

TONIC

The Journal of the
ROBERT SIMPSON SOCIETY

Vol 25
Autumn 2019

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EDITORIAL

Once again I have to apologize for the delayed issued of *Tonic*. The main reason was that the texts reasonably fitting for our periodical currently are scarce, and to some extent become even more scarce, as Lionel Pike's book on Robert Simpson's symphonies, in which some of the texts previously published in *Tonic* are included, is due for publication before end of next year, possibly earlier. Which leaves us only a fairly short *Tonic* this time, again with a most illuminating text by Lionel Pike, on the organ work *Eppur si muove*.

We have been mourning several losses since the last issue of *Tonic*. Foremost to be mentioned is Angela Simpson, Robert Simpson's widow, who died on 25 October 2018. I met her only a limited number of times, but I observed both her friendliness and hospitality as well as her vivid memory and insightful interest in all promotional and archival works relating to her late husband. You will find two obituaries in this issue of *Tonic*.

Graham Melville-Mason (born in 1933), a close friend of Robert Simpson's, executor, and a long-standing committee member and Vice-President of the Robert Simpson Society, died on 2 February 2019. Graham, who at one time had worked at the BBC, was well known as a musicologist, musician, journalist, recent chairman of Dvořák Society for Czech and Slovak Music, and great promoter of Czech music. An important part of this focused effort has always been the music of Martinů. Graham's lectures on Czech music have given Martinů his due and prominent place. Bob Simpson dedicated his String Quartet No. 13 'To Graham and Alex Melville-Mason' in 1989.

Also due to ill-health, Bob Hill, our past secretary for several years, resigned from the committee, together with his wife Rosemary. His work on behalf of the Robert Simpson Society will likewise never be forgotten.

On the positive side, we have been happy to acquire two new committee members. In 2017 Mike Lunan was elected, who has kindly offered his services as our new Membership secretary, a position he also fills at the Havergal Brian Society and which he has already most successfully filled for us as well. John Peregrine, a long standing member of the Robert Simpson Society, was elected as a committee member at the 2018 Annual General Meeting.

At the 2019 Annual General Meeting cellist Raphael Wallfisch was elected a new vice-resident of the Robert Simpson Society. Born in 1957 into a family of distinguished musicians, he studied under teachers including Amaryllis Fleming, Derek Simpson and Gregor Piatigorsky, among others. His portfolio boasts an innumerable amount of neglected music, and he was the musician for whom Robert Simpson wrote his Cello Concerto in 1991, which he premiered, with the City of London Sinfonia conducted by Richard Hick-

ox, on 17 May 1992 at the Malvern Festival; his recording of this work, which was released on the Lyrita label (cf. *Tonic* 24, Editorial), received high critical acclaim.

The 2021 Centenary of Robert Simpson's birth is already making its mark, and the committee has begun enquiring and acquiring opportunities and possibilities of festivities and memorials of diverse kinds. A first visible step in this direction is our new website, at a new URL: <https://robertsimpson.org.uk/> . The new website contains all past issues of *Tonic*, plus two other items that give particular stimulus to thinking about Robert Simpson: Malcolm MacDonald's two talks Robert Simpson's Symphonic Appetite (1993) and An introduction to the String Quartets of Robert Simpson (1999), which it has been possible to publish on <https://robertsimpson.org.uk/media/audio/> . As soon as more definitive information on the Centenary is available, we will publicise it both on our website and in communication with our members. We hope to get a 'full package' of as many opportunities to hear music by Robert Simpson and learn about him and his thinking not only of course in 2021, but especially then.

Jürgen Schaarwächter

DONALD MACAULEY & JENNIFER AND LIONEL PIKE
IN MEMORIAM ANGELA SIMPSON

Donald Macauley

I was saddened and surprised to hear of Angela's death, having seen her seven months previously, at which time she was in good spirits, though frail.

My mind naturally reverted to earlier and happier times. I first met her at an R.S.S. AGM in the 1980s and later for lunch at their then home in Chearsley. After their move to Ireland came the very enjoyable week-long seminar on Bob's music (1989) after which I was invited to stay with them by myself.

I think I spent three or four weeks in Killelton over the years – Bob fell ill after my first visit, but staying there was still very healing to the mind, with long walks on the beach (practically deserted apart from seabirds), Guinness during the day, wine and whisky during the evenings, Angela's excellent vegetarian food, plenty of music and, above all, great company and conversation.

