Som Som the most feline of persons and composers, whose father was a Hottentot and whose mother was a Cannibal, and who was born while both his parents were on show at an Earls Court Exhibition of monsters, in the year so-and-so cannot with justice be called British, indeed on the rare occasions when I have timidly hinted that that was what some people had been heard to call him, I was greatly alarmed to see an atavistic frenzy and signs that any moment Mr. Som Som might revert to the anthropophag[ian] habits of his maternal ancestors"

Enough ... enough Many, many thanks for your kindness in sending me that nice little score of the Nielsen, which I shall investigate with interest.⁴⁶

Yes, I have been really exceedingly unwell, prolonged feverish attacks, neuralgia going on for days a and nights all over my head and face, and one night quite literally almost driven MAD by a real Devil's Dance of the third section of the final quintuple fugue movement of my last piano work the Sequentia Cyclica upon DIES IRAE in my unfortunate racking burning and intermittently pouring-with-sweat head ... three or four times every night I've had to get out of bed literally DRY IT RUBBING IT WITH A TOWEL! This is now past, Laus Deo, for ten days, I was not outside the house, crawled from bed to chair, chair to bed, getting rest nor relief in neither, until a gradual subsidence of the symptoms took place. I now both look and feel something less like a relaxed dog's mess, I hope!

Blessings on you and yours;

Yours quite as much as before;

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji.

intelligence - Obituary of Sir Peter Pears', *The Sunday Times*, 6 April 1986.) Compared to the great Italian contraltos of her time, also the voice of Kathleen Ferrier (1912-1953) could be criticized.

⁴⁴ Obviously Simpson intended to write an entry on Sorabji for *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Allgemeine Enzyklopädie der Musik*, ed. Friedrich Blume, the first volume of which appeared in 1949-51 in Kassel; the volume containing the entry on Sorabji eventually was only published in 1965, the entry being signed by Nimal Chatterji and Fritz Bose.

⁴⁵ *Nirvikalpa samâdhi*, the only true final Enlightenment.

⁴⁶ Unclear which score may be meant.

P.S. Another delight about your new neighbourhood is that it contains both a CRANLEY GARDENS and an ONSLOW GARDENS blessedly, blessedly un-Kensingtonian ... that most depressing district in or near London.

175 Clarence Gate Gardens.
Regents Park.
N.W.I.

29. IV. 49.

My dear Robert Simpson:

Apologies of unanswering yours si aimable note of 14th. I have been actually far more severely unwell than I thought, and what I took to be a more than usually severe feverish attack turned out to be a sharp attack of malaria which has left me feeling as much like a human person as the noise that comes out of Mr. Peter Pears are like singing!

Now what days and times do you think suitable for burrowing in my MSS.? Do Saturday afternoons 7th 14th 21th appeal to you? Say 2.30 to 3? You can then spend say 3 hours or so- if you can stand that! - with them, fortified by tea at 4 - China tea (not Typhoon or Scirocco Tips or Lyons ½!!⁴⁷)[.] You can have my study quite privately to yourself. (I shall of course efface myself during this period - one must or must one NOT! ... make a pretence at bashfulness[.] If you've other suggestions regarding dates and times that you prefer[.] let me have them.

Yours always

KomSee

KomSaa

NB.

I was born of poor but dishonest parents - in wedlock - to my immense chagrin: my hands were kissed as a small child by the children of the Infanta Eulalia⁴⁸ who used to exclaim "Ah voilà la jolie petite Espagole!" "La jolie in petite Espagnole" being attired in that indiscreetly sexually ambiguous - or ambidextrous [-] attire, that was the mode on the Continent when we were all that young. A contemporary photograph shows me as "une petite fille" of exotic and seductive beauty with eyes like limpid wells of blackest Encre de Chine[,]⁴⁹ hair of a fabulous silkiness and of an allure qui ne se conçoit pas! In fact I was much more beautiful than Thais at a quarter of Thais' age!!! (at the height of her fame!)

⁴⁷ Sorabji obviously complains about the poor quality of industrial tea.

⁴⁸ Infanta Eulalia of Spain, Duchess of Galliera (1864-1958) was a Spanish infanta known for her controversial books.

⁴⁹ Chinese ink.

175; Clarence Gate Gardens;
Regents Park. N.W.I.

May third. 1949.

Dear Mr. Simpson;

Yes; May fourteenth at two thirty for the preliminary Augenblick is duly marked, fixed and appointed.

Your Bishop story is delightful; but do you think that for concentrated and really brilliant nastiness the following can easily be surpassed? I DO hope not for alone and unaided I did it To a pushing intrusive bumptious acquaintance-gate-crashing bore "So here you are again at Corfe Mr. S. S. S. S. S. I've seen you SOO often ... SHOOOOORLY you MUST remember me?????" "My VERY good Sir, I forget faces on principle. Yours gives me no convincing excuse for breaking my rule. GOOD morning!" Yes, and when you want to warn somebody that somebody is anything but a gentleman, but desire at the same time to draw a decent veil over what he actually IS, you say he's one of natures ... It[']s like those frightful DEAR souls who MEAN WELL If Hell is paved with good intentions THEY ought to be underneath the paving stones.....

About sulphanilamide treatment, I can give you a very great medical man's warning ... from a text book circulating among the medical profession ... McDonagh's UNIVERSE THROUGH MEDICINE[,]⁵⁰ a VERY remarkable book ... he notes the increasing incidence of empyaema after pneumonia PARI PASSU with the use of M. & B.⁵¹ which are of course sulphanilamide. I see you need some warnings against conventional medical men and their ways ... I can give you lots and lots Returning to M. & B. ALL THE PEOPLE I KNOW WHO HAVE BEEN TREATED OR RATHER MALTREATED WITH IT FOR PNEUMONIA HAVE DEVELOPED EMPYAEMA AFTER IT.

Till Saturday afternoon. May 14th. allora.

Cordially yours;

K. S.⁴. S.⁴

⁵⁰ James Eustace McDonagh, *The Universe through Medicine*, London 1940.

⁵¹ Sulfapyridine was discovered by Lionel Whitby at the British firm May & Baker Ltd. in 1937 and was successfully used to treat Winston Churchill's bacterial pneumonia in 1942. In a subsequent radio broadcast he said: "This admirable M. & B. from which I did not suffer any inconvenience, was used at the earliest moment and, after a week's fever, the intruders were repulsed." In 1944 M. & B. 693 also saved Nero, the Royal Circus lion, from pneumonia.

175; Clarence Gate Gardens. N.W.I.
Padd. 8089.

xxv/v/mcmxlix.

My dear Robert Simpson;

Here is the SOUTH WIND⁵² quotation I was trying to recite to you. It[']s that wonderful character old Count Caloveglia speaking – a Latin of the Latins ... He is speaking to a young man Denis – who is suffering those perplexities that afflict earnest Northe[r]n youngthings especially acutely Denis asks Count Caloveglia what his old teacher said to him. ... It runs, “[’]The old teacher? Let me see ...[’] he said[.] ‘Do not be discomposed by the opinions of inept persons. Do not swim with the crowd. They who are all things to their neighbours cease to be anything to themselves ... Avoid the attrition of vulgar minds keep your edges intact[’]” Golden advice every word of it! .. And the other, from the incomparable SAKI .. (Reginald on Worries) ... “If you want a lesson in elaborate artificiality, just watch the studied unconcern of a Persian cat entering a crowded salon, and then go and practise it for a fortnight.”⁵³

I look forward to further séances on my return in mid-July.

Greetings;

Yours;

K. S. S.

2/9/49

Ellern Cote
East St.
Corfe Castle.
Wareham.
Dorset.

Dear Robert Simpson:

You will (perhaps!) wonder at not hearing from me. I am still away and am [i.e. will be], until the last week of this month. I shall be thus coming up to London for a short while, but shall not be there long as I shall henceforth spend most of my time here.

Did you hear Germani’s superb performance of the great Reger Op. 73?⁵⁴ What a work and what an organist!

⁵² *South Wind* is a 1917 novel by British author Norman Douglas. It is Douglas’ most famous book. It is set on an imaginary island called Nepenthe, located off the coast of Italy in the Tyrrhenian Sea, a thinly fictionalized description of Capri’s residents and visitors. The novel’s discussion of moral and sexual issues caused considerable debate. Count Caloveglia is the only character in the novel clearly hinted at to be homosexual.

⁵³ Hector Hugh Munro, *Reginald on Worries*, in *Collected Short Stories of Saki*, Ware (Herts.) 1993, p. 16. After Munro’s (1870–1916) death in the First World War, his sister destroyed all surviving personal papers and replaced them by her own memoirs.

⁵⁴ Possibly Sorabji refers to Germani’s performance of Reger’s Introduction, Variations and Fugue on an

By the way an organist recently said he had read somewhere that Shakespeare had said that he at one time wrote musical criticism!!!!!!..... The organist was cutting my hair as he told me this Have you ever heard of a hairdresser-organist???... Well, here he is!

Yours always.

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji.

175 Clarence Gate Gardens.

N.W.I.

Nov. 26th. 1949.

Dear Robert Simpson;

I want those manuscript scores of mine that I lent you six months ago back as soon as possible please, as they have to go along with all my others into the safe-custody of my Bank. Don[']t make a special journey but leave them any time convenient to yourself when you are passing this way.

For callow adolescent insolence and impudence, THE TIMES hack surpassed even himself lately, when referring to the Mahler Second Symphony, which had an inspired performance under Walter.⁵⁵ He said that Walter was not bothered by its "banalities" as "WE ENGLISH are" ... so. THE TIMES GRUB STREET GRUB! HOW too remarkable that banalities in Mahler's work should be observed by "US" and not by a musician of such eminence as Bruno Walter Indeed MUCH too remarkable to be believed GANZ ASTRONOMISCH!!!!

Greetings;

Yours "come al solito"⁵⁶

K. S. Sorabji.

original theme op. 73 which took place at St. Mark's Church, North Audley Street, London on 13 February 1947 (cf. John Wesley Barker, *The Reception of Max Reger in England 1925-1973*, in *Reger-Studien 7. Festschrift für Susanne Popp*, ed. Siegfried Schmalzriedt and Jürgen Schaarwächter, Stuttgart 2004 [Schriftenreihe des Max-Reger-Instituts, vol. XVII], p., 615). There is a rendering of this work performed by Germani (albeit several decades later) available on Youtube.

⁵⁵ A live rendering of the work with the Vienna Philharmonic was recorded for radio on 16 September 1948; the first movement of this performance is nowadays available on Youtube, the complete performance was released on CBS/Sony Japan.

⁵⁶ I.e. "as usual".

Rowbarrow;
Townsend.
Corfe Castle.
Dorset.⁵⁷

June 20th. mcml.

Dear Robert Simpson;

How good to see your exceedingly percipient and able notes in that scrofulous mangy rag THE RADIO TIMES!⁵⁸ IS there any hope do you think that the British Water Closet will surpass its almost hors concours howler on the occasion of the last malperformance under its auspices of the glorious EIGHTH, when it told us in the programme that Mahler who was engaged upon the work during a villegiatura in a small Austrian country town HAD TO SEND TO VIENNA TO HAVE TO HIM THE WORDS OF VENI CREATOR SPIRITUS? .. This in a Catholic country where any paroissien, Missal or Breviary would have given him them ... not to mention the priceless assumption, that he a passionately convinced Catholic did not know the words more especially being a convert ... and converts are ALWAYS more au fait all the faithful should know than the born faithful are!

Unfortunately, of late, the Water Closet seems to be losing some of its one-time glorious gift of inspired idiocy.

A more grotesquely inept composition than Schoenberg's Survivor from Warsaw (or was it Chelsea or Montparnasse?) I have rarely had the good fortune to hear! I enjoyed it IMMENSELY; it was ALMOST as good as Nellie Wallace or Robey.⁵⁹ The wild applause of the devout too was an added piquancy. I think it might be subtitled BOWELS OF CONSTIPATION or "DULCE ET DECORUM EST IN LOCO ..."

Yours come sempre;

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji.

The ROYAL PESTILENT HALL sounds QUITE the nastiest place for music I have ever heard! One, of course, EXPECTS an orchestra to sound bloody in England ... but at least it usually sounds FAINTLY like an orchestra HERE a band of musicians sounds like a lot of people all playing in their own home relayed by some magical means into one loud speaker of more than usual acoustical inadequacy.

⁵⁷ Sorabji rented this house in December 1950 before moving into "The Eye" in 1956.

⁵⁸ It is currently unknown as to what Simpson text Sorabji refers to here – it is not in the Robert Simpson Archive at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

⁵⁹ Nellie Wallace (1870–1948) and George Robey (1869–1954) were well-known music-hall stars.

[postcard, pasted into Scrapbook No. 1, p. 50]

Heartiest congratulations on dealing so faithfully with that pompous pretentious wind-bag, that dreary prig!⁶⁰

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji
Corfe Castle. XXXI.V.MCMLV.

⁶⁰ Here Sorabji refers to critic Donald Mitchell (*1925), who from 1958 was editor of Music Books at Faber and Faber and in the same year was appointed Editor of Boosey & Hawkes's music journal *Tempo*. In 1965 he founded the music-publishing firm of Faber Music. In 1972 he became the first Professor of Music at Sussex University. Following the death of Benjamin Britten, Mitchell became a senior trustee of the Britten-Pears Foundation; in 1986 he became the Foundation's director and chairman of the Britten Estate Ltd. From 1989 to 1992 he was chairman of the Performing Right Society. Mitchell had attacked Simpson on the matter of his Third String Quartet, and Simpson had fought back (cf. Lionel Pike, *Robert Simpson on music: writings and lectures*, in *Robert Simpson, composer – Essays, Interviews, Recollections*, ed. Jürgen Schaarwächter, Hildesheim 2013 [Studien und Materialien zur Musikwissenschaft, vol. 74], pp. 429–431).

LIONEL PIKE
ROBERT SIMPSON'S 'GOTHIC SYMPHONY'?

Simpson's First Symphony was completed in 1951: it was not his first symphony, for he had destroyed others, including a serial one. The Symphony No. 1 was the work that partly gained him the degree of D. Mus. at Durham University;¹ and it is a symphony basically in one movement (a type he well knew from Sibelius's Seventh Symphony), for although there are changes in the length of note-values, etc, the basic pulse is constant throughout and the music is continuous. Simpson had a life-long interest in momentum, and it is that fascination that causes him to use a pulse that does not change at any point in the work. Nevertheless the symphony falls into three distinct 'movements' – moderately fast–slow–fast. I shall refer to them as First movement, Slow movement and Finale respectively, even though the work is basically a single movement: to put inverted commas round each one would make the text look unnecessarily fussy.

The basis of the work was *Cathedral Music*: this was written before the rest of the piece, and it became the slow movement.² It is a Palestrina-like (but not a pastiche) passage mainly for strings. The composer said 'I like writing calm music': his further description of this as being in madrigal style reminds one that there is little distinction between the sacred and secular music of the late sixteenth century. Imitations of the music of a far-distant time by twentieth-century composers have several different manifestations. One – as is the case with Robert Simpson – is an appreciation of medieval (Gothic, and particularly ecclesiastical) architecture, a pinnacle of building that has its musical equivalent in late sixteenth-century polyphony. Another (perhaps also found in Simpson) is an appeal to a distant time when the problems of contemporary life had not yet sprung up: indeed, in musical terms, a time before the advent of serialism and other forms of contemporary music. There is also the sheer joy in the beauty of ancient music; and a deep appreciation of the craftsmanship of the old masons, even when they carved gargoyles.