Getting to know them better, I came to realise how well suited they were. The serious-minded, gruffly humorous composer of decided views and his cheerful, intelligent and articulate wife complemented each other perfectly. She had her sparky side too, not hesitating to pull him up if she thought he was being bigoted, or telling one of his more off-colour jokes. Nor were others spared – on my first visit Bob gave me a lift from the airport, and on the way we stopped at a pub for a beer and toasted sandwich. On arrival, the whisky bottle was made use of; when Angela got home she examined the remains, and pronounced us a couple of old soaks. Another time, I carelessly observed that all stupid people were confident: for some reason she took this personally, and I had hurriedly to explain that I did not mean that all confident people were stupid.

Looking after Bob in his later years must have been a great strain, both physically and psychologically, but she bore it all with equanimity. Her personal kindness was evident from the number of abandoned animals she took into the household – at one time, five cats and two dogs shared the premises.

I can understand why she returned to England after eighteen months after Bob's death. Killelton is a small, isolated place, little more than a one-time railway halt, though the handful of houses are (or were) serviced by two pubs. On top of that, the house was over-large for a single person, and would always have been redolent of the composer's decline.

After I decided to write the biography [of Bob] I visited her several times in Chipping Norton, both to check matters of detail and to borrow archive material, including twelve large volumes of correspondence. She was unfailingly helpful and hospitable. Later, her

worsening health caused her to move, firstly to a flat in the centre of town, and then to the Henry Cornish Care Centre on the outskirts of town. For reasons of both personal obtuseness and the familiar dearth of public transport in the Cotswolds my visit was a brief one, but it was good to see her again, confined by now to a wheelchair, but as articulate and compos mentis as always. I made a mental note to plan my next visit more sensibly but his, of course, cannot now happen.

The world would be a better place if there were more such as Angela. Her kindness to people as well as animals was evident in her voluntary work both in Ireland and England. Her sharp, questioning mind was always apparent and, although the gradual physical deterioration which comes with a debilitating condition such as Parkinson's disease must have been frustrating for one so previously energetic, she suffered it with a stoicism comparable to that of Bob in his last illness. She will be much missed by all those who knew and valued her.

Jennifer and Lionel Pike

Angela will go down in music history as the dedicatee of one of the greatest symphonies of the twentieth century – Robert Simpson's Ninth, of which the composer said, 'She deserves something much better'. That would be honour enough for most people: but there is more to her than that. Most of the members of the Robert Simpson Society first met Angela as Mrs Simpson, and it is all too easy to confine our memories to her role as Bob's devoted wife and, at the end of his life, his carer. This impression of her is reinforced by her gentle, sunny nature. But this is to overlook the woman herself. Angela had many gifts and qualities: professionally she was an accomplished secretary and personal assistant and a qualified speech therapist. Personally, she had many interests: music, of course – to the end of her life she championed the cause of bringing Bob's music to a widening public audience. We all know how determined she was about that!

But Angela's other interests may be less well known. She was passionate in her support of nuclear disarmament, and joined the Greenham Common protesters. She was a vegetarian, and was also deeply concerned about third world poverty. One Christmas, instead of a 'normal' Christmas present, Angela informed the Pikes that they were the sponsors of a cow, which would provide milk (then cheese and perhaps butter) to a third world family. Hopefully it would produce calves to start a small herd, and ultimately provide meat and leather. Her love of animals is better known, and any visitor to the Simpson home would be greeted by a motley crew of cats and dogs, as well as by the human hosts. All these animals were ones which Angela had rescued (Tessie from a beach in Ireland, where she had been abandoned as a puppy, and, later, Bracken from homelessness when his owner became incapacitated because of an accident and had to move from his tied cottage into a flat). The others could all have told similar stories. Whatever their background,

in the Simpson household they found love, security and a generous care for their well-being.

From this it can be seen that Angela was a person who turned her concerns into commitment, and strove at all times to act in accordance with her beliefs and convictions. These were deeply and passionately felt, though Angela never forced them upon others. Indeed, she was always much more concerned to learn of the doings of her friends than to regale them with her own. For that reason, Angela will be remembered for the warmth of her personality, her friendly good humour and, above all, for her ever-ready smile.