Cathedral Music is a largely E \flat passage, devoid of imitations and (at first) free of dissonance: it provides a contrast with the first movement, for that lives on the conflict of seconds and a grinding of chords that move by contrary motion. The *Cathedral Music* is really the heart of the work, and it infests the Finale in a powerful way.

Simpson himself considered the work a discussion of the relationship between E \flat and its opposite pole, A major – a relationship he also explored in the early string quartets.³

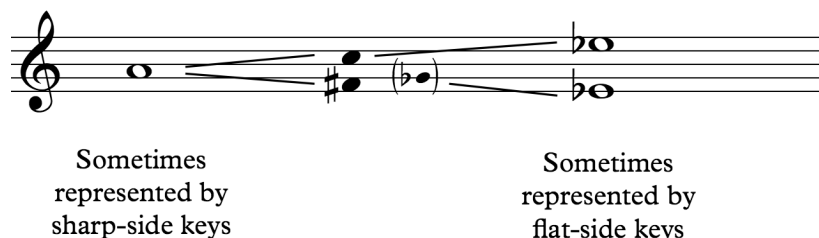
¹ Simpson tells – with a wry smile – of the viva-voce examination for the degree in which he was made to sight-sing a trombone passage from a Vaughan Williams symphony.

² Harold Truscott maintains that the work started out as a piano sonata, but he persuaded the composer that the music was too powerful for that instrument, and required orchestration. See Truscott, *The origin of the First Symphony*, in *Robert Simpson, composer – Essays, Interviews, Recollections*, ed. Jürgen Schaarwächter, Hildesheim 2013 (Studien und Materialien zur Musikwissenschaft, vol. 74), p. 47.

³ Simon Phillippo, in *Symphonic momentum and post-tonal drama: Simpson's First Symphony*, in Schaarwächter, op. cit., pp. 49–56, shows that the semitone is also of great significance to the structure of the piece.

There are two pitches that bisect that pair of notes, keeping them in balance: C₃ is one, and F₃ (or G₂) is the other: thus all the main pitches are equidistant by minor thirds (see Example 1).

Example 1



We will see that these two bisecting pitches play a role in the work, if not a large one.

First movement

Exposition

Robert Simpson says that the first bar of the whole piece – a dyad on d'' and f''₃ played by two D trumpets (an individual addition to the two B₃ trumpets) – was added as an afterthought; 'like the *All Clear* sounded [after an air-raid] during the war'. This opening is an inspired choice: it is slow-moving (stationary, in fact), and could thus refer to the slow motion of *Cathedral Music*; it is consonant, and could thus make the same reference; and it could be either part of the subdominant of A (the eventual tonic of the entire work) or part of the dominant of E₃ (the rival key). The listener cannot, of course, know this at a first hearing; and even by hindsight one is unsure which key it represents: in fact it represents both. As often as not the rival tonal areas of the work are stated merely as keys on the sharp side or the flat side of C, one of the notes that bisect the two rival areas, as shown in Example 1.

The tonal contradictions are made clear in bar 2, where a strong B₃ (which would help define the opening dyad as part of the dominant of E₃) is immediately countered by B₄ (nearer to sharp keys than flat ones). At the outset conflict is apparent. The sharp side is immediately strengthened by the repeated-note fanfare on F₃ (scored for horns, oboes and clarinets). A bass figure in parallel seconds (mostly whole tones) sounds beneath it, starting slowly (in minims) but moving into crotchets. The end of the bass phrase, on C₃ and D₃, prolongs the ambiguity of key (a factor emphasised by the octave leap), for C₃ might refer to A major while D₃ is simply another spelling of E₃ (see Example 2).

Example 2

The image shows a musical score for two staves, treble and bass clef. The top staff begins with a dynamic marking of *ff* and contains several measures of music, including a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff contains a series of notes, some of which are marked with an 'x' under a bracket, indicating a specific section of the score.

This conflict is clearly maintained by the semiquaver figures in the strings in bars 5–6, which use sharps in the ascending form but cancel them while descending. In bars 7 and 8 the pedal E's allude strongly to the sharp side, while the upward-rushing scales attempt to contradict those sharps at first, but then themselves use sharps.

At the top of these upward-rushing scales, in bar 9, an ornamental version of the d''-f'' dyad recalls the tonal conflict suggested at the opening. The high B \flat pedal stated by the D trumpet – an unexpected sound, just as was the scoring of the opening dyad – attempts to settle matters, only to set off an even more massive set of scalic runs: there are two sorts in contrary motion, and they expand the idea of bar 5, but this time the descending scales use flats while the rising ones have sharps.

This is the end of the first subject, which has been short and concise but laden with material: the composer commented that it is useful to have various ideas to draw on at the start of a big work.⁴ It overlaps with the start of the second subject on the two D trumpets; the unusual scoring emphasises the structural significance of that point. There are two further observations to be made about this. One is that the whole first subject has been more like a classical development section than a first subject in style and content; it does not have a settled theme in a settled tonality.⁵ The second point concerns momentum: the opening dyad – motionless in bar 1 – has become full of energy in bar 9, and the semiquaver motion is elongated into minims and crotchets as the contrasting second subject begins in bars 13 and 14. The new slower motion is only possible as part of an ongoing argument because of the increase in tension and the multiplication of semiquavers in the preceding bars: the slower pace is a precursor of the *Cathedral Music* that makes up the central slow movement. The shift in note-values without creating a decrease in tension is all part of the exploration of momentum that so concerned Robert Simpson.

The second subject should, according to the conventions that Simpson knew and appreciated, be in a contrasting tonality as well as a contrasting style. Here it suggests E \flat , but soon moves to F. The style of this new subject is much nearer to that of Renaissance polyphony at first, for the note-values are quite even (and white) and there are two suspensions treated in pure sixteenth-century fashion. The material, however, is a close rel-

⁴ See Schaarwächter, *op. cit.*, p. 436.

⁵ This point has been well made by Simon Phillipppo, *op. cit.*, pp. 49ff.

ative of the grinding bass figure from bars 3–5 (see Example 3, where it is marked 'x').

Example 3

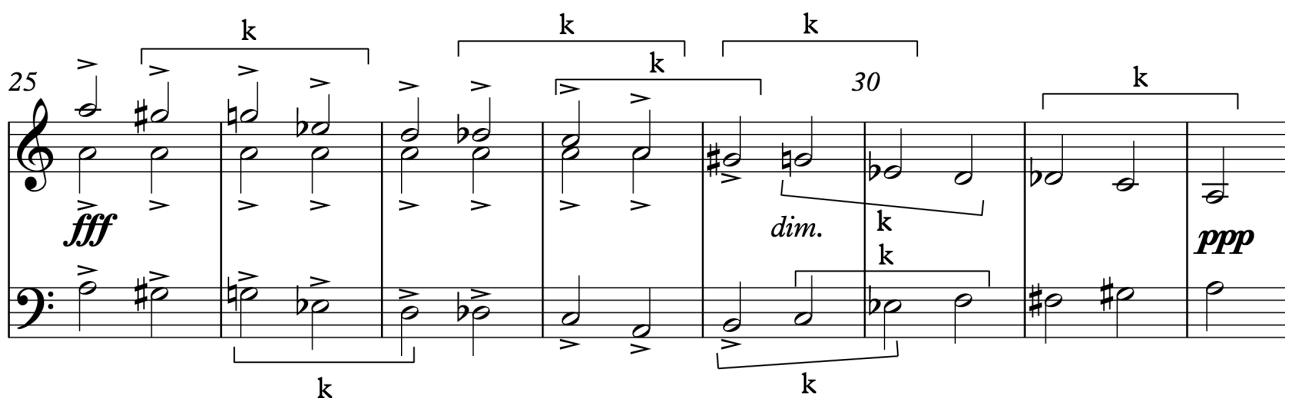


The opening of the second subject leads to a long multiple pedal – a chord of F major that recalls the upper note of the initial dyad.

Against the static background of the multiple pedal, rising flourishes move from flat to sharp keys until the F-major chord is replaced by a shift towards E (in bars 20–21), with a fanfare-like style in the higher parts. In tonal practice a firm F followed by a strong E has a particular meaning: the former will act – at least in the subconscious – as ^bVI and the latter V of a tonal area (in this case it will be A).⁶ The idea is destined to be heard again, much more powerfully, towards the end of the work, in bars 815–819.

The slow multiple pedal is now on E and B in the brass, and the rest of the orchestra fling fast-repeated chords much more on the flat side against it. The final part of the second subject reverts entirely to minim motion – a giant descending ladder; this prefigures the style of the slow movement as far as rhythm is concerned, but the internal pedal A supporting a vast (somewhat chromatic) falling scale makes the overall sound quite unlike that later movement (see Example 4).

Example 4



These massive, slow-moving strides are a clear marker of the close of the Exposition, and are utterly memorable – a feature of which the composer makes use later. The striding minims at bars 25f combine the sharp (perhaps A major) and flat (perhaps mixolydian E) sides, and culminate in contrary motion – an idea already heard several times – that

⁶ The semitones referred to by Simon Phillippo (see footnote 3) have relevance here.

homes in on an octave A in bar 32, though the listener is unsure of the tonal goal, despite the insistent pedal A, until the end. The whole giant staircase starts *fff* and ends *ppp*, and contains a number of statements of a figure shortly to be described as ‘knight’s move’ (see below): they are marked as ‘k’ in Example 4 whether they are in *recto* shape, inverted shape, or reversions.

This has been an extremely concise and very closely argued Exposition: its very brevity gives Simpson license to write a much more extensive Development Section.

Development Section

The Development Section (letter A, bar 33) opens with a fugue whose subject is later inverted. It starts very high up on strings alone, with only half the players on each line being used: the contrast in scoring with what has gone before is useful to mark the start of the new section. The material has three main features. One is a falling third (f'''-d''', recalling bar 1); another is a figure that rises and falls through a third (‘y’: see Example 5), an idea that is also inverted, and was derived from a similar idea in *Cathedral Music*; the third is the sequential pattern of falling thirds, which have the same derivation.

Example 5. ‘Fugue 1’



Later a semiquaver rising scale – with some notes repeated – is used (it is the figure shown in the lower part of the upper staff in Example 8). The start of the subject is virtually motionless, but shorter notes gradually increase the momentum. The interval of a falling third, however, begins with a ‘knight’s move’ shape (a leap of a third followed by a step in the same direction, or that idea backwards) – a''-g''-e'' – which is perhaps a contraction of part of the string figure in bar 9, and is destined to play a significant role later on. I shall continue to describe it as the ‘knight’s move’ figure, and to mark it ‘k’ in the examples. The pull towards E_b is strong from time to time.

Alongside his life-long love of symphonic form Simpson had a deep love of fugue, and wrote a great many himself such that towards the end of his life I suggested to him that he write his own *Grosse Fuge*. But the dynamics of the two forms are utterly different (though, confusingly, both have what is usually described as an ‘Exposition’). The discussions about tonalities and themes that are in the nature of sonata form are not the same as the demonstration of contrapuntal devices that is the very nature of fugue. The introduction of fugue into a movement in sonata form thus requires a new dynamic – a ‘change of gear’ – that is useful at the beginning of a Development Section of a work that started out by sounding as if it was itself a symphonic development. The sense of momentum in the two forms is different, so the contrast is useful to Simpson for a while: but the

'change of gear' cannot be maintained for too long.

To make the point about the 'change of gear' the motion is mostly in short note-values until the longer notes of the second subject – very much in sharps – stop the forward flow of the fugue in bars 50–52. Angry chords (a very unfugal element) intervene in bars 53–55, and the material of bars 3–5 (again stated in parallel seconds) is then accompanied by runs in octaves in the strings (the 'knight's move' figure is much used) and by chord progressions in alternating woodwind and horns veering between sharp and flat keys. The notable thing in these bars is the simultaneous combination of various speeds, and the refusal to embrace a settled tonality.

A repetition of the foregoing, unfugal, material leads to a passage in which the slow-moving theme is removed, the brass instead joining in with the alternating pairs of chords: these are destined to be 'capped' in the main transition to the Finale. This is the passage that leads up to letter C (bar 70), the point at which the slowest motion presses its claim once more: a long pedal G (in various octaves) is placed against fast (sextuplet semiquaver) runs in octaves in the strings. That G[♮] cannot belong to the key of A, and is more likely to pull towards E[♭], though both tonal poles are hinted at in the strings, soon to be joined by the woodwind. All parts eventually coalesce on F[♭], which is perhaps more in the realm of A than of E[♭]. But F[♭] is significant in another way, as I have described above.

The loud, vigorous and climactic passage is followed by a sudden return to the fugal material that had started the Development Section. This new version of the fugue (at bar 76) begins a third lower than the previous statement, on F[♭] (bisecting the tonal poles), and in the woodwind rather than the strings. Again it is quiet, but this time there is a (violin) inverted pedal (on a high F[♭]) and a slow countersubject in the viola. The whole dynamic of momentum is thus changed back once more.

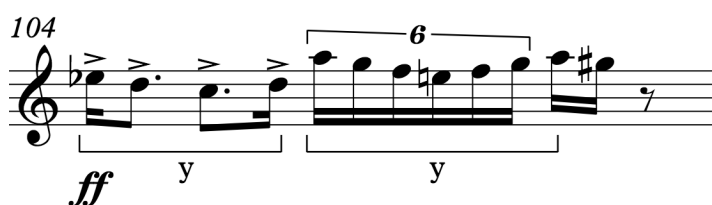
A third element, borrowed from the first five bars of the piece but now made to stand alone and stopping the progress of the fugue, is the quiet fanfare on a repeated open fifth (f[♭]-c[♭]) in the horns. Again this draws attention to one of the pitches that bisect the two poles, and it is a non-contrapuntal idea – contradicting the fundamental nature of fugue – which prevents that form from becoming too classical and formalised: indeed, it prevents fugue from dominating the 'first-movement form' dynamic. And yet it starts anew in bar 83, this time beginning on a dissonant F[♭], the (fugal) exposition involving strings and a trumpet as well, and being accompanied by a relatively slow-moving set of dyads in the bassoon, starting out from the open fifths of the preceding quiet horn fanfare but breaking away from them.

Again the progress of the fugue is stopped by the 'fanfare' – quiet and in repeated open fifths – this time on flute and bassoon (letter D, bars 97–98). The pitches here (d[♭] and a[♭]) are much more evidently on the flat side. So when the fugue starts up yet again it is with decidedly flat-side intentions, though after only two statements of the subject the progress is again halted, this time by trumpets using the soft repeated-note 'fanfare' on g[♭] and d[♭]. Yet before this latest interruption the fugue subject had blossomed into semiquaver flourishes that rise and fall through a third, a faster rhythmical development of part of its initial statement.