Robert Simpson (1921-1997) much admired the playing of the Danish organist Svend Aage Spange: he also liked the sound of the North-German organs and those found in Denmark, much preferring them to the more romantic English instruments. He therefore wished to write an organ work for Spange – a work that would celebrate the sound of those organs, the expertise of Spange, and also encompass his own ideas about musical motion. He was considerably grieved to have to admit that Carl Nielsen had already used the obvious title (*Commotio*, a work that he much admired): but at length Simpson called his own organ piece *Eppur si muove (Ricercar e Passacaglia)* (1985), adding the footnote “‘But it does move’ – the words Galileo is supposed to have muttered to himself on being forced by the church to recant his view that the earth revolved around the sun’. Clearly, however, the musical ideas were in the composer’s head before he thought of the title. ‘Ricercar’ is derived from ‘ricercare’ (to search), and refers to the detailed exploration of a musical idea: that will prove to be an ideal description of the construction of *Eppur si muove*. It is a large work, and it is dedicated ‘To Annalise and Svend Aage Spange’.

J. S. Bach is a considerable influence on the organ piece, as he is on several of Simpson’s orchestral works of the time: Bach, after all, is a noted exponent of *ricercar*-type fugues and monumental chaconnes and passacaglias. The author possesses two copies of the manuscript of *Eppur si muove*: one (which I will call MS A) is a photocopy of the piece as Simpson worked on it during composition: it is the score from which he asked the author to play as he wrote the piece (and the copy used for the publication by Lengnick, though the composer wrote the title page again and made some small changes). The other (MS B) has revisions made in the light of discussions about the former, and this one is carefully and copiously marked with the composer’s analysis, including numbering in a quasi-serial fashion. MS B – also a photocopy – was made specifically for the author’s interest, and it shows a side of Simpson’s composing not generally recognised, for he was an outspoken opponent of atonal writing – the kind of writing based on a 12-note series; and here he is careful to note all the permutations of his own series (though it only has five notes). Much of the following is indebted to the information in MS B, which crosses though the title ‘EPPUR SI MUOVE’ and replaces it with ‘(RICERCAR E PASSACAGLIA)’, and adds the name ‘Annalise Spange’ at the top right-hand corner of the first page (see Example 1).

(RICERCAR E PASSACAGLIA) Annalise Spang
(1985)

B.i. 65 ~~300 R. SIMONE~~ (1985) *Annalise Spang* ①

Severo tempo giusto ($\text{♩} = c. 56$)

4 8 15 22

in rilievo, marcato (a)

in rilievo, marcato (a)

There are no suggestions for registration beyond the indication of the particular manual to be used: the composer did, however, ask the author to demonstrate the kinds of things the organ could (and more specifically, could not) do on the organ of Royal Holloway College, while he was writing. He started it on '8.i.85' and finished (according to both manuscripts) at his home at Chearsley (Buckinghamshire) at 3pm on 20th May 1985: it lasts for about 30 minutes in performance.

Eppur si muove begins with a quintuplet *gruppetto* (D-F#-C-C#-G#, numbered 1-2-3-4-5; see Example 1) that uses a major third, a semitone, a tritone and a perfect fifth. These are explored in the music that immediately follows, and Simpson has marked occurrences of the *gruppetto* as '(a)', the semitone as '(x)', the major third as '(y)': a second five-note phrase that first occurs as a countersubject has a pair of notes repeated (G-D-G-D-B \flat), and the composer has marked this '(b)'. These ideas permeate the whole work, and the *gruppetto* ('a') is such a memorable device that the listener can readily identify its entries: the fifth is often used as an interval at which chords are doubled. The author pointed out to Simpson that such organ stops as the 'Quint' and 'Twelfth' double material at the fifth rather than the octave, but this doubling had already occurred in some of his previous works: he could see no reason why doublings should invariably be at the octave and not at another interval of the harmonic series – the fifth (or twelfth) for example.