This leads to a change in the fugal writing, for the latest open-fifth interruption is followed by a *stretto* on the new semiquaver rising-and-falling figure ('y' in Example 5). It is played softly, mainly by half the string players, though with some woodwind too. It is like an awakening of bird-song in the early morning (though the composer would certainly reject any such programmatic ideas). For some time the texture is fully laden with these figures, the fugal *stretto* being brought more closely into line with the idea of symphonic development.

But once more the fugal development is moving on too fast, and must be checked: the checking is this time applied much more dramatically, with a loud unison passage on all the brass. It is a version of the second subject, but faster and rhythmically-altered. The first version of this theme (at bar 103) is tonally on the sharp side, but two imitations which continue the fugal idea are given in *stretti* that are nearer to flats. The fast motion is somewhat balanced by slower-moving chords that start out as open fifths (an idea derived from the 'soft fanfares') but break out into other dyads. This proves to be a second fugue, very much more energetic than the first. I shall refer to it as 'Fugue 11', and to the fugue that had started the Development Section as 'Fugue 1' (see Example 6).

Example 6. 'Fugue 11'



The subject – slightly different from the brass statement of bar 103 – makes full use of the falling and rising stepwise motion through a third and of falling semitones, and it contrasts markedly with Fugue I, being much faster and more dynamic: it thus fits more comfortably than does Fugue I into the feeling of symphonic development.

All this use of fugue suits Simpson's purpose well in this opening movement. The form presupposes conflict in a way that the other classical type of polyphony – sixteenth-century counterpoint – does not. And yet, as mentioned above, it is not the kind of conflict that is found in the classical symphony. There are nevertheless points where fugue and classic symphonic form touch. Fugue can embody a conflict of tonalities – the kind of thing endemic to the classic symphony – by virtue of having entries of the subject at various pitches, even within a (fugal) exposition: and there can be conflict and contrast between a subject and a countersubject. But the fundamental nature of the fugue, differing markedly from sonata form, is that it has contrapuntal imitation, as is also the case with sixteenth-century polyphony; so fugue is an appropriate way of introducing the *Cathedral Music* section.

The entries of the subject in Fugue 11 use both sharp-side and flat-side tonalities: a background of slow motion sounds behind these entries, until that too dissolves into

quick notes, forming a set of simultaneous inversions with the sextuplet portion of the subject. Some influence of Bruckner (the *Te Deum* and other works) is perhaps evident in the passage that then interrupts Fugue 11, with the strings in octaves (at bar 120) in a style somewhat like organ toccata figuration. Against this the woodwind and trumpets provide a two-part slow-moving idea including suspensions and resolutions that might well derive from sixteenth-century practice (though the treatment is, naturally enough, not exactly like that of the earlier period). Whatever the truth of this, there is most certainly a combination of fast and slow motion, helping to set up the *Cathedral Music* section.

A further interruption, at letter F, is the most powerful and dramatic yet. It consists of a series of triads in dotted-quaver-semiquaver rhythm counterpointed against a series of syncopated chords that dovetail with them. That element of rhythmic contrast is joined by a contrast of speed, for the second subject (from bars 14f) is introduced in the horns and trombones in bar 131. But after just one statement, very much on the sharp side, Fugue 1 resumes, though this time the material is in inversion. The rhythm of the preceding chords continues, though the texture is thinned out to two single lines, one high and one low, all the while maintaining the sharp-side tonality.

The retransition starts at bar 141, though the listener cannot be aware of this, for Simpson has disguised the moment. The new subject is magically transformed to become a fairly long horn solo, later doubled by the clarinet. This is the last idea of the Development Section, and is the exact opposite of the many classical transitions where the excitement is at its highest, prefacing the recovery of the initial material. But in this symphony that initial material was not so much a 'first subject' in feeling as a type of development; thus the retransition needs itself to be in contrast with the oncoming material, or there is the risk of the point of return being overlooked. The lyric beauty of this passage is shattered by a quite unexpected and unprepared repeat of the opening dyad in enhanced form. This has been a large-scale Development Section, using up much of the space not taken by the short Exposition.

Recapitulation

The Recapitulation begins at letter G (bar 148), simply crashing in with the opening *All Clear* dyad, but now played in octaves by all four trumpets, and on G[♯] and B[♯]. The tonality of the dyad is as ambiguous here as at the opening; but, while on the page looking like a sharp key (another fact of which the listener cannot be aware) and following a lyrical solo in a settled sharp key, it can act as the minor subdominant of E[♭].

Now the first subject is rewritten in a more forceful manner than at first, though the elements are the same: there is, however, a strong flat-side feeling on this occasion. The second subject (bar 160ff – the material shown in Example 3) is also rewritten, being announced in imitative entries this time and continuing the flat-side feeling. There are three regular *stretto* entries at the distance of a bar-and-a-half, as if in a classical fugue, the imitations replacing the *tremolandi* etc. of the Exposition version. But there is more to this *stretto*, for the note-values are generally slow, the provision of suspensions and resolutions is fairly classical, and thus the whole might be more readily considered a foretaste

of the neo-Renaissance music that is about to start. This is the kind of preparation that was missing at the retransition. The first movement is rounded off by a repeat of the striding downward minim chords of the giant staircase, which are an utterly memorable way-marker. Here the A tonality of the end of the Exposition (shown in Example 4) is turned into its most distant rival, E \flat .

Slow movement: Cathedral Music

The slow movement, which begins at letter H (bar 180), does not change the basic pulse of the preceding music, but is simply written in the longer note-values that have been pre-figured there. This is the first time there has been a settled tonality in the symphony, even though elements of sharp-side and flat-side keys have been in evidence in the first movement. Dyneley Hussey rightly said of it that it contains ‘a serene contemplation of ideal beauty such as none of this composer’s contemporaries has imagined’.⁷ As mentioned before, it was this *Cathedral Music* that was Simpson’s initial idea, and it was with this part of the work that he began composition of the symphony: as in sixteenth-century music generally there are many white notes (see Example 7).

Example 7. ‘Cathedral Music’

The image shows a musical score for 'Cathedral Music' in two systems. The first system begins at bar 180 and ends at bar 185. The second system begins at bar 185 and ends at bar 190. The music is written for two staves, treble and bass clef. The first system starts with a treble clef and a bass clef, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The music is marked 'pp cantabile'. There are annotations 'x' and 'y' above the notes, indicating specific musical features or phrasing. The second system continues the music, with annotations 'y' and '190' above the notes.

The settled tonality (even if it has a spattering of accidentals) is accompanied by a settled minim pulse, and by an almost classical (in the sense of ‘late-Renaissance’) use of suspensions and resolutions. The conflicts of the first movement are here forgotten in quiet music with a three-voice texture. At this stage there is no attempt to announce the material in imitation, the natural language of church music of the sixteenth century.

The first movement was written to enshrine this *Cathedral Music*, its material being

⁷ See Donald Macauley, *The Power of Robert Simpson. A biography*, 2013, p. 60.

invented so as to prefigure it, so it is instructive to discover how the composer adapted the material. The sequential thirds of Example 5 are inverted from bars 181–182, and figure ‘y’ of that Example is at first partially suggested in *Cathedral Music* and then fully stated. The ‘knight’s move shape’ (‘k’) is the figure that starts the slow movement: and the octave leap of bars 186–187 is destined to achieve great prominence, but in the Finale.

Why is this *Cathedral Music* here? First of all, it is not an imitation of choral music: such an idea would more probably have been scored for woodwind (though Simpson disliked the sound of English Cathedral choristers, likening them to recorders – though that would not have precluded him from imitating a continental choral style). Second, it does not use the imitative language of Renaissance polyphony. It is more likely that the composer was intending to represent cathedral architecture: he loved Gothic (and especially the Isle-de-France Cathedrals), and that for him the musical equivalent was something approaching the Palestrina style.⁸

Coming after the conflict of the opening movement, this *Cathedral Music* must represent the peace and quiet (even the impression of Eternity) of Gothic cathedrals, an impression that must have affected Simpson even though he was not a believer.

E♭ is not maintained unsullied for long, for an A♯ (which in no way tries to move the tonality back to the home tonic) and some D♯s soon occur, and there is a distinct move towards G major at one stage. The bass line is uncharacteristically given to the viola for quite some time, and the range of the top part soars very high above that of any human voice: yet the *cantabile* marking might well make one think of some ethereal choir. Figure ‘y’ is much used, and made to sound like the ornamental resolutions of suspensions in sixteenth-century polyphony (at bar 190f, for instance: see Example 7). At letter I (bar 213) the cello joins in; but this is still an unusual sound for a string orchestra since the double basses are silent, and one always misses their fundamental contribution when they are absent. Perhaps this is another appeal to the choral style: certainly the opening of *Cathedral Music* is yet another place where the orchestration acts as a way-marker.

Horns take over the argument at bar 246, and they do so in two parts that make clear reference to the dissonance treatment of Renaissance polyphony: there is, however, still no imitation. But beneath it the cellos and (at last) the double basses make reference to the faster material of the outer movements, though in a pedal that is ‘stationary’ as far as ongoing motion is concerned. This is a reminder of the rhythmical relationship between *Cathedral Music* and the two outer sections that book-end it.

The essence of this symphony is the treatment of momentum, of Time: it is a notion that concerned Simpson throughout his composing life. In the First Symphony there is perhaps, the impression that the *Cathedral Music* material represents Eternity, while the material with a greater sense of forward propulsion stands for Time. At all events, the composer is very careful to dovetail the various types of motion. He had introduced long notes into the first movement, and now, at letter K (bar 253) there is a very soft preview

⁸ Sibelius’s Sixth Symphony, which starts with a somewhat similar appeal to Palestrina-style counterpoint, is discussed in Pike, *Beethoven, Sibelius and ‘the Profound Logic’*, 1978, pp. 188ff. Towards the end of his life Simpson turned again to Palestrina, and was contemplating working on the *Song of Songs* cycle of motets.

of the Finale's motion and its opening theme. This is derived from the second subject of the first movement (bars 14f, shown in Example 3), but presented in a much quicker, even scherzo-like form. It continues with a canon by inversion, a C-minor ascending scale being imitated by a descending scale of A major (as shown in Example 8, which is actually the beginning of the Finale), the pair combining flat- and sharp-side keys. But all the time the *Cathedral Music* continues in the horns as if nothing has happened, unaffected by this attempt to initiate a Scherzo or Finale.

Woodwind gradually take over the *Cathedral Music* material, so the sound might be said to become nearer to that of a choir. The oboe starts the process in bar 259, using the 'knight's move' shape ('y') in diminished note-values. There are certainly more black notes from here to the end of the slow movement, as the whole woodwind choir and horns join in; and now the sharp-side keys are mixed in with flat ones: but the steady pulse of suspensions and resolutions is maintained.

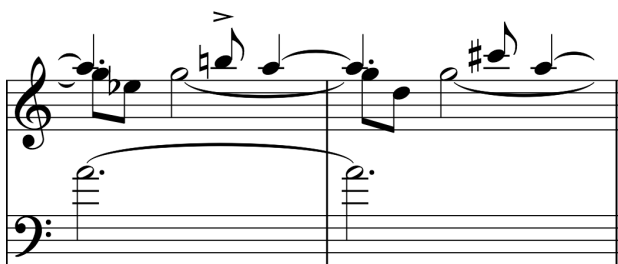
The lack of any real sense of form in this slow movement is explained by its position in what is fundamentally a single-movement work: *Cathedral Music* forms part of an extended 'First-movement form', and it is prepared as early as bar 14. In a sense it is an extended 'second subject', so it will require recapitulation in due course. But there is more to it than this: its very uneventfulness imbues it with a sense of calm lacking in the first movement. In the latter a large number of events crowding in on one another – even the beginning sounds like a development – create a feeling of dynamism that contributes greatly to the impression of momentum.

Finale

Exposition

The Finale breaks in without a gap at bar 246, using the material that had attempted to start this section some time earlier, and helping to clarify the fact that the tempi of the two movements are related. This, however, is the first time that triple rhythms have been used in the work (though they were foreshadowed during *Cathedral Music*). The leaps in the melodic material and the return to the use of seconds in the harmony immediately give a fresh feel to the music: the upper instruments present what can only be described as a 'canon by inversion', a motif whose interlocking dotted rhythms help to provide momentum (see Example 8);

Example 8



but nevertheless the ‘knight’s move’ shape continues to occur (for example at letter M). This last movement will prove to be partly scherzo (because of the fast triple rhythms), partly Finale, and partly development section for the whole work: it is also a recapitulation of the first movement and also of *Cathedral Music*.

The opening, upper material of the Finale (see Example 8) is soon underpinned by a striding bass in dotted minims, providing a slower counterpoint. It moves between natural and flat-side keys, but heads towards a more rhythmic tucket, derived from bar 2 of Example 8, that concentrates on A. But at first this is only the foundation of a theme that uses parallel thirds rather than the parallel seconds of the first movement; so the more mellifluous, more consonant, type of music heard in the slow movement affects the harmony at some points. A theme – or more than one – spelled out in parallel thirds is destined to fill up much of the Finale. At bar 310 a part of the opening theme – the rising scale, a feature borrowed from bar 20 – is combined with a slower version of the ‘canon by inversion’ (shown at the end of Example 8) which follows that theme: and the two lines proceed in parallel thirds, veering between the keys of A (?minor) and E \flat . There is then a mixture of quaver leaping figures (derived from the ‘canon by inversion’) in the violins and slower syncopated chords in the woodwind and lower strings, very much based on flat-side keys but heading for G.

But as G is reached all four horns enter on e \flat and g \flat , recalling the start of *Cathedral Music*: the scoring provides a firm reminder of the passage in the Slow movement at bars 246ff, where horns had used the *Cathedral Music* material against a fast triplet pedal on the lower strings. While the rest of the orchestra continues as if nothing had happened, the horns (immediately joined by a solo trumpet) take up the slow movement material in long notes. This yet again suggests that the Finale material has started too soon, and that the *Cathedral Music* is not yet ready to give way: but it also further emphasises the point about the relationship of the Finale’s motion to that of the slow movement; and it acts as a recapitulation of the opening of the *Cathedral Music* in a re-scored form. There is thus clear dovetailing of the two movements. Furthermore, the very absence of events in the slow movement’s material helps apply the brake to the energetic opening of the Finale, at least for the time being.

It was at about this point – ‘just after the beginning of the finale, at the brass chorale in the slow version’ – that Robert Simpson first discovered Nielsen. Before this point Bruckner had been his main influence, especially teaching him ‘how to handle great blocks of loud and soft without transitions’.⁹ He heard the *Sinfonia Espansiva* and it knocked him

⁹ See Schaarwächter, *op. cit.*, p. 436.

sideways ('What a way to start a symphony', he observed). He said he had always felt that there should be music like this, but he had never previously encountered it, and it stopped him in his tracks for some time. One of Simpson's most important discoveries in Nielsen was the notion that music must have a 'life force', a 'current' – Nielsen's description – and it was some time before he could take up composing again. There is no discernible break in style at this point in the symphony, though eventually a new – short and quite tuneful – melodic idea occurs that has not been used before (it does, however, grow organically from the preceding material). Perhaps, however, the 'life force' takes over from this point (Simpson was fond of observing, apropos the 'life force', 'we all know how a tree can split a rock'). Yet we must be clear that all the features of the symphony up to this point – the E–A dichotomy, the treatment of momentum, the use of 'First-movement form' spread over the whole work, the integration of the material – were already in place before Simpson's discovery of Nielsen.