The Ricercar opens fugally, but there is also an element of the baroque chorale prelude about it, with the pedals announcing what one might take to be the 'chorale' tune in long notes. There are five notes at each entry, and they form an augmentation of the opening *gruppetto*, the first two of them as a palindrome (5-4-3-2-1; the composer has carefully marked the number that corresponds to each note: see Example 1). Various other arrangements of this five-note shape follow, and they are used at various pitches; but eventually the pedal part becomes freer. The end of this section is marked by a *fortissimo* chord spread over five octaves (it is prolonged, beginning in bar 84), but with a *decrescendo* during which notes are gradually released to leave only an open fifth sounding in the pedals. The notes of this great chord are carefully marked in MS B – as, indeed, are the notes of many other chords – so that (in this instance) the pitches are identified as (reading downwards) '1-2-3-4-5-1-2-3-5-4'; the two statements of the five-note figure are a fifth apart, with the higher pitch '1' being E and the lower A (see Example 2).

Example 2

It is a summary, in chordal terms, of the opening material: but there has also been great care in arranging the chords leading up to it so that they, too, demonstrate the pitches of the opening *gruppetto*. I am unsure whether the idea of doubling at the fifth is connected to the idea of a five-note row; but if it is, Simpson could not have made the idea clearer than at the chord in bar 84.

At bar 95 a second, contrasting, fugue (marked to be played on 'Man. II' though there are excursions to 'Man. I') begins: it is marked '*fluente*' and is a much less austere and more flowing passage than the opening, with a theme in semiquavers. With great care Simpson has marked the theme ' $\frac{1}{2}$ tone, 1 tone, $\sharp 3^{\text{rd}}$, $\sharp 4^{\text{th}}$ and $\flat 4^{\text{th}}$ ', with the numbers of the pitches added below each interval: the 'chorale' in long notes reappears in the pedals during this second fugue, sometimes with double pedalling.

A further change of character takes place at bar 205, where the time signature becomes 3/8 and the registration marking is 'Man. III' (again there are excursions to other manuals). This third idea is something nearer to the nature of a 'Gigue' fugue, and there is a further move away from the gritty character of the opening. The new fugue subject begins in striding quavers, and the first five notes are carefully marked as '1-2-3-5-4', with the same shape in faster note-values in the second half of the subject but beginning a major third higher. This time the pedals do not use the long-note 'chorale-type' theme but join in the fugal material of the manuals: this third fugal section is the final one of the Ricercar, and it ends on bottom C \sharp in the pedals, ready for the start of the Passacaglia. There is no break between the two sections.

The Passacaglia theme – as is common in organ passacaglias – begins in the pedals, the pitches being carefully marked in MS B as '4-5-2-1-[G inserted]-3' at the start and '5-2-1-3 [4 is missing – see below] (in shorter notes) at the end. The fact that it is seven (rather than eight) bars in length helps to avoid any sense of rhythmic predictability: in other words, the theme cannot be thought of as 4 + 4, unlike Bach's C-minor organ Passacaglia. The initial rising fifth is a characteristic found in many passacaglias. In bar 351 the final note before the repetition of the bass pattern – an E \flat – has a note in Simpson's hand (in MS B) saying 'F would be strict, but 5th preferred to balance opening 5th': that is, the first two notes of the pattern (C \sharp up to G \sharp) are balanced by the falling B \flat -E \flat (rather than B \flat -F) at the end (Simpson had in any case a tendency towards thinking in palindromes, and the falling fifth at the end of the theme points towards this idea: see Example 3).

Example 3: start of Passacaglia

13

Poco più mosso (♩ = c. 76)

337

350

360

370

Handwritten musical score for piano and violin, measures 337-370. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamics (pp, pp, pp). There are also handwritten annotations in the margins, including "CH (X 6)" and "F would be strict, but 5th preferred to balance spring 5th".

The pitch that would have been numbered '4' at the end of bar 351 is F in this context, so musical considerations have taken precedence over strict serialism, as one would expect of this composer. In MS B Simpson has also carefully marked '(a)', '(b)' and '(4th)' above the theme at its first appearance, which is given out quietly. The Passacaglia bass gradually works through all the semitones from C # up an octave: the number of repetitions of the theme at particular pitches varies, some of them having only a single statement while others have as many as six statements. The number of repetitions decreases from the initial C # entry until the F # and G variations, then gradually increases again. In MS B Simpson has carefully marked these occurrences of the bass as

[bar 345] 'C # (x 6)'
 [bar 394] 'D (5 vars.)'
 [bar 429] 'D # (4 vars.)'
 [bar 457] 'E (3 vars.)'
 [bar 478] 'F (2 vars.)'
 [bar 492] 'F # (1 var.)'
 [bar 499] 'G (1 var.)'
 [bar 506] 'G # (2 vars.)'
 [bar 520] 'A (3 vars.)'
 [bar 540] 'B ♭ (4 vars.)'
 [bar 568] 'B (5 vars.)'
 [bar 603] 'C (6 vars.)'