The *Cathedral Music* continues in the brass, clearly emphasising the flat-side keys, and in a powerful expression indicating most forcibly that this idea wishes to dominate the material specific to the Finale. It is as if the architecture one had seen from afar is now close at hand and absolutely dominating. There is now more imitation, particularly of the figure that leaps up an octave before moving down and up stepwise through a third (as in bars 196–197 in Example 7). Naturally, the addition of imitation brings the style nearer to that of sixteenth-century polyphony than had previously been the case; but, more to the point, we now understand why imitation was not used earlier. The octave leap injects a sense of power not felt in previous statements of *Cathedral Music*, and the quiet of the earlier neo-Renaissance passages is here transformed into one glowing with exultant triumph.

At letter R (bar 389) the woodwind and strings attempt to start the Finale's initial material yet again, but the *Cathedral Music* is now so powerful, so absolutely dominating, that it cannot be shifted. Nevertheless it is forced to move into a cadence on A major at bar 436; but A is reached from a chord of B major, whose third is only another spelling of E. This cadence follows shortly after one in D major (at letter T, bar 420) that is strongly emphasised by the timpani and lower strings in a rhythmic figure that had been heard for a short while against the *Cathedral Music*. That D is strongly stated since it recalls the opening d''-f'' proposition, and in the Finale (where it is turned into a major third at this point) it acts as the subdominant of the final goal, A.¹⁰

This has been a massive insertion of the *Cathedral Music* motion into the Finale, and it dovetails the two movements impressively: but in order to do this it was necessary that it be a bold and forceful statement. Eventually the Finale's material resumes, somewhat timidly because of the utter dominance of the foregoing neo-Renaissance music, at the bar before letter U (bar 439). It is changed as compared with its first appearance, being shorn of the 'canon by inversion', being in octaves in the first violins and violas instead, and having a new pendant that includes both the 'knight's move' shape and the stepwise rise

¹⁰ It becomes a powerful part of the final cadence.

and fall through a third. This is the 'new Robert Simpson', coming after his encounter with Nielsen's *Sinfonia Espansiva*.

An oboe solo (at bar 448: see Example 9) introduces what sounds like new material (though its elements have been heard before), and it is accompanied by repeated-quaver dyads in thirds in the strings, derived from the opening d''-f'' of the whole piece.

Example 9

The musical score for Example 9 consists of two systems of staves. The first system has two staves: the top staff is for the oboe and the bottom for strings. The oboe part begins with a *p* dynamic and features a melodic line with a slur over the first two notes, followed by a series of eighth notes. A dynamic marking of *pp* is placed below the first two notes of the oboe staff. The string part consists of repeated quaver dyads in thirds. The second system also has two staves, continuing the oboe and string parts. A bar number '450' is written above the oboe staff in the second system. The string part continues with the same rhythmic pattern.

The attempt to turn this idea into a fugue by imitating it on the solo flute and bassoon is immediately halted by a quick rhythmic insistence on octave E's, though the new subject is picked up again at letter V (bars 459ff). It is scored more fully this time, and it has an additional two-part counterpoint on the flute and piccolo that provides a slower-moving idea using suspensions and resolutions in almost classical (in the sense of 'late-Renaissance') fashion.

This material is interrupted at letter W (bar 477) by a quite new-sounding idea – the nearest thing to a 'tune' in the work so far – which gives a strong impression of being the second subject. It derives from the stepwise movement up and down through a third, and it enshrines a conflict – even if an understated one – between E \flat and E \sharp , so acknowledging the tonal argument of the whole work, if not in any way seeking to settle the matter (see Example 10).

Example 10

The image shows a musical score for Example 10. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble clef staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. A melodic line is written in the treble clef, starting with a slur over the first few notes, with a 'y' marking above it. The bass clef staff features a continuous, interlocking dotted rhythm. A measure number '480' is indicated above the treble clef staff.

Melodically the tune is also linked with the 4-3-2-3 resolutions of *Cathedral Music*. The slower pace of the tune is possible because it floats on the running quaver motion of the strings that has first led up to it and then sounds beneath it. This idea could be the result of the discovery of the 'life force' in Nielsen.

A short interruption based on material from the opening of the Finale leads to another statement of the second subject, though now cast in decidedly sharp keys. Again the first subject material of the Finale interrupts (at bar 506), but now with the continual throbbing quaver chords beneath it. Here it is stated as a long tune in octaves in the violins, and it clearly emphasises the sharp keys. The whole is presented quietly, with some comments from the woodwind and horns; and it is extended until the motion slows into crotchets.

The second subject tune (that shown in Example 10) reappears at bar 544, again emphasising sharp keys but this time accompanied by the 'canon by inversion' material of the opening theme (see Example 8) of the Finale. This is a quite brief statement of the new tune, and the 'inverted canon' theme outlives it. The 'canon by inversion' device (particularly that shown at the end of Example 8) proves a useful means of propelling the music forwards, the interlocking dotted rhythms being a powerful driving force. It is an idea that is pursued at length, and is soon joined in counterpoint by a third subject that contrasts with it but floats splendidly upon its forward drive. This third subject is heard first of all at bar 565, largely stepwise and in parallel thirds: it starts by emphasising A major, and flows along lyrically – particularly because of a number of syncopations and the slower motion that contrasts with the canon (see Example 11).

Example 11

The image shows a musical score for Example 11, consisting of three staves: a top staff in treble clef, a middle staff in alto clef, and a bottom staff in bass clef. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 2/4. The top staff features a series of chords, some with a 'trmn' (trumpet) marking and a fermata. The middle staff begins with a forte (ff) dynamic and contains a melodic line with slurs and accents. The bottom staff provides a bass line with slurs and accents. A measure number '575' is placed above the top staff. The score ends with a double bar line.

A somewhat 'singing' quality also results from the scoring for woodwind. (Trombones join in for one of the statements.) The third subject material eventually moves towards flat-side keys, and a long sequence of crotchet parallel thirds (with the 'knight's move' shape very much in evidence) prolongs the tune. Eventually the canonic material drops out, but its forward thrust has been powerful enough for the sequential 'knight's move' shapes to survive by themselves, and they continue 'free-wheeling' for some while.

Little asides occur from time to time: there are dotted-rhythm repeated-note octaves (but with rests rather than dots to make them more pungent and persuasive); a rhythmic fanfare; and the rising scalic figure from the Finale's opening theme. But the second subject (the new, 'post-Nielsen' tune shown in Example 10) returns at bar 618, this time played by muted trumpets and one trombone, with the foregoing material dovetailed into it, and with clear opposition of E's and E's.

The equal-crotchet pendant of the third subject (as in bar 576 of Example 11) takes over from this (at bar 630) in a passage interspersed with elements of the Finale's first subject. At intervals the 'canon by inversion' theme (as at the end of Example 8) crops up to keep the forward motion under way, but now the rising and falling scale elements are separated out rather than being heard in counterpoint. There is a clear leaning back towards the flat side, though a sudden interruption of two chords (a short B-flat one moving to a long C-major one at bar 666) neutralises the tendency. C, as mentioned above, is one of the pitches that exactly bisects the two tonal poles of A and E \flat , and its presence here is clearly intended to create a balance between the two rival areas at a stage in the work where it is important that neither shall seem to be dominant. The pair of chords is a reminder of those heard in the first movement at bars 55ff, but now greatly enhanced.

Development, and False Recapitulation

The Development Section is quite short this time; that is because a great deal of the last movement is concerned with development of one kind or another. It begins by pulling in two opposing tonal directions: the 'canon by inversion' (as at the end of Example 8) starts again, this time accompanied by sustained woodwind chords and a further, almost canonic, running semiquaver first-violin idea. The canon then ceases to be in inversion, and the texture thickens (detached two-note figures in the woodwind being added).

There is clearly growing excitement here – indeed, it proves to be a retransition, and the excitement is of the kind missing from the corresponding place in the first movement – until the two chords occur again, this time *fortissimo* in the woodwind and horns, and lead to a Recapitulation. This retransition proves to be the more powerful because of the underplaying of that feature earlier in the symphony; but it is, in fact, a misleading Recapitulation, for the real one comes a little later, and completely upstages it.

This false Recapitulation starts at bar 710, and it consists of a varied version of the opening material of the first movement and – more clearly – of the Finale, though now louder and slower. A real Recapitulation should recover the main tonality; but here the key is in limbo between the two sides, yet the ‘canon by inversion’ is powerfully expressed, the two lines holding the key areas in balance and propelling the music forward most decisively. What sounds like a new subject at bar 742 is derived from the first movement’s second subject (bar 14), and the rising scale from bar 20, though shorn of its imitations. The continuation, however, resembles the material of the Finale’s third subject (that shown in Example 11), an idea made even more evident at bar 761, though that proves to be no more than an introduction to the ‘new tune’ of the Finale’s second subject (see Example 10), in the bar before letter Kk (bar 765). Here the main tonal centre is A, though the lower part contradicts it – if only in passing form – with a flatter leaning.

The solo D trumpet briefly tries to derail the second subject (that shown in Example 10, bars 779ff), but to no avail, and the ‘new tune’ continues for some time until single-note octave fanfares – very powerful since they are in quadruplet rhythms that contrast with the prevailing triple time – sound first on F₁ in the trumpets and then on E₁ on the horns, suggesting a tonal movement on to A (a normal ^bVI-V preparation in tonality): it is a greatly enhanced recapitulation of the idea heard in bars 20–21. These fanfares lead to a series of crashing pairs of chords that preface a contrapuntal combination of the first movement’s second subject with a version of the Finale’s opening (bar 825). Here sharp keys are emphasised, and the idea is soon repeated several times, the Finale’s material being sometimes inverted. The tonal emphasis is now strongly on A. This is the retransition for the Recapitulation proper, and it is necessary for it to outdo the two previous ones – that leading to the Recapitulation in the first movement, and that introducing the false Recapitulation in the Finale. That does much to explain the repeated-note fanfares in a quadruplet rhythm that contrasts with the prevailing pulse – an idea that has not occurred in the previous retransitions – and the tumultuous texture.

Recapitulation

Now comes the real Recapitulation – a Recapitulation not just for the Finale but for the whole symphony. This is an indication that the entire piece is a re-thinking of First-movement form: Robert Simpson commented that in a big work ‘balance and symmetry are important, hence the recapitulations in sonata form’.¹¹ It begins at bar 859 with the opening dyad, but now announced by the woodwind and horns on B₁ and D. This is some dis-

¹¹ See Schaarwächter, *op. cit.*, p. 456.

tance from A major, though it is an incomplete dominant of E^b (E^bs, however, sound in the strings): as before, then, the listener cannot tell to what key the dyad will eventually lead. At this point it necessarily takes up six bars rather than the four fairly steady beats of the opening, and the extra excitement here is enhanced by the running quavers in octaves in the strings. These runs emphasise the flat side, but use E^bs rather than E^bs.

The subsequent portions of the first movement's opening are then repeated, but the note-values are necessarily different, and the slow-moving trombone figure is now announced in unisons rather than in parallel seconds, with much fuller scoring. The fanfares at bars 896f are not taken from the first movement's opening but from part of its second subject (bars 20f), so telescoping the Recapitulation somewhat and saving a number of bars.

That saving of space – an idea that Simpson has identified in his great predecessors – gives him room to introduce another idea: this is the first movement's second subject (bars 14f; see Example 3) now transformed into the style of the *Cathedral Music*, and here in imitation. The new – and last – portion of *Cathedral Music* begins at bar 903: violin figuration somewhat like the 'canon by inversion' (from Example 8) dovetails into it, but soon dies away, leaving the most powerful piece of *Cathedral Music* yet. It includes little written-out ornaments that help to maintain the rhythmic impetus and also, perhaps, give the impression that we are now close enough to see even the smallest details of the building. This music is loud, dominated by brass (reminding us that the composer was brought up as a brass player), and presents more of a climax than any of the preceding portions of *Cathedral Music*. It is a long passage, and manages to combine both flat and sharp sides of the tonality: moreover, there is much of Bruckner in it (despite the discovery of Nielsen), for Bruckner had himself written many neo-Renaissance pieces of church music, some of them with brass accompaniment.

The long notes of this passage return to the original notion of *Cathedral Music*, but the material is different: it is imitative and with little written-out ornaments. But the connection with the slow movement is very clear, as is the idea that this is an enhanced Recapitulation. Here is the ultimate climax of the work, even though it could not be said to emphasise the final goal of A (it ends on a chord of E major). It is the Recapitulation of the great downward-striding passage – the giant staircase – in equal minims from bar 25, now properly heard again in A, that clinches the matter of tonality at bars 1045ff. As before there are brief mentions of E^b, though they do nothing to divert the attention away from A major. At the same time the strings use an inverted form of the theme from the start of the Finale (the start of Example 8).

A series of syncopated Cs with off-beat emphasis from the trumpet gives a short feel of the flat side, and briefly introduces the melodic material of *Cathedral Music* (there is, again, an appeal to the ³VI-V preparation for the tonic here, for C^b would prepare the rival tonal area of E^b). This material had previously only been recalled insofar as its slow note-values were concerned, but now the melodic material is also recalled, if in a rhythmically-altered shape. It is, though, in its original key of E^b. All this time the timpani have been pounding away at the eventual tonal goal, A. The final gesture returns to the opening

dyad, but makes it major (D-F \flat), and this proves to be the subdominant of A. Perhaps the query in my title needs to remain, for it is not certain that in the end the Gothic matter in the symphony triumphs over the surrounding material. Nevertheless it is the *fons et origo* of the work, and its influence floods over into the final movement. It acts at first as the still centre of the turning wheel – an idea of T.S.Eliot’s that seems quite relevant to Robert Simpson’s *First Symphony*;¹² but it does not remain as that still centre, for it grows in intensity through the Finale, and attempts to dominate it. In many ways it does so: and yet it is eventually powerless to affect the tonal outcome of the work, despite the final strong C’s that, following precedent earlier in the piece, might have suggested movement towards E \flat . But the symphony has masterful characteristics beyond those connected with the Gothic: and it has an individual character, quite unlike that of any of the composer’s other symphonies. It is a demonstration and exploration of momentum on the very largest scale, and of how the number of events – or lack of them – affects the listener’s perception of pace; and it demonstrates the use of orchestral scoring to delineate the various stages in the argument. It is an object-lesson in the handling of space, and the ‘saving of space’ so that it might be used elsewhere. It is a masterly demonstration that First-movement form can be relevant to an entire work – one in several ‘movements’ cast as a single-movement symphony. This could only have been achieved by a composer with a deep knowledge of – and a deep love of – sonata form; and, moreover, by one who understood the subconscious effect on the listener of certain tonal features, and their use over a large canvas. It is a quite extraordinary achievement for any symphony, let alone a ‘first’ one.

¹² The idea occurs in both *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) and *Burnt Norton* (1943), but Mrs Angela Simpson has informed me, in a private conversation, that she cannot remember her husband having any interest in Eliot.

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