That naturally provides a sense of variation in itself, and the music fluctuates in tension but builds massively at the end: nor does the tempo remain rigid. (Simpson told the author that he could see no reason why every variation in a passacaglia should be played at the same tempo, and the style and tempo markings change during this one.)

The variations explore many organ-playing techniques: there is imitative writing, two-part counterpoint, toccata figuration (in parallel fifths at one point), dramatic chords (many doubled at the fifth), overlapping scale figurations, and towards the end fast quintuplet figures that recall the *gruppetto* of the opening. The Passacaglia portion of the work requires a large number of different registrations, and many combinations of stops can be explored during it: in this the Passacaglia is unlike the Ricercar, which calls for only three types of registration, but Simpson has left the details to the performer. There are clearly places where the Passacaglia theme could be soloed out, and places here two parts cross over each other several times – but the particular manuals are not indicated. This all requires enormous technical expertise from the player. Reminders of the five-note 'chorale' occur in the pedals towards the end: one is a complete retrograde, and thus a reminder of the tendency towards the palindrome shape in the theme itself. It is clear that the composer calls upon the doubling of lines – and more particularly of chords – at the interval of a fifth especially when he wishes to increase tension. The end is on full organ, with a blazing open fifth above the root C #: this is a perfectly tonal end to a work that has had in it elements derived from serial procedures. The piece ends with massive, craggy grandeur (see Example 4).

Example 4: end

(30)

Allargando molto

672

680

3 p.u.
20 v 85
or c. 30' 00"

Chorus

It will be useful to list the changes made by Simpson after he had produced MS A. He changed the fourth note of the pedals in bar 83 from C in the middle of the pedal board to bottom C to make the part more playable; and he added the D # at the top of the pedals in bar 139 to help make a smoother join between the bars. He added a ♯ sign before the left-hand B on the third beat of bar 123, and a # before the third left-hand note in bar 661. He made small changes to the tempo indications: at bar 644 the original 'sempre allegro' of MS A first became 'quaver = crotchet', and then in MS B, 'Doppio movimento'; MS A had 'Allargando molto' at bar 673, but in MS B this is moved to bar 677 (MS A had 'poco rit' in bar 677, but it is crossed through).

The Ricercar at the start of the work uses the opening five notes as the basis of a three-sectioned movement that looks backwards to baroque chorale preludes; and in the Pas-sacaglia a relatively slow-moving bass pattern has faster-moving variations above it. These kinds of piece both pose a particular problem for a composer, for two types of motion – the slow progress of a 'chorale' melody or the slow bass pattern with the faster surrounding counterpoint – must both be appreciable by the listener. The composer was also deeply interested in the way in which a palindrome can produce logical music in two opposite directions. Simpson will have observed these various kinds of differing motion as he pursued his hobby of astronomy, and would doubtless have drawn musical parallels. He may even have thought of the quintuplet *gruppetto* as a five-star constellation, which is viewed from different angles and at different distances. In his programme note, however, Simpson wrote

There is no programme, but the vast slow motion of the music has something to do with Galileo's words – the composer (a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society) has long been interested in astronomy.

The piece was first performed by Christopher Bowers-Broadbent at Marylebone Parish Church on 25th May 1988, and it has been recorded by Iain Quinn on the organ of Winchester Cathedral (Hyperion CDA 67016). It proved to be the last piece Simpson wrote before moving to Ireland, and it also proved to be a catalyst for his Ninth Symphony, the work he wrote having settled on the Dingle Peninsula. The Ninth Symphony also uses a note-row, and treats it tonally; it has a 'chorale-prelude' nature about its opening; it uses palindromes; and it, too, is a mighty investigation of musical motion (fifty minutes on the same metrical pulse). *Eppur si muove* proves in itself to be a glimpse into Robert Simpson's workshop.

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